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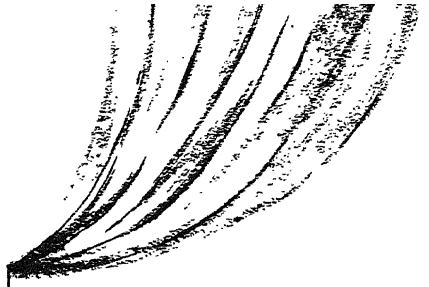

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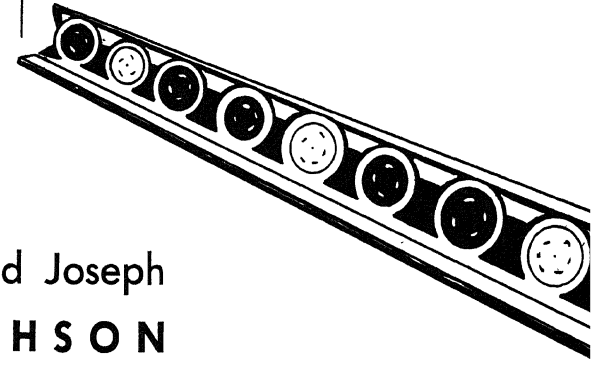

Dorothy and Joseph
SAMACHSON

With an Introduction
by **John Gassner**

ABELARD-SCHUMAN · NEW YORK

Library of Congress
Catalog Card Number 53-10843

Printed and bound in the
United States of America

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AUTHORS' PREFACE

So MANY BOOKS have already been written about the theatre that every new one appears to need, if not an apology, at least a clearly stated reason for its existence. This, then, has been our aim: to offer a useful and informative introduction to the theatre, an introduction that will be as well-rounded as possible, without bulging too greatly and without falling into the opposite error of becoming too flat and skimpy.

We have hoped to give the reader an idea of how he or she might fit into the theatre, especially the noncommercial theatre. In addition, you may find in this book the answers to such questions as these: Can you start a worth-while theatre group with little or no money? How do you decide what play to do? Isn't the scenery expensive and complicated to make?

We are not writing for people who are already experts on the theatre, nor for those who want a textbook on some single phase like production or acting. Excellent volumes on these subjects already exist, and we refer to some of them in our appendix. Moreover, although the theatre is full of debatable subjects (such as, How closely should an actor identify himself with the character he is portraying?) we have tried to reduce matters of opinion to a minimum.

We have attempted chiefly to help the beginner find his direction, to keep him from becoming confused and lost in the maze of detail in which the story of the theatre abounds. This guiding thought has influenced our choice of material throughout the book. It explains, for example, why we have presented so many interviews with important personalities. We are dealing here with an art in which facts are not always easy to ascertain, and where at almost every turn it is impossible to draw a sharp dividing line between fact and opinion. It is for this reason that the individuals we have questioned have so much of value to contribute to rounding out the picture. That they often contradict one another in many details is to be expected; from their different points of view they succeed in illuminating the various aspects of the American theatre today far better than one or two individuals would be likely to do.

There is one final word to be added. The pages which follow contain occasional references to that solemn question: Is the

theatre dying? In answer, it need be said only that we did not set out to write this book as an obituary. But although we do not believe that the theatre is dying, we do agree that it is changing. The nature of the changes will explain some of the emphasis in this book.

DOROTHY AND JOSEPH SAMACHSON

PREFACE

MANY BOOKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN about the stage, and a number of these have been intended for the younger generation which is expected to provide the theatre's new artists and new audiences. But I know of no other book like *Let's Meet the Theatre* which treats the young reader as an adult—and that is the first principle to be observed, I believe, in writing about the stage. We owe it to the young to tell them the truth about the stage. We owe it especially about an enterprise which is often financially unrewarding and always difficult, if not indeed heart-breaking. Instead of glamorizing a stage career and deluding boys and girls into expecting easy success and fabulous rewards, the authors have assumed the obligation to be realistic. They know that the glamour of an art is not the art itself, which must grow out of real conditions and must accommodate itself to them. Unlike the merchants of glory who publicize film stars and publish fan magazines for movie addicts, the authors assume that their readers are already adults in the sense that they want to be provided with facts rather than fancies. Moreover, those young people who possess any talent worth developing are already adults, because in talent distinctions of age rarely matter; one must work hard and responsibly and attend to the business on hand with reliable craftsmanship whether one is fifteen or fifty-five.

Because they respect the facts, besides, the authors decided to go for their information to those who have actually worked in the theatre in one capacity or another—professionally and for many years. This book is, to my knowledge, the first one to let the young reader hear what the experts have to say about their own specialty and about the problems of the theatre as a whole. This, too, is the grown-up way of approaching a subject. One respects both the subject and the reader, regardless of his age, in presenting the views of people who tolerate no nonsense about their job, who don't talk down to anyone because they are experienced enough to have learned humility, and who don't "talk up" their subject either—because they are not selling anything. That is, they are not recom-

mending a theatrical career to anyone who is not genuinely impelled to become a playwright, actor, director, scene designer, or producer in spite of all the obstacles that stand in the way of success; and they are not advertising their own artistry or business because they know that there is only one place in which to sell it and that is in the theatre itself through the interest aroused in the audience.

Because the making of "theatre" is a collaborative undertaking, the authors, finally, have given most of their attention to the functions which must be discharged before a play can come alive on the stage. This does not come about by spontaneous combustion, but only when everybody from the most inspired playwright down to the most down-to-earth stage manager has performed what is expected of him with as little friction as is possible in a large group of collaborators. Tracing the number of jobs to be done is the most practical way to provide insight into the work as a whole. That is surely the reason for the method adopted by the authors in interviewing representatives of the various arts and crafts that make up the total experience we call theatre.

Still, if I endorse the authors' procedure, it is not solely because they have been so commendably practical. They have been that only in order to better serve their ideal of theatre. They would not have gone to the trouble of giving us a book so completely free from pet theories and self-advertisement if they had lacked a proper regard for an art that has been one of the most remarkable accomplishments of the human mind and spirit. The theatre, an enterprise at least three thousand years old and spread, in one form or another, over the entire globe, is the mirror that shows men to themselves. By making men share an experience publicly, the theatre, moreover, gives them a sense of communion and welds them into a community for each performance, in this way making society recognize its emotional and intellectual and spiritual unity. The artists of the stage, in working together, themselves constitute a temporary community, which like the larger community of the audience, city, or state, involves mutual understanding and common endeavor. And, finally, the theatre is the repository of all the other arts developed by civilization. Writers, dancers, singers, musicians, painters, costume-designers, architects, and technicians of all sorts—they all come together and pool their talents and techniques to create one total art. We might say, then, that when the authors of this book write about the theatre they are, in a profound

sense, writing about almost everything that distinguishes us from the animal kingdom.

If our authors refrain from waxing lyrical about their subject, the reason is that its humanism is intrinsic. All that is required is to make its attributes manifest by means of craftsmanship and art. Nevertheless, it cannot be stressed too strongly for the general public, and particularly for parents and teachers, that the theatre is the school of life. It is that for both those who participate in putting on a show and for those who witness the performance. And when this fact is realized, we come to understand the ultimate justification for this book as well as for the theatre.

Let's Meet the Theatre is not a compendious volume and does not tell us all there is to know about the craft of theatre. For a more detailed analysis and for more technical information the student would have to turn to comprehensive textbooks such as Heffner, Selden and Sellman's *Modern Theatre Practice,* Hewitt, Foster and Wolle's *Play Production,* or my *Producing the Play.* The purpose of the authors of *Let's Meet the Theatre* is simply to sum up the nature of the enterprise, which Granville-Barker once called "Everyman's art," so that those who would like to work in it will understand what the creation of theatre entails and those who will become its audience will be able to follow the effort intelligently. But whether the book comes into the hands of the potential theatre worker or into those of the potential playgoer, it is to be hoped that everybody understands that there is no intention here to lure anyone into the Broadway marketplace, which is also the graveyard of many hopes; and that if any promise is held out, it is a promise of enhancement of life by theatrical art whether one serves the art or is served by it. (And in stage performance obviously those who serve and those who are served interact.) Above all, if the young will realize that good, stimulating theatre is something they can create in their own town or city, they will escape much disappointment and win much gratification. They will get more out of their humanness than a workaday existence alone can give them. They will lead fuller lives and make life richer for others in the place they know as home and wherever they can effectuate themselves as complete and rooted individuals, for no one completes himself separately. Theatre need not replace their other studies, vocations and relationships. It need only supplement and illuminate these to prove highly valuable.

It would have been a mistake to write this or any other book

for the purpose of manufacturing hordes of role-hungry actors and actresses for Broadway. But it can only be a service to the individual and the community to introduce the young to an area of human activity in which they may develop their senses, their understanding, and their sense of fellowship. Theatre is an activity in which participation is possible even when an exclusive professional commitment to it is not possible or considered feasible. And it is an activity, direct rather than canned, in which contact with the other persons who make up a society is a major gratification—a gratification especially important in our century which suffers greatly from men's lack of relatedness. One thing is certain: We ought to view the theatre and a person's activity in it as an expression and extension of reality rather than as an irresponsible intrusion. That is what must have been in the mind of the Elizabethan playwright John Heywood when he drew his analogy:

The world's a theatre, the earth a stage
Which God and Nature do with players fill.

JOHN GASSNER

New York, N. Y.
June 1954.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE HAVE BEEN PLEASED, in the preparation of this book, to discover that the generosity traditionally associated with the stage is to be found not only in the professional theatre, but also among critics and press agents, and in community and university theatres as well. It is a welcome duty to acknowledge how much help we have received.

First of all, we owe much to the people we have interviewed. Many of them were occupied with other work when we saw them, or preparing for exhausting performances. We can only thank them for their kindness and patience, and for their courtesy in answering questions when they had so much else on their minds.

We owe additional thanks to Brooks Atkinson, who has read the section on *The Producer,* and granted permission to use the ideas expressed in a lecture given at Antioch College. We have borrowed some of Mr. Atkinson's thinking in our chapter on *Author and Audience;* he is not responsible, of course, for what we have done to his ideas.

Mordecai Gorelik, who has been of great help in writing the section on *The Designer,* has generously permitted us to lift some of his thoughts about Shakespeare from an article, "This Side Idolatry," which appeared in the October, 1951 issue of *The Educational Theatre Journal,* and to use them in the *Author and Audience.*

Arthur Miller has read the whole *Author and Audience* chapter and Harold Clurman has read the chapter on *The Director.* Edith Atwater has gone over the chapter on *The Actor.* George Freedley has helped with the part on *Theatres Throughout the Country,* and supplied information we had not obtained elsewhere.

Thomas G. Ratcliffe, Jr., has gone to considerable trouble to help inform us about *The Summer Theatre.* And during a record-breaking July heat wave, Professor Milton Smith, of Columbia University, maintained his composure and his temperature in answering our questions about *The University Theatre.*

We owe thanks to Leon C. Miller, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Thespian Society, and to Christine Edwards, for their information about *The High-School Theatre.* We are also grateful

to Miss Edwards for reading the section on voice and body in the chapter entitled *The Actor.*

We are indebted to Jose Ferrer for answering our questions on how to combine apparently conflicting roles in the theatre, to James D. Proctor for his information on how to be a press representative, and to Zachary Solov for his advice on the staging of dances in the round. To Mrs. John Burdick, of ANTA, we owe thanks for information about that organization.

To Professor Sawyer Falk, of Syracuse University, we owe a great debt for the kindness with which he helped us learn about Community and University Theatres and enabled us to secure many of the photographs needed. To Gertrude Macy we are grateful for being helpful in various ways.

To Alfred Harding, editor of *Equity* Magazine, our thanks for many acts of kindness. He has read most of the manuscript, and has combined a scrupulous insistence on matters of fact with considerable tolerance in matters of opinion.

To Isadora Bennett we owe thanks for help and encouragement in the early stages of this book. To Betty Lee Hunt, we are indebted for helping us obtain many of the interviews, and for other kindnesses as well, going far beyond the call of a press agent's duty.

While occupied with the preparation of her own book, Dr. Alice Venezky Griffin has been of aid in many ways. We are grateful for the time and trouble she has taken.

Thanks are due also to Dr. Kurt Pinthus, who has been kind enough to go over the manuscript in detail with a keen eye for mistakes. He has made many suggestions that we feel have increased the value of the book.

For the kindness and generosity expressed by community and university theatres, we wish to thank Bettie Wysor, of the Barter Theatre; Paul Baker, of the Baylor Theatre; Alan Schneider, of Catholic University; Ramon J. Elias, of the Cleveland Play House; Margo Jones, of the Dallas Theatre; Newell Tarrant and Kenneth K. Goldstein, of the Erie Playhouse; Louise Dale Spoor, of the Goodman Memorial Theatre; Jasper Deeter, of the Hedgerow Theatre; Fred Koch, Jr., of the University of Miami; Horace W. Robinson, of the University of Oregon; Gilmor Brown and Oliver B. Prickett, of the Pasadena Playhouse; Monroe Lippman, of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, New Orleans; John Wray Young, of the Shreveport Little Theatre; Hallie Flanagan Davis, of Smith College; Norman Philbrick and A. Nicholas Vardac, of Stanford University; Glenn Hughes, of the University of Washington; and Boyd Smith and Frank Bevan, of Yale University.

Finally, our special thanks of John Gassner. With his vast

knowledge of theatrical literature and of the theatre itself, as well as of the writing of books, he has helped us in many ways both to secure information and to arrange it to advantage.

If, despite the sharp eyes of our numerous kind critics, errors are still to be found, they must be attributed to us alone. In the process of revision and re-revision we have made many changes; for any inaccuracies thus introduced, only we ourselves can be held responsible.

INTRODUCTION

"ALL THE WORLD'S a stage," said Shakespeare in one of his most famous passages, and we may add that it is the most interesting of all stages. But it is also a stage on which too many different episodes are being acted at the same time. Real-life drama is too complicated for us to follow clearly. And because we ourselves take part in it, we often miss the tragedy and the humor that a bystander might perceive.

The stage we find in the theatre is smaller and simpler. What takes place upon it is more easily followed and understood. Most important, on this stage it is not we ourselves but the imaginary people created by the playwright who laugh and enjoy themselves, or weep and suffer. They may be realistic—that is, *like* real people —but they are not real.

Both actors and audience know this. As an actor, you may make a convincing Macbeth, but you never convince yourself that you have actually killed Duncan! You may thrill the audience, but it doesn't forget that it is attending a play, not a murder. As you create a character, you observe it from within, while the audience observes it from without—but you both realize that (except on rare occasions) you are merely spectators. You watch other people do the living and suffering, and you share the acted joys and sorrows at second hand.

This sort of sharing is one of the theatre's greatest gifts. For centuries, audiences have watched entranced as the actors created their own world within our greater world. In ancient Greece the people used to rise while it was still dark, and, in the chill before dawn, assemble in a theatre at the foot of a hill. And as soon as the sun was high enough to let the actors be seen, the first play would begin. Drama would follow drama throughout the morning and, after a short intermission, into the afternoon. The next day a new set of plays would begin, and the day after still another. The Greeks took the theatre very seriously indeed.

Through the Middle Ages also, the theatre was a means for enriching the lives of the people who lived in small towns and country villages. It never lost its popularity. Even in nineteenth-century

England and the United States, the arrival of a group of touring actors was an event to which everyone looked forward with eagerness for weeks. The plays were often bad, and the actors worse. But what did that matter to people who considered themselves lucky if they saw so much as one play a year? To them the theatre was enchantment—and it has not lost its magic even with the advent of movies, radio and television.

Now, according to certain prophets, the magic of the theatre is on the wane, and in fact there have been times when these prophecies have seemed on the point of coming true. Certainly, in our own day, radio, the movies, and television are giant and formidable foes of the theatre. But the cry that the theatre is dying is much older than the oldest of these. It was first raised centuries ago, before such competition as the movies and other modern forms of entertainment were dreamed of. And that is why the theatre is often referred to as "the Fabulous Invalid."

Actually, the theatre *has* died. It died in ancient Greece, it died when Rome fell, and it died again in seventeenth-century England. But in each of these cases the corpse was not *quite* dead, and death was only temporary. Like that fabled bird, the phoenix, it always rose from the ashes of its dead self younger and stronger, ready for new flights of the imagination. And the new live theatre always looked different from the old dead one.

Perhaps that is the kind of death and rebirth that is overtaking the theatre now. Although on Broadway it faces fiercer and fiercer struggles each year, throughout the rest of the country it gains new footholds. You may live in a small town or village, but the theatre is no longer a visitor that you can see and hear just once a year. Now you can know it well, be a part of it yourself.

Your grammar-school classes put on short skits. Your high school has for years been successfully giving full-length plays. You can go to numerous colleges which offer courses in playwriting, acting, and production. From Michigan to Texas, from California to Carolina, you can attend university theatres, art theatres, little theatres, and experimental theatres. Your club, your Sunday school, your YMCA or YMHA, all produce plays. And despite the movies and radio and television, summer theatres are spreading throughout the country. All this, remember, where a few decades ago there were hardly any theatres at all.

Why has there been so tremendous a development? For one reason, because the theatre offers its audiences rewards that me-

chanical inventions cannot hope to match. Its actors and actresses are no mere shadows on a screen, no disembodied voices, or combinations of voices with shadows shrunk to fit the dimensions of a television cabinet. They are flesh and blood, and at their best they can move audiences to heights of emotion that their rivals rarely attain.

There is something else, too. When you act on the movie screen or over the air, the audience might just as well not exist as far as you are concerned. You know it's there—and that's all. But when you act in the theatre, you and the audience see and hear each other, inspire each other. A theatre without an audience is no theatre.

The theatre, then, as we shall consider it, includes a stage with actors on it, playing directly before an audience. Some of the actors, whatever else they do, must play the roles of imaginary characters. That is, a theatre cannot consist of just a series of juggling, acrobatic, or trained-animal acts. You can have such acts as part of a musical comedy, or even of a serious play. But the musical comedy or play as a whole must tell some sort of story, no matter how silly, or you don't have theatre: you have only a vaudeville show.

The theatre can be either with or without music. The music may be of little importance, or it may be a way of telling the story itself. That is why the opera, strictly speaking, is a form of theatre. But we shall not consider opera at length in this book because its music is paramount, and by comparison the story and acting take second place.

You cannot understand what the modern theatre is and can be unless you learn how a play is written (and frequently rewritten), how it is produced, directed, and finally put on the stage. This knowledge will help you to appreciate how much it takes to produce a good play.

The more you learn about the theatre, the easier it will be for you to become a part of it. And as a part of it, you will understand why it will not die and stay dead to please the gloomy prophets. The theatre is already thousands of years old. In one form or another, it has outlived powerful empires and widespread civilizations. In one form or another, it will continue to live.

HOW A PLAY IS PRODUCED

LET US SUPPOSE that we are reckless enough to attend the first performance of a different play on Broadway every night for an entire week. What do you think we shall find?

If it's an average week, we shall come across two plays so bad that everyone in the audience asks in amazement: "How did *that* ever get produced?" The critics rip the production apart with their most cutting adjectives, and after two or three performances the play quietly folds its scenery and silently steals away.

On the other hand, there may be one play so good that the audience can't stop applauding. The critics lavish their choicest words of praise upon it, and even the actor with but a single line in the second act utters that line with pride. It comes as a shock, therefore, to learn that a dozen producers turned the play down as a sure flop before one daring soul decided it was worth a gamble.

In between are the plays that are not very good and not very bad, reasonably entertaining, and reasonably unimportant. These, naturally, are in the majority. They run for several weeks or months, they keep the actors at work, and sometimes they make a fair amount of money for their backers.

Now, plays are very expensive to produce commercially, and each one of the failures, or "turkeys," as they are gloomily called, has cost many thousands of dollars. You wonder, naturally, how people wise in the ways of the theatre could possibly have mistaken a turkey for a hit. What on earth has got into author, producer, scenic designer, and actors that has made them waste time and money on a story that never stood a chance of success? Or, on the other hand, what madness has made them turn down what turns out to be a sure thing, a play that was certain to be an artistic hit, as well as to put a great deal of money in their pockets?

Is it perhaps because our Broadway theatre people are forced to be commercial? Do they think too much about money, and thus lose their sense of perspective? That, certainly, can be a reason. And yet the producers of plays in community and university theatres make mistakes that are quite as serious. They may be completely indifferent to money, they may think only of artistic

success. But this success is just as elusive as any other kind. More than one director has staked his reputation as an artist on a script which audiences and critics have condemned as a piece of idiocy or incompetence.

There are many reasons for failure, which we shall appreciate more fully as we learn how difficult a play is to produce. For one thing, everyone connected with the theatre has opinions, and stands to profit by convincing the world that his opinions are right.

It's like the story of the Brahman and his goat. A dignified Brahman was leading a goat along by a string when three thieves saw him, decided that the goat was worth having, and cooked up a plot. The first thief approached the Brahman and said, "Good day, noble Brahman. Why does a holy man like you lead an unclean beast like a dog on a string?"

"A dog? This is a goat, a clean and beautiful goat. Out of my sight, you liar, you scoundrel!"

Then the second thief approached the Brahman, and asked the same question. At this the holy man became doubtful. Who was he to set up his opinion against that of an unprejudiced bystander? This time, as he asserted that the goat was a goat, he was less sure of himself. And when the third thief also asked him why he was leading a dog, he decided that everyone else was right and he was wrong. He turned the goat loose, whereupon the happy thieves quickly caught it and ran away with it.

A producer with his play is like a Brahman with his goat. Some of the people he sees try to persuade him that it is a hit, while the rest argue that it is a flop. The only eyes with which he can view the play while it is still in manuscript are the eyes of his imagination and judgment, and these do not always see clearly. He knows that everyone who gives him an opinion has some ax to grind, from the author who wants his masterpiece put on the stage to the actor who wants a bigger part for himself. Is it any wonder that he sometimes feels he is groping blindly, and has no idea whether the play he is producing is good or bad?

Well, let us see how the goats and turkeys are born—that is, how the playwrights create plays, how the producer selects them, and then how he chooses the actors and designers and all the other skilled people who will get them ready for performance. Let us see how the "turkeys" are palmed off as "goats."

AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE

Why does a man write plays? And why are some plays good and others bad?

THESE SIMPLE QUESTIONS cannot be answered simply. Authors write for many reasons. Some want fame, others are more interested in the fortune that may come along with it. One man may be an actor as well as author, and write in order to provide himself with good parts. Or, like Molière in the seventeenth century, he may be the manager of a troupe of actors and find it necessary to furnish them with plays to show off their special abilities as comedians.

But these reasons only scratch the surface of the playwright's purpose. There are more profound motives why a man decides to win fame and fortune writing for the stage instead of selling shoes or building bridges or trying to become President. He has something important to express, a way of feeling or of thinking which he wants the world to know. And he believes he can best express this in a play.

Thus, the ancient Greek dramatists, beyond the desire to win prizes and be honored by their fellow citizens, wrote to express their sense of the mystery or tragedy of human life. Euripides and Aristophanes vented their hatred of the stupidity and tragedy of war. Molière sought not only to provide comedies for his troupe, but to ridicule the follies of his time.

Shaw penned his first play, *Widowers' Houses,* to provide suitable material for a new group, the Independent Theatre, which had been organized shortly before and found no English plays ready for it. But he also wrote it to express his horror of the British slums and the hypocrisies of British life.

Even the most money-minded dramatist is inspired more by the examples of Aeschylus and Shakespeare than that of Rockefeller, or he would not be a dramatist at all, he would be in the oil business. The Dramatists' Guild, which consists of playwrights whose work has been produced commercially, has about four hundred active and two thousand inactive members. Of the four hundred, a few dozen at most can hope

for a commercial production in any year. And of these few dozen, perhaps ten will earn enough from their plays to live on while they write more plays. Consider the thousands of dramatists who write without a chance of production, and you will realize that the average income for all playwrights will not even pay for the cost of typing their manuscripts. The most underpaid ditch-digger receives more per hour of work, and a quack seller of "cancer cures" has a better chance of getting rich.

As for fame—well, the average "fame" amounts to little more than recognition by the Copyright Office that the author has paid its fee. From the days of Aeschylus on, even the dramatist of recognized genius has faced the continued risk of failure, and even Shakespeare and Molière had their flops.

Does the author write for posterity, for future generations instead of his own? Then the chances are even more against him, for he has no idea what tastes these future generations will have. And experience shows that the greatest playwrights, from Aeschylus to Ibsen—no matter how advanced they seemed to be, how far "ahead of their times"—have always been most appreciated by their own generation. Posterity is the harshest critic of all: it gradually finds many of the old plays more and more dull and incomprehensible.

There remains the one fundamental motive for writing plays—the desire for the expression of something that appears to the playwright to be important, whether it will bring him material rewards or not. Given this desire for expression, how can the playwright go about his task successfully?

In the first place, he must realize that the writing of plays is not only an art but a craft, and he must learn this craft thoroughly. It is advisable, as Arthur Miller suggests in the following interview, to go first to the best teachers—the greatest dramatists of the past—not for the purpose of imitating them, but to gain insight into their methods, to study their weaknesses as well as their strength.

There are schools for playwrights in universities and in various large cities. New York has a New Dramatists' Committee Workshop, which was first set up in the City Center with the co-operation of the Council of the Dramatists' Guild. It provides for discussions with established playwrights, the encouragement of tryouts of new plays in college and com-

munity theatres, and the setting up of a professional laboratory in New York to put on new plays. Just as important, it helps new authors get radio and television assignments, etc., in order to earn a living while working on their plays.

Having learned that the craft of writing plays is not a mystery, you can begin to express yourself with some skill. And the first place to apply this skill is in your choice of subject, in the idea or theme that will embody what you wish strongly to express.

The idea may come from a story you hear, a newspaper account you see. It may come from a daydream in which you imagine what would happen *if*—. You may want to write a play on a certain theme in order to prove you can do better with it than another playwright has done. Marlowe and Goethe used the same Faust legend to express vastly different ways of looking at life, and Shaw turned the old story of Don Juan into a medium for the expression of his own philosophy. You may be called on to write a play for a certain actor or actress. Or you may have an idea for a wonderful scene and decide to elaborate the scene into an entire play.

Wherever your idea comes from, it will not automatically turn itself into a play. You must do some careful dramatic construction, and a good place to begin is at the end.

If you start with Act I, Scene I, and just go straight ahead, you may find it impossible to tie up all the loose threads and end your play satisfactorily. Therefore, many playwrights decide how to end the play and then construct the action to lead up to that ending. Much depends on the kind of play, on the degree of realism, on the extent to which the effect of the play depends on plot.

Will your play have two acts or three, a single scene per act or many? That is determined by the nature of the story you have to tell. You plot your action and try to determine how the tension will increase, where your climaxes will occur, where you had best break off a scene or an act.

Some playwrights plot in great detail, others very sketchily. What *you* do will depend on the vividness of your imagination, the speed with which your characters come alive to you.

With the plotting sufficiently advanced, you begin to write. A man like Lope de Vega (1562-1635) could turn out a play

in less than a week, and some modern playwrights have worked as rapidly, but without equaling him in quality. Shaw might take a few weeks to a year. Ibsen often required several years.

Some playwrights write a single draft, make a few verbal changes, and consider the play finished. Others, like Ibsen, regard the first draft as little more than a skeleton, which contains the action of the play and only an outline of the characters. Ibsen would go over the play again and again, filling in what was needed to round out his characters and make them come alive.

When you have completed a play, it is submitted, through an agent, for commercial exploitation. If a producer is sufficiently interested, he will take an *option*; that is, he will pay you some sum such as five hundred dollars (more if you are an established playwright with good bargaining power) as an advance against royalties, for the right to do the play within a specified time. If he lets the time pass without production, you keep the money and try to sell the play to some other producer. Some authors never have plays produced at all, and live on the money they get for options. They do not live well.

If the producer wants to go ahead with the play, he will almost certainly suggest revisions. If you are George Bernard Shaw, you refuse to let anyone change a word. Otherwise, you fight what is generally a losing battle at each suggestion, and you revise, even to the extent of rewriting the entire play. When you have revised to the producer's temporary satisfaction, and he does proceed to make plans for rehearsal, you find that your work has just begun.

For now you discover that there are dozens of people who have a hand in your play—the backers or "angels," the director, the scene designer, the actors, and the numerous friends and relatives of all these. Each now has an investment in a business enterprise. The angels have put in their money, and they hover around to protect it; everyone else has put in time, reputation, and hopes for the future, and wants to guard these. Everyone has an idea for improving the play from his own point of view. The angels want to make the play more commercial in order to fatten their pocketbooks;

the actors want to fatten their parts. There are endless suggestions for new additions and revisions.

For every good suggestion there may be a dozen bad ones. You use your judgment and you revise again and again. At some stage of the proceedings, a "play doctor" or collaborator may be called in to work with you, to make additional revisions and possibly to share your royalties, if any. You begin to feel that the play no longer expresses what you meant it to express. And very often you are right.

You may end with a compromise play that satisfies nobody. In that case, key actors resign, the producer calls the whole thing quits, the angels lose their investment, and you start all over again to try to get your play produced.

If you are more fortunate, the revised play actually achieves production. And now you meet your greatest, your final test —the audience.

An audience is critic, teacher, and judge in one, and its decisions, although they can be completely mistaken, are social judgments. They are not swayed by the purely personal factors that influence each of its members. The individual critic may be in a glow of good feeling from a well-cooked meal or may suffer the pangs of indigestion from a bad one. But in the audience as a whole (unless it is either starving or overfed, and that happens occasionally), happy and unhappy stomachs cancel out.

The audience is a wonderful critic of writing technique. If you have developed your plot in a wrong or confused fashion, the audience will show the effects in its own confusion or bewilderment. If you have drawn your characters badly, the audience will be indifferent to them. No audience will tell you how to get things done. But it will tell you whether you have done them with reasonable correctness or not.

However, it is not as a critic of technique that the audience is most important. The main thing is, How does it feel about the emotion or thought you are trying to express?

If this arouses no response, your play will be born dead, no matter how technically perfect it is. There is hardly a week when some play does not open on Broadway which leaves the audience either cold or hostile. The same play, in London, or possibly no farther away than Greenwich Village in New York City, will find a warm and friendly reception.

Audiences differ tremendously from one another, and the playwright, whether he is aware of it or not, does not write for audiences in general but for a specific type of audience. A play may be a success when first produced, and a failure five years later, when the nature of the audience has changed. During the depression years, *Tobacco Road*, with its pretense of realism, broke records for length of run; in 1951, when the picture of inhuman degradation it presented was no longer in style, an attempted revival failed miserably. In the late thirties, Saroyan's sentimentally optimistic plays were able to win wide response. But by 1950, Pollyannaish plays had gone out of fashion, and it was very difficult to get a new Saroyan play produced.

Does this mean that as a playwright you should try to gauge what public taste is, and then try to satisfy it? Not at all. Certainly you must take public taste into account to some extent, just as you must take into account the miseries of producers. Large casts of characters mean high expenses for salaries; therefore most modern commercial plays have relatively few characters. The public does not like four-hour plays; therefore you increase your chances of pleasing by writing shorter works (although if you are a Shaw or an O'Neill you can occasionally thumb your nose at this rule and succeed anyway).

But better not try to satisfy a taste that disagrees violently with your own. Do not try to write a sentimental play if you hate sentimentality, or a melodramatic play if you despise melodrama. Some of Broadway's (and Hollywood's) worst failures have been the result of trying to carpenter a play to the low level of what an author or producer has thought would meet the taste of the greatest number.

Remember that in writing what you do not feel you are betraying your very reason for being a playwright. And there is the practical consideration that you will meet fierce competition, and that you will be handicapped in comparison with other playwrights who actually share the bad taste of part of the public. The great technical skill of Scribe and Sardou[1] would never have brought them success if they hadn't held much the same shallow views of society as the audiences

[1] French dramatists of the nineteenth century.

of their day. Neither Aeschylus nor Shakespeare could have competed with them at their own game.

If you study the history of the drama, you will see that playwrights have often won surprising success by telling an audience the very things it was sure it *didn't* want to hear. Almost a century ago, large numbers of spectators were becoming increasingly disgusted with the falsity of the pictures presented on the stages they knew. When Ibsen offered them their first icy plunge into greater reality, they shuddered and drew back. But in time they came to endure and then to prefer him, and no longer possible to endure Scribe and Sardou.

After the initial shock of Shaw, even British audiences began to realize that he did fill a need of which they had not been conscious. American audiences, once they had experienced the plays of O'Neill, could no longer go back to the sentimentality of Augustus Thomas and Clyde Fitch.

These "advanced" playwrights were not literally a generation ahead of their audiences. But they saw more clearly what the audiences wanted—and even needed.

You cannot hope for success if you aim too far ahead of your audience. But you had better not be behind it, either. The strong point of every audience is that it is part of the life of its time, and to the extent that it is representative of the general public, it can judge this life as pictured on the stage. But every audience also has its weaknesses—its prejudices, its fears, its irrational hopes.

In ancient Rome, for instance, audiences were brutalized and demoralized by scenes of cruelty and lust. The low tastes of Rome's audiences are reflected in the inferior plays of its dramatists, who never came close to attaining the heights of the great Greeks. On the other hand, Aeschylus, in his tragedy *The Persians*, tells of the enemies of his people, the soldiers of an empire which had invaded Greece. Nothing would have been easier than to present the Persians as beasts of inhuman cruelty, to picture them as the most prejudiced of his own people might have done. But Aeschylus rose above such feelings and pictured the Persians with sympathy and insight. And his play still lives as an example of his greatness.

By contrast, Shakespeare in *Henry VI* panders to the worst prejudices of his own day by making Joan of Arc a prostitute. Shakespeare's great virtues included a knowledge of human

nature. Yet, in his portrait of Joan of Arc, in his use in *Titus Andronicus* of a Negro character, Aaron, whose black skin is supposed to show a black heart, in his concessions to anti-Semitic prejudice in *The Merchant of Venice*, he is false to his own knowledge. His *The Taming of the Shrew*, with its moral for women: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper," becomes more and more absurd as time goes on. Such weaknesses are not enough to kill Shakespeare's plays. But in another less towering playwright they might be fatal.

Thus, the greatness of a playwright will depend to a tremendous extent on the people who see his plays. A dramatist needs an audience which is close to the life of its time and takes an active part in that life, an audience which is neither too aesthetic and "advanced," nor too vulgarized—too much prey to the prejudices it has inherited from the past. The playwright must give honest expression to the best feelings of that audience.

If your intentions are too serious, or if your plays are not sufficiently "commercial" for Broadway, you might try some of the noncommercial theatres (ANTA may help you choose the right ones—see the section on Theatres Throughout the Country). At best, the financial rewards are not in a class with those that Broadway can offer. But there is a good chance in these theatres for new playwrights, and in the future it may be possible to live and work on royalties from them. Margo Jones, in her Dallas theatre, pays an advance of a hundred and fifty dollars against royalties, but her theatre is small and holds relatively few spectators, and even if a play is unusually successful, the author can hardly hope to receive more than five hundred dollars from Dallas.

There is no reason, however, why the same play cannot be performed in a single season in half a dozen or more community theatres. Many, like Miss Jones's theatre, are generous and helpful to playwrights. When they become sufficiently well organized to make joint arrangements for the production of new plays—and steps in that direction have already been taken—it will be possible for them to support playwrights who have no connection with the Broadway theatre. Some, in fact, do have resident playwrights who work on salary, like the director and professional actors, as part of the community theatre organization.

Meanwhile, an author whose work is produced in a community theatre stands a much better chance of being heard on Broadway than an author whose work is not produced at all. A few productions *do* make the transition from the noncommercial to the commercial theatre. For this and other reasons, no serious playwright can afford to neglect the noncommercial theatre, and many a newcomer to the theatre is turning his attention to it.

The community theatre, as we have seen, offers the playwright a different type of audience from that of Broadway. It may be too specialized, at times too arty and at other times too easily pleased. But very often it is far superior in seriousness and understanding to the average Broadway audience. Plays that commercial producers shun as "unprofitable" are produced by community players to the profit and delight of both actors and audience. You stand a better chance of finding Shakespeare in the Pasadena Playhouse than on Broadway. And the new playwrights of California and other Western states are turning to university and community theatres rather than to commercial producers.

Some authors have earned steady, if not tremendous incomes by writing one-act plays for high schools and small amateur groups. One play publisher, Samuel French, has long been in the market for such plays, which are made available in inexpensive paper-bound editions. Here too there is a possibility of reaching large audiences of which many playwrights are not aware.

A survey of the most successful legitimate plays on Broadway in recent years (that is, "straight" drama as differentiated from the musical play such as *Carousel* or *South Pacific*) would show that among the most consistently successful playwrights have been John Van Druten, the famous team of Lindsay and Crouse, and a young man named Arthur Miller who brings to the theatre a stimulating element of social criticism. Another kind of writer important to the drama—the dramatic critic—is well typified by the *New York Times'* Brooks Atkinson. Let's hear from these five writers about the pros and cons of Broadway versus the noncommercial theatre, and other aspects of the relationship between playwright and audience.

Why Write a Play?

ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller is one of our younger playwrights who has established a firm position in the American theatre. The critics called his first Broadway play "promising." But his next plays, *All My Sons, Death of a Salesman,* and *The Crucible* had no need to promise anything. They were progressively mature, skillfully written, profoundly moving works.

Mr. Miller is also well known as the author of *Focus,* a novel. During the past few years, however, he has been devoting most of his writing time to plays and a few short stories.

What attracts you or any other writer to the theatre? Is it the so-called "glamour"?

A M. One attraction the theatre has for me is that I can see the effect of my imagination on people, whereas the impact of a novel upon the reader is private and concealed. But the reason I write plays rather than nondramatic works is that I tend to think and feel in terms of the actual confrontations of people. I have no patience with the past tense, such as a novelist must have; I am stimulated by compactness and intensity and immediacy, rather than the diffuse, the contemplative, and the historical. In short, I love the dramatic form.

I also suspect that most playwrights, myself included, are shy actors who act vicariously through their writing. There is no other art I know of which permits the author to speak to an audience with such directness, without the interference of printed words or static pictures, or any other aesthetic means.

Would you consider a producer an aesthetic means? Haven't you found that your work is seriously hampered because so many people have a hand in the play?

A M. No. That is, not any more. (*Laughter.*) But seriously, a young novelist is also up against the unbelief of his publisher. The difference is that the play form itself does not permit as many moments of boredom as the novel form does. The play must *work*, as a machine works. Consequently, the playwright, under the best circumstances, must fend off "fixers" more than the novelist has to. He must also know when to listen. This is a question of his own judgment and integrity, and it is too easy to blame the lack of these qualities upon others.

The fact is that this kind of interference diminishes as the playwright begins to understand production and takes it into account as he works.

An experienced playwright or a neophyte, however, is "interfered" with by less obvious, and more damaging forces. First, the impossibly high cost of production, which I'm sure is preventing the expression of new talents, at least on Broadway. Except for one or two remaining producers, none is capable of appreciating really new dramatic modes. Today the house must be completely filled in order to keep a play running, and this fact erodes courage. Paradoxically, the most successful straight plays since the war have been "unorthodox"; but they are still hard to get produced.

Second, the theatre is always very sensitive to the climate of public opinion. It is the quickest of the arts to take advantage of any clearly discernible change in public opinion, and also to shy away from subjects or points of view which are under attack by the most vocal sections of the press. Today it is impossible to produce on Broadway any of the last six plays of O'Casey, who is known to be a radical. Money cannot be raised for them.

How about the critics? Do they damn the play for its opinions?

A M. Obviously, a play's thesis being hateful to them, critics will take advantage of any of its aesthetic weaknesses in order to damn it. So will anyone else who cannot bear the theme. It was never any different in any country at any time. Nevertheless, there are plays so beautifully written as to win the praises of critics who, as citizens, are antagonists of the authors' views. George Jean Nathan and Brooks Atkinson are among the strongest supporters of O'Casey; this is a great triumph

for O'Casey. But he still can't get produced on Broadway today.

As for myself personally, my plays have sometimes been attacked politically but, with one exception, not by the drama critics. This critic saw my adaptation of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People* as a covert defense of a political minority's right to advocate its line. He was, of course, perfectly correct, excepting that the defense was open and not covert at all. The other critics were not taken by it because it wasn't, for certain reasons, good enough. Theoretically, of course, the world's greatest masterpiece might well be called rubbish by critics if it seemed to advocate something which, should they approve it, would challenge their respectability. The fact, however, is that this masterpiece and its condemnation do not yet exist.

To change the subject, Mr. Miller, how can young people interested in playwriting learn the craft? What training would you suggest?

A M. There seems to be no required background for an aspiring playwright. There are professional playwrights who, with no formal training of any kind, and with no contact with the theatre, except as audience, have begun writing plays successfully. There are also individuals who have served apprenticeships as actors, stage managers, directors, assistants, etc., and have later become playwrights.

In my opinion, a man learns this craft mainly by practicing, and for this he needs paper, pencil, and money. But a point arrives when the playwright must see his play produced in order to receive the final judgment of his senses and of an audience. For this we have no facilities. I think that a miserable production of a play which requires fine acting can probably discourage a playwright quite as much as no production at all. We have no provincial theatres outside of a very few college groups, whose quality varies from semester to semester.

It would also help a young playwright, if he can't attend a class, to ask a drama teacher for a list of the outstanding plays of the past two hundred years, and read them to find out what has been done. Let him read Chekhov, Shaw, Strindberg, Ibsen, O'Casey, Kaiser, Brecht, and Lorca.

Do you think that, in general, work with a community theatre is helpful to a young playwright? Or does it make him feel that he is a big frog in a small puddle—does it get him into a rut?

A M. Such work can be of great encouragement to a young playwright. At least he'll find out whether he is a frog at all. The worst danger that faces him is that no one will pay any attention to him, and that he will produce less work than he might. Connection with some kind of theatre is better for him than being alone. It will encourage him to write additional plays, and the more he writes the more he will learn, and the better off he will be. But too close an embroilment with the theatre blots out the world; again, judgment is all.

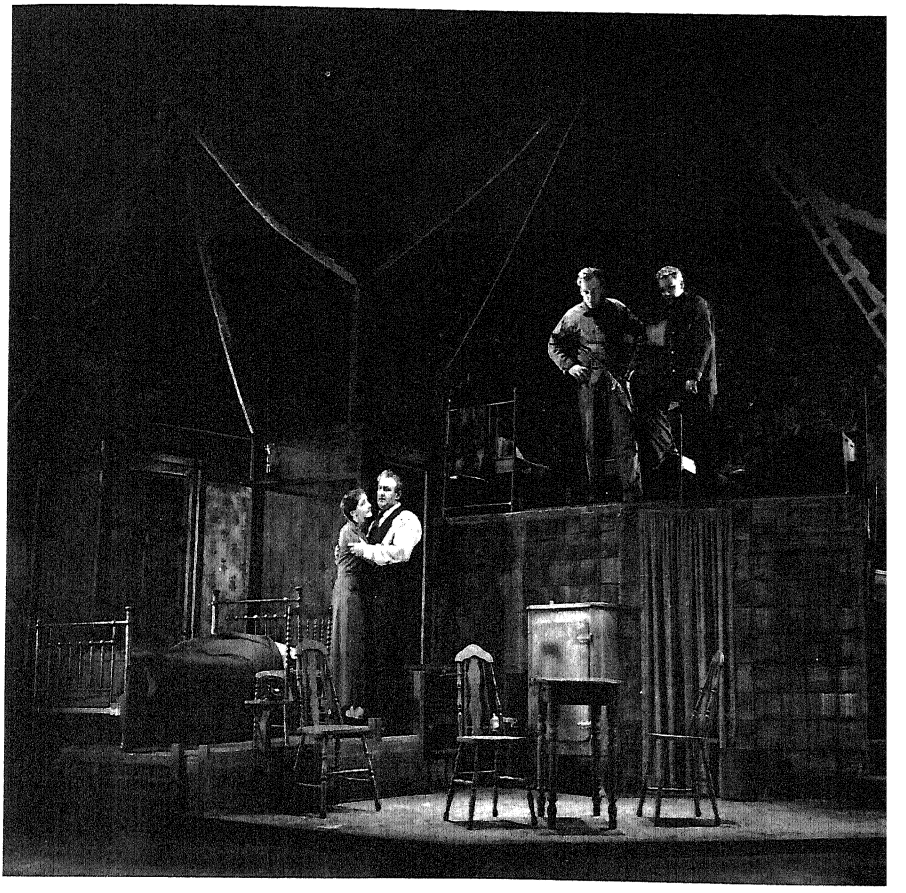
Your own plays, Mr. Miller, were written for Broadway. Death of a Salesman, *for instance, has a complicated set which required careful design and careful production. How could a community theatre adjust itself to such a play?*

A M. Actually, *Death of a Salesman* does not have a complicated set. It is the three platforms that make you think of it as complicated. I wrote it to be done without a set, and it can be played that way.

I would not have a multiset play, and the reason is not primarily economic. The reason is that the changing of one box set for another is a waste of time, and obstructs the action of a play, bleeding the dramatic effect. It is also highly artificial. However, I would advise a young playwright not to bother his head with things he doesn't know about, like set design. He should just write as well as he knows how. Stage techniques follow the plays, not the other way around.

What types of plays would you advise noncommercial groups to present?

A M. They should emphasize original plays; do Broadway plays that are more imaginative and daring than run-of-the-mill productions. There is no point to their doing mediocre, unimaginative successes that Broadway can and does do better. They should take chances. A play of mine once won a college prize contest,



Courtesy of Kermit Bloomgarden. Photo by Eileen Darby, Graphic House

1. Mildred Dunnock, Lee J. Cobb, Arthur Kennedy, and Cameron Mitchell in a scene from Death of a Salesman, by Arthur Miller.

but it was not produced there because the very people who awarded the prize saw no point in backing their judgment by showing the play to an audience. That kind of timidity kills the spirit of a theatre.

Can young people in schools and small communities help the theatre reach new audiences?

A M. They can. First, if they're away from New York and hear of a good play, they can ask the producer to send the touring company to their town. Second, they can familiarize themselves with the British set-up—the Arts Council.

We could have a blossoming of the theatre in this country if we had an Arts Council, which would in effect have the government acting as a disinterested guarantor against loss, while the profits of successful plays would be pooled to offset the production costs of possibly uncommercial but worthy new plays. This would give producers a strong motive to experiment with new playwrights, and would create a feeling of optimism and a sense of possibilities which are absent now. It would expand production tremendously, offer new openings for hundreds of actors, and generally create an atmosphere of hope and vigor.

Young people can propagandize this idea among their teachers and parents. And they can keep putting on plays.

The theatre happens to be the only area left in America which is not monopolized by large corporations. In it, thought and speech are freer than in any of the other arts. It must therefore be protected and expanded.

How to Select a Subject

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

One of the most consistently successful dramatists of the past few years, John Van Druten has to his credit such hit plays as *Young Woodley, The Voice of the Turtle, I Remember Mama, Bell, Book and Candle,* and *I Am a Camera.* These differ from one another so greatly as to indicate a very wide range of talent for the theatre—and this talent includes directing as well as writing.

Two of the plays we have listed above are adaptations of books. We asked Mr. Van Druten about that.

Why does a man who can write original plays with such skill and to such critical acclaim choose to adapt a book to the stage?

J v D. It doesn't happen often. It may happen because I have nothing of my own to write at the time. There are certain books and certain characters that have appealed to me. The character of Sally Bowles seemed so easy to dramatize and so attractive that I had always known there was a play to be written about her. Then, when I heard that someone else was writing a play about the Isherwood stories[1] in which she appears, changing the locale from Germany to this country, and changing Sally Bowles' personality, I was spurred into writing *I Am a Camera.*

The book *Mama's Bank Account*[2] was sent to me by Rodgers and Hammerstein, who wanted to know whether I'd be interested in dramatizing it. I wouldn't have wanted to make a conventional three-act play, but I had always had the idea I'd like to do a play with the author sitting off to one side and walking in and out of the action, and this book seemed perfect for the purpose. That's how I came to write *I Remember Mama.*

[1] *Berlin Stories,* by Christopher Isherwood.

[2] by Kathryn Forbes.

2. ***William Prince, Martin Brooks, Marian Winters, and Julie Harris in a scene from*** **I Am a Camera,** ***by John Van Druten.***

Courtesy of Gertrude Macy. Photo by John Erwin Associates

I want to write something different. No author wants to feel that he's doing the same play again and again with a different set of characters, and to start off with someone else's work is a challenge. But every play I do has the sound of my voice in it, just as every actor's part has the sound of his voice in it.

Isn't there a play in every character and every human situation? Why is it that you see a play in certain situations and not in others?

J v D. My own instinct tells me. Either the situation strikes me or it doesn't. And if it doesn't strike me, it may strike someone else. That's a matter for the individual dramatist's inclinations and abilities.

Do you take your audience's feelings into account, Mr. Van Druten? You started to write in England and then came to the United States. Do you feel that you write for any particular audience?

J v D. You take a great deal of account of the audience, but after a time that becomes so much a part of you that you're not aware of it. You grow into it as you grow into learning a foreign language. By now I suspect I would have difficulty in writing for English audiences.

I don't write for "Broadway" as a special audience. That just happens to be the place where the professional theatre is centralized, and I write plays that would appeal to a general audience.

As a playwright, do you feel that it's more important to learn from what your contemporaries are doing, or from the great classics of the past? Or do you feel that it's most important to study staging, acting, and so on?

J v D. You have to know the classics as you have to learn to read and write, but you must know what's going on around you. You must see and read contemporary plays.

You must know a great deal about staging. You get that best by watching your own plays being rehearsed.

For many years my plays were directed by Auriol Lee. I never realized how much I learned from her until she died and we had to get a new director. Then, as I watched him, it struck me, "Why, I can do that," and I tried it. Now I feel that no one else can do my plays the way I want them done. But you have to know a great deal about the theatre to direct. I wouldn't have been equipped to do it when I started.

You might direct your own plays to make sure that they're done as you want them. But why did you turn to directing not only your own plays, but those of others?

J v D. Because I love directing. When you direct, you're releasing every acting and interpretive gift you have. I know, however, that I'm a playwright first, and must work as one. I must spend more time writing.

Mr. Van Druten, do you think it would be useful to a young playwright to write scenes which show human relationships,

just as actors study isolated scenes in plays in order to develop their facility?

J v D. No, I don't. A playwright might do scenes as an exercise, but he must learn how to put the whole thing together, just as a dressmaker must learn to make a complete dress, and not just practice sewing on buttons, or making hems, and so on. I've never been sure how right and good the writing of scenes is. An author would have to do a lot of preparation of the people in his mind, and he would end up with a complete play anyway if he had ability.

Can a young playwright learn the art and craft of writing in schools and workshops? Isn't there a danger that he will lose some of the sharpness of his original concept at the same time as he gains technical skill in the workshop?

J v D. A school or workshop can teach you a certain amount about writing plays, but it can't teach you to be a playwright. Either you have the ability or you haven't. But even if you haven't, you'll learn some technique. And you needn't worry about losing the sharpness of your concepts. If you have talent, you'll retain it.

How about having a play produced by a community theatre?

J v D. It's good for a playwright to have his play produced anywhere, but it's useless to tell him to aim for the community theatres and not to have his eye on Broadway. He can't help but have his eye on Broadway. He wants the most the theatre has to offer in recognition, financial rewards, opportunity, and so on, and the one place he can get them is on Broadway.

The playwright is in a difficult situation. Nobody demands of a plumber or a carpenter that he be the best plumber or carpenter in the world. It's enough if he knows how to thread a pipe or use a hammer. But a playwright is made to feel that he is in competition with every other playwright, from Shakespeare on. When he writes a play, he challenges every other playwright in the world. And if he's good enough to do that, he feels that he's good enough for Broadway.

There's one ability the playwright is supposed to have that you haven't commented on, Mr. Van Druten, the ability to observe—to observe everything.

J v D. The ability should be there, of course. But you can't force yourself to observe. If you try to, you lose sight of things. I remember a story by H. G. Wells in which a woman writer is asked if she saw a certain thing happen. "I didn't notice it," she replies. "I was too busy observing."

A playwright never knows what is going to be important to him later; he can never tell what to record. You can't keep a notebook and go back to it later to see what you have observed—at least, I can't. I'd say, trust your memory. It will sift out and retain the impressions and sensations that are important to you.

Everyone is concerned these days with the state of the theatre. What do you think of it, Mr. Van Druten?

J v D. I've lectured over most of the country, and I know that interest in the theatre does exist. The need for the theatre is a wonderful thing in human nature, and all the little-theatre groups all over the country are helping to satisfy this need.

People forget how greatly the quality of the theatre has improved during the past fifty years. Think back to the quality of the shows that were put on at the beginning of the century. The average was very low. Standards have gone up since then, and are continuing to go up. There's no justification for any extreme pessimism. I'd advise young people just to make plays —first in homes, if necessary, and then in halls. The theatre is going to stay alive, and they can help keep it that way.

How Playwrights Collaborate

HOWARD LINDSAY

RUSSEL CROUSE

The theatre needs people who are able to work together, but rarely does it get any who practice that difficult art as well as Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Even before they wrote *Life with Father* (which set a Broadway record of 3,224 performances), *State of the Union*, and *Call Me Madam*, they had learned the secrets of effective collaboration. Their joint career has included owning and managing the Hudson Theatre, as well as writing and producing plays that enliven other people's playhouses. In addition, Mr. Lindsay acts and directs, and Mr. Crouse has been a theatre press agent. They know the theatre from every angle.

How do you use your knowledge? Do you both do everything, or do you divide the work?

H L. We both do everything together and in each other's presence. We talk about story and plot until we're sure of every step before we start the dialogue. Then we collaborate on every line. That's much better for us.

R C. We collaborate without any self-consciousness. I'll have no hesitancy about bringing up a bad idea. Lindsay will look at me as though I were crazy. But he may say, "Now, let's take that idea and do this," and out of a bad idea comes a good one.

We started with a secretary, but I was so self-conscious in the presence of a third person that we threw out the secretary.

Do you have many differences of opinion about plays, or do you think sufficiently alike to have the same judgment?

R C. We think more alike than most people. Our differences are so slight that it's easy to make them meet.

H L. We think alike about literature, philosophy, politics, etc. We approach people the same way.

Do you ever find yourselves in conflict?

H L. There's no serious conflict.

R C. We're both professionals, and although we might have a difference of opinion, by the time we're through with the writing, we're in thorough agreement about every part of the play. If there's complete disagreement, we drop the idea. But this rarely happens.

Do you find that there's a danger of losing perspective when you're with a play in so many capacities?

R C. (*as Mr. Lindsay leaves the room to be televised*) Yes. That's why we consider our third collaborator, the audience, as perhaps the most important. This collaborator is smarter than we are. It can tell us where a play is wrong, but not how to fix it. You can tell by the end of the second act. When you've lost their interest, you're gone.

Life with Father opened in Maine. We had doubts about the first act, but not about the rest of the play. That, we were sure, would require no rewriting. But the audience had a different idea. The first act went well, but it was the second act that needed work.

That's why we try out a play out of town before tackling Broadway. Audiences are pretty much the same, unless you have a purely local New York play. And they're the best judges. No matter how funny we think a line is, if the audience doesn't laugh, it isn't funny, and out it goes. And we've found that an audience seldom coughs because of colds but because of boredom.

(*Upon his return, Mr. Lindsay endorses all this wholeheartedly.*)

Why do you produce plays, in addition to having so many other activities?

R C. There's a curious sort of vanity that is satisfied in sponsoring

Courtesy of Theatre Arts Magazine. *Photo by Vandamm*

3. Howard Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney as Father and Mother Day in a scene from* Life With Father, *by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.

a play that we have faith in and having audiences and critics support our judgment. But we never produce our own plays. That would destroy our perspective, and we would then be much too closely involved. An outside producer can do a much better and more objective job.

H L. I also lose a certain advantage when I'm acting in a play. You can't have the same judgment of the audience's reactions when you're on stage as when you're out front. When I'm on stage, I know when I'm holding the audience, but if I'm offstage when we lose them, I don't know where or when it happened. I just know when I come on again that we're not holding their interest.

How do you agree on a play to write together? And how do you select a play by an outsider?

R C. The method differs. Critics complain that young playwrights don't write about serious things. Well, moral integrity seems to us to be a vital subject, and we want it in all plays, whether it's our own *State of the Union,* or *One Bright Day,* which we produced.

We also have to think, "Will the audiences like it?"—that is, "Will the play make money?" We feel that the theatre should be entertaining. People won't pay just to be lectured at. But if you can combine entertainment with the lecture, that's great. The theatre is commercial, but it's purpose is not just to make money.

When we did *State of the Union,* everyone was talking politics. Roosevelt was responsible, with his fireside chats and his ability to bring politics home to the average man and woman and make it part of their lives. We decided to write a play that would get people to take a greater interest in politics, but it had to be entertaining too.

When we have a general idea like that, we talk it over until we get a more definite dramatic idea, or else throw it out. In this case, we got a definite dramatic idea.

How about acting talent outside of Broadway? Do you have any idea of how much there is?

H L. No, I'm sorry to say that we don't know about acting talent outside New York.

R C. We may run across an actor by accident. Once my wife was at the dentist's, and she happened to look at a magazine that had a picture of a girl who, she thought, might take a part in *Remains To Be Seen.* So we tried this girl out. Unfortunately, she wouldn't do. But that's a rare thing.

What about writing talent? Do you do anything to help encourage that?

H L. We're working closely with the New Dramatists' Committee. Because of time limitations, we cannot read all plays submitted to us. It would be wonderful if we could.

R C. We don't read plays at all when we're working on a play of our own. We just have no time. We read only when we're planning to produce.

What advice would you give to an unproduced playwright?

H L. Playwriting is a difficult craft, but a playwright always learns more when a play is in production. If he can have it produced in a community or university theatre, that would be very helpful. And anything that helps train good new playwrights certainly helps the theatre in a period like this.

Does the Critic Make or Break a Play?

BROOKS ATKINSON

Since 1925, when Brooks Atkinson gave up the literary editorship of the *New York Times* to become its drama critic, he has been one of the most popular writers on the theatre. His reviews reach hundreds of thousands of readers, including many who rarely or never see a play themselves. Before coming to the *Times*, Mr. Atkinson had been assistant to the drama critic of the *Boston Transcript*. All in all, he has seen a tremendous number of plays and has undoubtedly influenced the course of the theatre in our times.

What is the function of the critic in the theatre? Would it be just as well off—or perhaps better off—without him?

B A. I work for a newspaper, and my function is to be a reporter for people who are interested in going to the theatre. Mine differs from other forms of reporting in that it's subjective, and not objective. The basic news about the theatre is, "Is it good or bad?" And that is a matter of opinion.

In my Sunday columns, I also write as a reporter. I report on subjects that have news interest, and I hang my column on a news-peg. I don't usually write essays. When I do, it's only because there's no noteworthy news.

As a critic I'm interested in the theatre, in seeing it grow. I believe in trying to be judicial—but I'm not objective. No one is objective. No work of art is objective, and no critic is equally receptive to every kind of theatre. Even with that point of view, however, I make an attempt to look at a play from the point of view of the people who are doing it.

Then if all the critics were to disappear as if by magic—you don't think the theatre would benefit?

B A. I don't think so. Critics are not an isolated group of people. They're members of the public. One of the biggest pieces of folklore is that critics make or break a play. Well, I remember

one play we tried to make—*Billy Budd.* I praised it not once but several times, and other critics did the same. But the public stayed away, and the play closed. On the other hand, we jumped on *Tobacco Road* with both feet—and it went on to break the record for length of run.

Some people say that critics have power. I say that they have no power. All the power is on the stage. What the critics can do is transmit power; they can reflect it in their views.

Apart from the question of quality, don't forget that there are other factors that determine whether a play will be a success, especially the economic factors.

To whom is your criticism directed? Do you criticize for the sake of the actor, author, or director—or for the sake of the public?

B A. Not for the sake of the actor and author, or the director. If I tried to do that, I'd be a director. If you're looking for really creative criticism, look to the directors. Any critic who approaches his work from the point of view of molding actors and authors should be functioning as a director.

So you don't think that actors and authors learn anything from the critics? You believe that all they're interested in is a good review for the sake of the success of the play?

B A. I can't see that a critic can do them much good. Criticism may be interesting to them as coming from a third party, as being an echo of what they've done. It may clarify their minds about what they've accomplished. In that sense they may benefit to some extent from criticism.

Has criticism ever *done any good? Aristotle has been called the first great critic. Over a period of two thousand years, did anybody pay serious attention to his ideas? And if any attention was paid, did the theatre benefit? Did he help playwrights to write better plays?*

B A. I am anti-Aristotelian. I think that his sort of dogmatic criticism put a straitjacket on the theatre. It didn't help the theatre. Tradition that replaces life can be a bad influence. That's

what makes academic criticism pompous and pedantic. If well done, criticism is a form of art, in which the critic, as a human being, responds to the ideas and emotions in the theatre, painting, or any other form of art.

It may sound pretentious, but Anatole France had the right idea when he said that criticism is the adventures of the soul among masterpieces.

If you want the name of a great critic, there was Shaw. Shaw's biographer, Archibald Henderson, says that Shaw wasn't a great critic, but a great *provocateur* and pamphleteer. But no laws or definitions apply to genius, and Shaw was a genius. He fought numerous battles and had a corrective influence on the theatre of his day. He was intensely personal, and his motive was to create a new theatre. And as critic and playwright, he did it.

How does one become a critic?

B A. Personally, I was interested in newspapers first, and I still am. It's a form of work I like. I'd say that if you want to become a critic you should have newspaper training and a background in newspaper reporting. I'm skeptical of people coming straight out of the theatre to a newspaper. The point of view is too specialized. It's difficult to take a public point of view where personal associations are strong.

Go to the theatre, read reviews. You can't know too much about the theatre. Learn the background, learn how it got started. Know all the standard plays. And know a lot about life outside the theatre. New playwrights sometimes come to New York and score successes—and then lose contact with the life from which they drew their strength. The critic faces the same danger when he becomes too closely involved with the theatre. The theatre life is an ingrown life, unhealthy when isolated.

Why are there no women critics?

B A. There's no reason that I can see why a woman can't be a critic. We did have a woman critic, Willela Waldorf, in New York, and in Chicago we have Claudia Cassidy, who is one of the best, and in Boston, Elinore Hughes, also one of the best.

Do you think that a good critic would make a good playwright, as Shaw did?

B A. It requires a very different type of mind. As I said, Shaw is the exception to the rules. But I'm a commentator, and I've never in my life had the kind of original creative idea that a playwright needs.

Do you get much chance, Mr. Atkinson, to see community theatres outside New York?

B A. Some chance. Every year I try to organize a trip to see what is being done. These theatres fulfill a very vital function. In some respects they're better off than Broadway. The productions are less expensive, and done on a more amiable basis. Community theatres do many more classics and semiclassics. They remind us that if the economics of the theatre were different, a lot of the things we don't see in the commercial theatre would have a public.

We have a tendency to end an interview with the same question, Mr. Atkinson. What do you think will happen to the theatre in the United States? And what can young people do to revive and strengthen the theatre in their communities?

B A. The theatre has always been on the verge of disaster, but I think it'll keep going. To young people, I'd say: Go to the theatre, put on amateur plays. Just make theatre. Have some fun.

THE PRODUCER

IN ANCIENT EGYPT, the earliest plays dealt with the tragic life and death of a god. Now it is a new and sometimes tragic god, the Producer, who determines the life or death of a play.

The producer wields his supernatural powers by virtue of his control of the money needed for production. Thirty or more years ago, when the cost of putting on a play was rarely more than ten thousand dollars, he preferred to invest his own money and keep most of the profits of a successful run. Now, with costs from five to ten times as high, he must raise most of the amount needed from the angels whom he can influence. These angels do not spend their every moment hymning his praise. Instead, they examine his record and try to decide whether he will lose their money for them or multiply it several times over.

In this arduous attempt they are guided by their general estimate of what he knows about the theatre.

What he should know is *everything.* Not only must he know plays, he must know people. He must be able to appoint capable assistants of the right kind for the type of play he is producing: director, scene designer, stage manager, and others. He must know how to get them to work together, how to reduce the egos of authors and actors in one breath, and how to soothe their feelings in the next.

He had better know something about everything that anyone else knows—how to write a play (he will have to tell the author how to *re*write it), how to direct (so that he may be able to direct the director if he thinks the latter is not on he right track), how to design scenery (so that he may suggest to the designer ways of saving money in his designs). He must be aware of what goes on backstage, he must keep track of the publicity, he must make sure that his stage crew violates no union regulations.

All this knowing requires a background of considerable experience in the theatre. Once in a while a producer comes along who doesn't know the theatre, but does have money,

and does have an idea of the kind of play he likes. In that case he will hire people to get things done for him. If he is unusually lucky, his play will be a success. More likely, it will be an expensive education to him.

Of all the things he must be able to do, however, none remains more difficult than choosing his next play. He is continually trying to answer the question: "What is the difference between a play that will succeed and one that will fail?"

He can answer this question in general, but he falls into a sweat when he realizes that he can never know for certain with regard to any particular play. If he remains a producer long enough, he is sure to put on a turkey which the critics will proceed to carve for him with their most cutting epithets. And sooner or later, some play he has himself labeled a turkey will be put on by another producer in a way that lets the actors sink their teeth into it and turn it into a smash hit. He has his moments of success and glory, or he would not be able to remain a producer and raise money for his next play. But in general he leads a manic-depressive life, alternating between the heights of achievement and the depths of failure.

Should he try to put on a play he likes—or one he thinks the public will like? Most successful producers, as you will see from the interviews which follow, put on plays *they* like. The fact is that they never can tell what the public will like, and must therefore rely upon their own judgment.

But that doesn't settle the question, for the producer must still take some account of public taste. Suppose the play for which he develops an affection is too different from the usual commercial play. Then the public may not like it, and he'll lose all the money he invests, and angels will shy away from his next production. On the other hand, suppose the play does not suffer from the curse of being different; suppose it is a prime example of a commercial play. In that case, critics and public may jump on it and say, "We've seen this same thing a thousand times. Why bother to put it on again?"

The producer thus wavers between the impulse to do the same safe thing and the urge to do something different and daring. And, in the end, he usually decides on the basis of what he thinks will pay best.

For many producers, the theatre doesn't pay at all. There

were 105 producers listed in New York for the 1951-1952 season, but the majority of these did not produce anything. Formerly Broadway would see more than two hundred new productions a season; now it is not likely to see more than sixty.

The first difficulty is obtaining a theatre building. It is questionable whether, considering the present condition of the commercial stage, there is an actual shortage of suitable buildings. For the 1951-1952 season, for example, only thirty theatres were available for plays, and the number may still be decreasing. But there are rarely more than thirty producers who want theatres at the same time.

There would therefore seem to be enough theatres, if not for the fact that the owners have a keen eye for possible hits. The owners follow the fortunes of every play from the beginning of production, and they often refuse to rent a theatre for what seems to them like certain failure, if they can hold off and secure some play seemingly destined for a long run.

The theatre once rented, the owner sits back and relaxes, while the producer finds himself with a new worry on his hands. For it turns out that rents are so high that he must take in a considerable sum at the box office to so much as break even.

Along with the rents, other costs have also risen. The prices of costumes and sets have doubled and tripled. Salaries are high, although, curiously enough, of the actors who receive them few can make a living in the theatre. Because of the small number of hit plays produced, actors work so infrequently and for such short periods that their total income is low. The stage hands do better. There is enough work on television to keep most of them occupied and happy.

All in all, to keep a drama running, the box office must gross from about $10,000 a week for a one-set small-cast modern play to $20,000 for a play like Shakespeare's *Richard II*, which requires a large cast. For a musical, the sum is much higher. If ticket sales fall below the break-even level and threaten to drop further, the producer usually decides to close quickly, and cut his losses.

As expenses continue to rise, the number of successes decreases from year to year. It has been estimated that about one drama out of every eight is profitable and one musical out

of every three or four. Possibly a dozen producers, therefore, can count on hits in a season.

When a show does make money, the investors are first paid off. The producer then splits the rest of the profits with the investors, usually on a fifty-fifty basis, although some producers take less in profit and pay themselves a salary. But even a hit show is not the same thing as a profit-making show. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* received good reviews and ran for months, each week recovering part of the original cost—but not all of it. When it closed, it showed a loss of approximately $100,000. Shakespeare's *King Lear,* an excellent production of the 1950-1951 season, with no author's royalties to pay, opened to critical applause, lost money, and closed after a short run, although numerous people still wanted to see it. (See the interview with Edith Atwater.)

There is another expense the producer often has to pay these days, of a kind unheard of thirty years ago. Because of the need to attract angels, he must often give readings, or auditions. He arranges for actors to read the parts of a play, and to do the songs and some of the dances of a musical. Along with the performance, the wily producer supplies champagne and caviar in order to induce a generous mood. If the angels are not sufficiently impressed to invest their money, the free show must be repeated before another group.

In his efforts to find a play that has already been tested before an audience, and thus avoid some of the dangers of experimenting, the producer will keep in touch with what is going on in London, Paris, and the theatre abroad in general. He may even do some traveling himself. And once in a while he will transplant to Broadway a play that has already been put on successfully by a noncommercial theatre in this country.

The noncommercial producing groups share many of the headaches of their commercial colleagues. They are faced, particularly, with the problem of selecting the right play.

Does your noncommercial group intend to put on a new play? Then you need taste, good judgment, and experience to help in selecting something good. You must select for the kind of audience you have, not the one on Broadway. The

play must say something, whether in a serious or humorous vein, that this audience wants or needs to hear.

Compared with the Broadway producer, you have several disadvantages in putting on new plays. Well-known dramatists will not generally give you first choice of their best plays—they cannot afford to. And once you have chosen the play, you cannot always give it a first-rate production. From director to actors, you are likely to be dealing with amateurs who lack experience and knowledge of the theatre. It is therefore far from usual to find an outstanding new play put on effectively by the average noncommercial theatre group. Only the best university and community theatres can do the careful work the play needs to appear at its best.

But even if your group is a small one, you have advantages too. You are not limited by the dilemma of choosing between smash hit or flop. You can be satisfied with moderate financial success. You can choose the plays that commercial producers cannot touch, the plays that are so strikingly different that a Broadway audience would shy away from them. It may be that *your* audience has better, less limited tastes.

Noncommercial groups tend to center their efforts on reviving well-known plays. On this point, practically every person we have interviewed is in agreement: Don't choose a Broadway play just because it has been a commercial success. Where skill in acting and care in production are needed, you will find it difficult to compete with the commercial theatre. But where imagination and daring are required, you have your chance. You can put on classics that, because of Broadway expenses, the commercial theatre cannot touch. Broadway shies away from plays with large casts; expenses for salaries are too high. But for a large amateur group, the more in the cast the better. Everybody is able to have some part in the show.

You can put on plays that have been tried on Broadway and have failed because they were not adapted to Broadway audiences. But they may have things to say that your audience considers important. Don't forget that some Broadway flops have been successes abroad. In considering what to produce, don't automatically limit yourself to what has already been a commercial success.

Once you and the rest of your group have chosen a play,

you must take the same care in its production as if you had thousands of dollars invested. You must select the best possible director, scene designer, manager, etc., go through the agonies of casting, and try to arrange the widest possible sale of tickets.

In general, you will do well to simplify as much as possible. Remember that the actual physical production of a play can be exceedingly complicated, and that you can easily be swamped by the details of costumes, scenery, and props. To handle these details successfully requires considerable experience. You can make your own job easier by eliminating potential difficulties before you start. Unless you have the facilities of some of our better-equipped university theatres, avoid complicated settings and elaborate costumes, and shun stage effects that require too great skill in lighting and exceedingly accurate timing. As much as you can, reduce the chances for making mistakes.

Like the commercial producer, you have to worry about box-office sales. He has an experienced press agent to publicize his play. You can adopt certain of the press agent's methods.

It is not enough to send a notice to the newspapers, or to make an announcement to a club or high-school group. For publicity, you must be both thorough and imaginative.

First, suggests James D. Proctor, a press agent with wide experience in a great variety of plays and musicals, list all the newspapers, magazines, and radio stations in your community. Study this list, and decide what departments or outlets would be most interested in your play.

Second, gather all the facts about your play, and write news releases.

Third—and most important—interview everyone concerned with the play, from chairman of the production committee to the carpenters on the set. Where you find an interesting and unusual point of view about the play, dig deeper. Write down the information, think about it, summarize the most important points, and then barge into an editor's office or a radio station ready to discuss the possibility of a feature story.

Take pictures that have news value, not necessarily those that flatter the actors, but those that the reader will find interesting to look at.

As Mr. Proctor summarizes it: "First, be accurate and hon-

est. Second, be imaginative within the area of truth and reality."

You can see by now that a producer's lot is not an easy one. It was much simpler in the old days when a theatre owner was the producer of his own shows, or when the producer was known as the manager and did not have to face the endless problems that are now occasioned by the high costs of putting on a play. These problems will probably become more rather than less difficult as time goes on.

Remember, by the way, that in a producing *organization* the functions carried out by a single commercial producer may be split up among several people, bearing the title of director, artistic director, etc. But, whatever the title, the headaches are essentially the same. Some inkling of these headaches—and also of the creative challenge of the producer's job—will become apparent in the interviews that follow.

How Our Theatre Has Changed

JOHN GOLDEN

The dean of American producers, John Golden recently celebrated fifty years in the theatre. During his long career as song-writer, actor, playwright, and especially as producer, he has seen considerable changes take place. but he has never stopped bringing the theatre to the public. In a previous generation, his *Lightnin'* set a Broadway record for length of run. When we interviewed him, he was doing a revival of *The Male Animal* and planning to put on additional plays.

Mr. Golden, have the changes in the theatre been for the better? Has there been any improvement in acting, in the quality of the plays?

G. Yes, there's been improvement. When I was young, heroines were pure, the hero was good, and the villain was the dirtiest dog that ever breathed. The audience accepted seriously lines and situations that would bring a howl today. I remember one play, *The Phoenix,* in which the villain announced in a voice that carried through the theatre, "Little does she know that I will lure her to my yacht, and ruin her at my leisure." And all the while, the heroine he meant to victimize stood four feet away from him, completely unaware of his plans.

In the background, of course, you had Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Shaw. But they didn't have much influence on the everyday theatre, not as much influence as ignorance and prejudice. Do you know, for instance, why so many theatres were called "opera houses," why there are still about a hundred "opera houses" in the United States today? Not because operas were given in them, but because to many people the theatre was a hideout for the Devil, and they wouldn't permit it to exist under its own name. You had to call it an opera house to make it respectable. You couldn't give a vaudeville show on Sunday in New York or in many other cities. You had to call it a "concert," even if the musical program consisted of performers like Al Jolson doing songs

like "Mammy." That kind of thing hurt the theatre, and we're better off without it.

Has the acting improved? Yes, the actors are more like human beings—there's less hokum and more honesty. There's less of the grand manner. You may have heard of Salvini, the great Italian actor. One of the things that made him great was a voice you could hear three blocks away. But there were a few stars who didn't bellow. William Gillette was one of them. He made all the rest of his cast do the shouting, and he himself spoke in a quiet way that was very effective.

The theatre's more real now, closer to life. But it's lost something too. It's better, but it isn't more fun.

You mean for the audience, Mr. Golden?

J G. For most of the people in it. Take the actors, for instance. In the old days there was a wall of mystery between them and the audience. Nobody could go backstage but the people who worked there. Neither the actor's wife or children, nor his friends. And, of course, no strangers. A star like Ada Rehan always wore a veil in public, and she never dined in a public restaurant. And when she left the theatre, she disappeared. The public's curiosity about her was always whetted and never satisfied.

Nowadays there are four thousand actors without jobs. And there's no glamour in an actor who has to sell shoes or wait on table. In those days, the average actor didn't have to spend most of his time looking for work. He acted. There were theatres everywhere. I remember playing thirty weeks in the same play in New England, moving to a different theatre each week.

How about the producer?

J G. The producer is becoming more and more unimportant. The director is taking his place. The producer is now a man who knows a lot of rich people and can persuade them it's more fun to bet their money on actors than on race horses.

That isn't true of you, Mr. Golden, is it?

J G. No. I always put up all my own money. Nobody has produced so many failures. You can't help having failures when you put on one hundred and fifty-seven plays. But I've had fifty hits —and that's a pretty good average.

Why do you use your own money?

J G. Because I trust my judgment, and if the play's a success, I don't want to have to share the profits. And if it's a failure, I don't want to have any explaining to do.

You say that the director is taking the producer's place?

J G. In the old days, the producer was head man. The author had great authority too, and assisted in the staging. Formerly, the stage manager did most of the directing, what there was of it. Now, as you know, he handles the show only after it starts.

There were great actors before there were directors—Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, and later William Gillette and David Warfield. They became great without direction. You can include Frank Bacon too, although he did have direction later on. But the theatre changed, thanks to Shaw and Ibsen and what was going on in the rest of the world, and direction became more important.

So did the director. He's become a great person. The job made the man. Nowadays the director decides on everything —not only on the actors, but on the sets and costumes and the play itself. Sometimes he begins with the author and adds enough to the play to become co-author.

How about the author? Is his lot a happy one?

J G. It's frustrating. He has a most difficult job. He creates characters that he can almost see. And then the play is cast, and he has to give up all his dreams about how the characters look. The theatre breaks a playwright's heart. Everything depends on others. The success of opening night depends on the good health of the army behind the curtain line and a dozen drama critics in front, who have seen everything to be seen.

As an individual, the author's more important than anybody else in the theatre. The theatre has enough actors and di-

4. Martha Scott, Robert Preston, and Elliott Nugent in a scene from The Male Animal, *by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent.*

Courtesy of John Golden. Photo by John Erwin

rectors—more than enough for the jobs it can offer. The only thing it needs is good plays. And you can't have good plays without good playwrights.

How about the cost of production?

J G. That's part of the trouble. Under present conditions, the stage can't give many new writers a hearing. TV is the place for new writers to learn.

Do you think that TV will replace the live theatre, Mr. Golden?

J G. No, the live theatre will never die. There will always be people who want to get together in one place and see live actors. But in many ways, the future of the theatre is with TV. TV and the radio and the movies have made it almost impossible for the theatre itself to compete. A man puts down a ten-dollar bill for two orchestra tickets to *The Male Animal* and he gets forty cents in change. He thinks that's outrageous —and it is. But I have no choice. Even at these prices, I still haven't made any profit on the show.

Compare that with TV. The industry spends millions producing its product—and then gives that product away! We just can't compete with that kind of thing. TV is close to live drama, closer than the movies. In the movies you take a scene eight or ten times, from different angles. And if you don't like anything that you get, you can cut the scene out altogether. The movies are full of tricks. But on a live TV program, as on the stage, the actor has to act, and no mistake about it.

Do you think that the quality of TV compares with that of the stage?

J G. No, not yet. You have some good plays, well acted, well produced. You have people like Worthington Miner who do fine jobs. But in many ways TV is back where our theatre was fifty years ago. The lines were crude, the humor was for children. It was great fun for one comedian to slap another in the face with a custard pie, or to slip on a banana peel. The movies had to go through that phase when they started, and so did radio and television. Television is still in it.

The movies gave nothing to the stage. One well-known actor, after doing a term in the movies, came to me for a part in a play. He asked a ridiculously low salary. I wanted to know why he'd accept so little, and he said he wanted to act. In his last movie, a dog stole the show. The dog whined over his dead master's grave, and after a while he dug into the ground to get closer to his master. But they got him to whine by beating him till his tail was between his legs, and they got him to dig by burying meat in the ground. That's the movies. You touch people's hearts by using tricks. On the stage you do it by acting.

On TV it's acting too. That's why I have hopes for it.

Do you think you can bring young people closer to the theatre by amateur productions, Mr. Golden?

J G. You can't bring them to the theatre that way. You can get them to *learn* from amateur productions. Young people who like each other and like to do the same things together should form groups. If they like the theatre, they'll learn in it.

But such groups won't cure the Broadway theatre. We

need good new playwrights. I've done what I could to encourage them. I engaged a teacher of writing for the High School of Performing Arts, and I go over there often. Two of the youngsters, still in their teens, have sold plays to the Samuel French firm. I hope they're even more successful in the future.

The one big thing wrong is that there aren't enough productions the public wants to see. The only prescription the Fabulous Invalid needs is more good plays.

How a Producing Group Is Formed

THERESA HELBURN

As one of the founders and more recently one of the two codirectors of the Theatre Guild, Theresa Helburn has been active in play production for more than thirty years. Beginning with an amateur's interest in the theatre, she long ago attained a professional knowledge of it that few others can match.

Will you tell us about the origin of the Theatre Guild, Miss Helburn? The Guild is really a continuation of the group known as the Washington Square Players, is it not?

T H. Even before the Washington Square Players, a group of us used to get together once a week at someone's house, have dinner, and read a play aloud in character. It was the pleasantest way we had of spending our evenings. Many of the people in that group were later involved in the formation of the Washington Square Players.

In those days, few people used to read plays. When I was asked to lecture on the drama at a large girls' school shortly after I had finished English 47 at Harvard, I remember asking the students whether they had read any plays, and they said, "No." "Haven't you read any Shakespeare?" I inquired, and the answer was "Oh, yes," in terms of such boredom that I was shocked. At the request of the head of the school, I organized a Shakespeare class the following season and spent all of three months just reading *Twelfth Night* aloud and discussing the meaning and intent of each line from an actor's point of view. It was an exciting experience for us all.

Many years later I was interested to find that the Lunts, before deciding on the new plays we suggested to them from time to time, would get their group together to read a script aloud. With other Theatre Guild plays too, we often used this method for testing its needs and values. We organize what is called an "Equity Reading," with well-chosen paid actors to

read the parts. This is always of great value to the author as well as the producers.

I would suggest that young people who would like to make a start in the theatre form reading groups. It's enjoyable, and it might ultimately lead to a more ambitious theatre group.

Do you believe, Miss Helburn, that the Guild system of having a group select plays, rather than a single individual, helped it attain success? What happened when there were differences of opinion?

T H. The majority vote carried. We sometimes had spirited fights over plays, and sometimes my side lost plays that it hurt me to give up. However, it's been ten or twelve years since that committee functioned. At present there are just Mr. Langner and myself. When we both like a play, it increases the range of audience appeal.

Courtesy of The Theatre Guild and Joshua Logan. Photo by Zinn Arthur

5. A scene from Picnic, by William Inge.

Do you think the committee system would be useful for community theatres?

T H. Committees are very unwieldy, but I'd say yes, if a committee is really active. A majority vote is always better—it gives you more of a cross-section of your theatre audiences. And the committee itself learns from the differences of opinion and discussions. Of course, if it has any inactive members, it should get rid of them.

How many plays are submitted to the Guild annually? And how are they submitted?

T H. We receive about five hundred to six hundred plays a year, but many of these have to be returned unread. Only in rare instances do we consider unsolicited manuscripts. We try to get the authors to submit them first to established agents. Agents perform a useful function in filtering out the plays that show no promise, and there are many of these. Of course, we get a great many plays through our personal contacts with authors. After thirty-three years in the theatre we naturally have very wide contacts.

Does the Guild raise money for production in the same way as other producers?

T H. We always used to use our own money exclusively, and any profits on successful plays went to defray the losses of the unsuccessful ones. Now that it costs so much more to put on a play, we raise funds from the usual sources, but we always put in some of our own money, too.

Do your subscribers help?

T H. They help pay for the running costs. But they can be a liability if the play is a failure. Subscriptions may be sold for several weeks in advance, and the play may lose money every week it's kept going.

Do you have subscribers in different cities, for your tours?

T H. We have subscribers in more than twenty cities. We offer subscriptions to from four to six plays in advance, not only for our own productions, but for good plays of other managements too. And this year we have been co-operating with the Council of the Living Theatre in developing our subscription audiences even further.

You have nothing like branches in other cities?

T H. No, that would be impractical, but we do use Mr. Langner's summer theatre, the Westport Country Playhouse, for experimental productions and tryouts.

Has the increase in the cost of production affected the Guild as much as it has other producers?

T H. It probably has affected us more, because we like to do plays that have less obvious commercial appeal, and that has become increasingly difficult. Formerly, if a play failed, we'd lose from two to seven thousand dollars on it, but we'd make that up on the success of the next play. Now, a flop means a loss of twenty-five to fifty thousand, and we can't risk that very often. A great deal of the fun of the theatre is gone.

It affects us in other ways, too. When we started, thirty-four years ago, we set out to fight the star system and develop a level of ensemble playing. Since then, the rise of talking pictures and radio and television, and the tremendous rise in costs, have made the star more important than ever. Luckily, however, the level of ensemble acting is also higher than ever.

The theatre seems to be flourishing in other countries, Miss Helburn, even in countries like England that are in a bad way financially. It's only in the United States that the commercial theatre seems to be in a bad state. Would you care to suggest what could be done for the theatre here, and what part the noncommercial groups might play in helping keep it alive?

T H. I don't know much about the conditions of the theatre in France—I think it has many difficulties to contend with—but

the theatre in England gets government help and has a tax-free covenant for many ventures. And the press doesn't influence theatre-goers too strongly, whereas here, a couple of bad reviews can kill a play before it has a chance to get started. It's much easier to produce plays in England than it is here.

As for keeping the theatre alive throughout the country—everyone who works in the theatre in any capacity is part of a potential audience for commercial productions. Young people can best create and keep growing these new audiences for the professional theatre by working with community groups wherever they are.

The Producer in the Noncommercial Theatre

OLIVER SMITH

Oliver Smith is one of the younger producers who not so long ago was facing many of the same problems faced by the average young man new to the theatre. He became a producer by a rather unusual path—by way of stage designing. He has designed fine and highly imaginative stage sets, and has been associated with ballet as a co-director of Ballet Theatre.

How do you become a producer?

O S. First you get the idea of what you want to produce. Then you secure the money. If you select a play of quality, you will have less trouble finding artists and money. My first production was *On the Town,* in which all the people, from writers and composers to actors and dancers, were young and not too highly experienced. But it attracted money, because the collaborators were talented.

I don't think you can go to school and learn to be a producer. That kind of executive talent you have to be born with.

If you want your children to be actively interested in the theatre, start them young, while they're still in grade school. Have them give puppet shows, and charge ten cents' admission. They'll learn box-office and publicity problems that way, not to speak of the artistic end of a production. Children are fascinated by anything they can make, anything they can give identity to.

So you think producers are born, not made?

O S. The job takes an inner self-assurance. A false front is no good. You have to trust your judgment, right or wrong—and then face yourself without being devastated when it goes wrong. As a

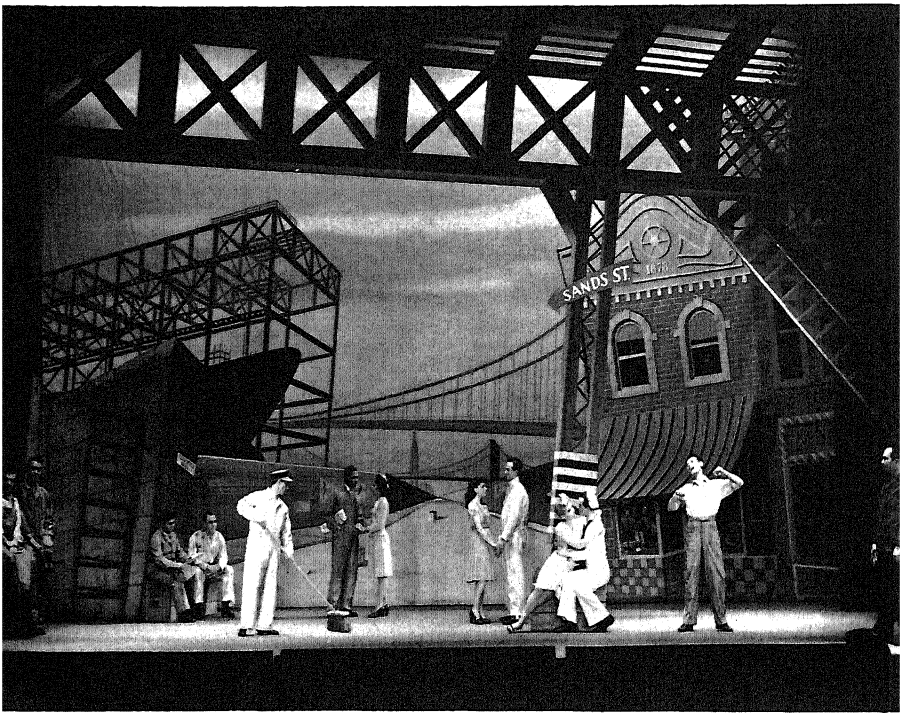


Photo by Vandamm

6. A scene from On the Town, a musical comedy by Adolph Green and Betty Comden, produced by Paul Feigay and Oliver Smith, and designed by Mr. Smith.

producer, you must face people of all types, you must be interested in human beings. You learn to see your world in terms of theatre. Of course, that's dangerous, as sometimes your sense of theatre and reality gets mixed up.

How do you select your plays?

O S. That's a very personal matter. I want to bring new literary talent to the theatre. I'm looking for people who have warmth, reality, and amusing qualities.

That must mean that you read many plays.

O S. No, not many. I can tell from four or five pages whether a play is for me. Sometimes I find playwrights among novelists, sometimes an agent will find a playwright for me. All agents

have readers who read all plays submitted. And, incidentally, producers are extremely generous about getting a play produced, even when they can't handle it themselves and it goes to another producer.

To return to that personal matter—how did you train yourself to tell a good play from a bad one?

O S. I didn't train myself. I was trained by my personal inclination, my choice of reading matter, my academic background.

Well, what is it that in those first four or five pages makes you feel, "This is it, this is for me?"

O S. The fact that the play gives me goose-pimples. Some producers are cold-blooded; they ask themselves, "Will this make me money?" A few are talented money-makers, but most of them are no more likely to make money than those producers who put on only those plays they feel are good.

I don't stick to a single type of play. I put on Sartre's *No Exit*, even though I disagree with Sartre's philosophy, because I thought it was a work of art. I put on Gertrude Berg's *Me and Molly* because I considered it warm and human.

How about musicals?

O S. Musicals are much more expensive to put on than they used to be, and you go into them with a lot of care. You have to organize them much better than before. Here the author and composer work closely together, and the producer sometimes works closely with both. George Abbott always works with his authors. Creative artists like Rodgers and Hammerstein produce their own shows. In general, all the creative artists—author, composer, arranger, etc.—have authors' contracts, and they have to respect one another's talents, as well as the ability of the producer, or there would be tremendous confusion.

What kind of plays would you suggest for a noncommercial theatre to concentrate on—classics, new plays, or Broadway hits?

O S. There's room for everything in the theatre, but noncommercial groups have no reason for existence if they don't put on worth-while plays. They often want to put on only established plays, because they have more difficulty in selling tickets for new plays. And, besides, they find it difficult to get original plays of value.

They might solve that problem by sending someone to New York to see producers. The latter know of many worth-while plays which they themselves cannot put on, and they'd be glad to suggest them to the noncommercial theatres.

Should they try to put on musicals?

O S. No—these require too much organization, too much talent in performance. I've seen some that made me shudder. Revues would be less excruciating. Variety entertainment comes naturally, and doesn't require such skill in pleasing an audience.

How do you select actors?

O S. By calls for auditions, and by agents. More by agents. For musicals, I use both methods.

You hear of young actors and actresses going around from one producer's office to another. Does this do them any good?

O S. Very little. It's very difficult to get to see a producer that way. They only waste shoe-leather.

Then what would you advise a young actor or actress to do?

O S. Affiliate with an acting school or group which screens out the untalented. More young people get in through directors than through producers, anyway. If they can't affiliate with an acting group near by, let them form their own group. The plays they put on will attract directors, and some producers, and their talents will be noted. They might try acting in summer theatres too. As a last resort, to attract attention, some would-be actors frequent places where producers are to be found. If they have sufficient social charm, they may be noticed

and remembered. But the odds are against them. It's best to try to attract personal attention by doing a good job.

Suppose the young people live a thousand miles from any producer they know of? Should they come to New York and try to build an acting group there?

O S. I wouldn't advise them to come to New York, although many do. It's a rat race here, and most kids—including some very talented ones—finally give it up and go home. Those who stick it out are obsessed, but not necessarily talented. I'd suggest that they organize off-Broadway groups like the Cleveland Playhouse and the Karamu Theatre.

In your dual role as designer and producer, how do you try to keep costs down, and yet create appealing and effective sets?

O S. By using my imagination. The best designs are not necessarily expensive. And I've seen expensive ones that were horrible. As a producer, I don't want to waste my money on sets that ruin the play.

To be stuffy for a moment, Mr. Smith, whither the theatre? Where do you think it's going? Is it dying?

O S. Not dying. It's going through a period of transition. It can't compete with television and the movies by doing the stuff that they usually do. If it tried to, it would deserve to die. It can live by producing plays that are gripping and vital.

One final question. What can young people, students, do to revitalize the theatre, not only on Broadway, but nationally?

O S. They can do two things. First, create and build the theatre in their own communities. Second, support good theatre, amateur and professional both, wherever they find it. As they help create audiences who love, understand, and patronize good plays and good acting, there'll be no need for the theatre to fear the competition of inferior forms of entertainment.

THE DIRECTOR

ONCE THE AUTHOR has written his work, and the producer has decided to put it on the stage, the director is usually the single person most responsible for the success—or failure—of the play. The oddity of this fact is apparent when we consider that the director as such is a modern development. Before the early part of this century, his duties were usually taken by the stage manager, although sometimes in the most perfunctory way. And plays *were* successful before directors existed.

The Commedia dell' Arte of some centuries ago by its very nature couldn't have had a director, any more than it could have had an author. Once the manager of the troupe had read the synopsis of the play and indicated the exits and entrances, the actors were on their own. In England during this same period, and indeed until the time of Garrick, many of the functions of a director would have been superfluous. One of the first duties of a director is to see that everyone has an understanding of the meaning of the play as a whole, that the entire production is keyed to that meaning. But before the latter half of the nineteenth century, a play was usually not put on as a whole. It was staged to provide parts for a few stars. A tragedy gave a dramatic actor an opportunity to tear at the emotions of his audience; a comedy gave a comedian a chance to mug, to clown, to use his voice in funny ways.

In England, before Garrick, the other actors did little to help the star along. Outside England, the old ruggedly individualistic methods persisted even after Garrick. An actor wouldn't make his entrance in character. He would enter as himself, chat with friends, straighten his costume, and possibly clear his throat. Not until he got into the center of the stage did he assume his character and begin to "act."

Nor was there much worry about the meaning of a play. If a production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* astounded the audience with its scenic effects, it was successful. In fact, very often the patched-up conglomeration of Shakespearean dia-

logue that served as plays could *have* no meaning as a whole. It was enough that from moment to moment the actor could stun his audience with the power of his outburst, with the vividness of his rendition of the author's language.

In the modern theatre, however, everything in the play must contribute to a unified effect. The scenery must match the style of acting; the actors must work together, not merely compete as individuals for the attention of the audience.

The director must therefore have a definite conception of the play before he begins to work with the actors. He must make up his mind beforehand what sort of effect the play is intended to produce, and by what methods he will obtain this effect. He does not have to plan every inflection of the voice, every gesture of the little finger of every actor, although some directors do come close to doing this. But usually he does plan exits and entrances, pieces of stage business, and the general movement of his characters.

Even in this, however, not all directors work the same way. Some find that the moment they begin actual rehearsals, much or all of their planning must be discarded, and they must start all over again. Others find that their plans are highly useful, although they need to be changed in some details.

Those who plan in advance have a certain advantage. Both commercial and noncommercial productions are short on rehearsal time, and things are speeded up considerably if there is less groping around. The scenery can be designed only if the director knows what he intends to do, and once it is selected the director's freedom to change his mind about many details of the staging is limited.

Directors, nowadays, begin with a reading of the play. Script in hand, the actors sit around and go through their parts, trying to gain an understanding of the characters, of how the different roles are to be played. It is better for each actor to have the script as a whole rather than to depend on "sides," which contain only the lines of individual actors, plus cues, and which necessarily center each actor's performance on himself.

After four or five readings, or possibly sooner, if the play offers great difficulty, the director will discuss and analyze the characters, and if actors have conflicting ideas about how different parts are to be played, he will help straighten them out. Some directors simply tell the actors what they consider the

Courtesy of ANTA. Photo by Vic Shifreen

7. Helen Hayes and the cast reading Mrs. McThing, by Mary Chase. Among those present are Brandon de Wilde, Jules Munshin, director Joseph Buloff, and producer Robert Whitehead.

correct way; others start a discussion which will help the cast thrash things out. At any rate, although many questions remain unsettled, after a day or two the actors leave their seats and, still reading from scripts, begin to walk through the play as the director blocks out their movements.

There is no attempt, at this stage, to memorize lines. With a new play such an attempt would be futile anyway, as there will almost certainly be considerable changes in the rewriting. It is difficult enough for the actors to learn how to express the feelings of the characters and how to make the movements required of them seem natural. There is no scenery, no stage set. But the set has been, or is being, designed, and the actors must move in relation to where the different pieces of scenery and furniture will be. Hence, props are set out, while the posi-

tions of walls, fountains, and so on are noted by chalk marks, or by tape lines. The actors concentrate on the first act until they can run through it fairly well. Then they go on to the second act, and so on.

Once past the first readings, there is considerable confusion and indecision. If the director has planned everything in advance, he finds that some of his plans must be changed. The actors don't like some of the things they are asked to do, and they have their own suggestions. There are heated arguments among the various actors fighting jealously to preserve the importance of their own parts. Questions that have supposedly been solved arise all over again. It turns out that an actor who had agreed with the director as to the meaning of his own part understood the terms of agreement differently. Until the very end of rehearsals, and sometimes until the very end of the play's run, there may be certain roles that are not interpreted to the director's satisfaction.

Directors have different approaches to the solution of these problems. Some are autocrats; they tell the actors what to do, and consider their own decisions final. If the actor doesn't get the point, they pass from telling to showing, and have the actor imitate them. Others show nothing. They do their best to explain, to get the actor into the mood of the character, to make him grasp the motive behind the things he must do, and then to have him find out for himself how best to express the mood and motive.

At the halfway point in rehearsals, tempers are likely to be frayed. Not every actor is doing a good job, and the director's discussions are likely to sound to some of the cast like unfair criticism. If by this time the actor doesn't see the characters pretty much as author and director see them, there is trouble in store for everyone.

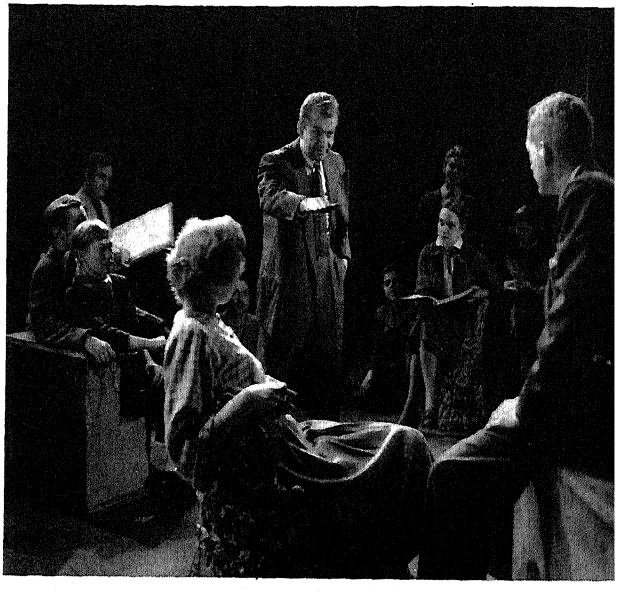
A great deal depends on the nature of the cast. An experienced and talented professional actor often needs no more than a slight hint of the director's meaning. A novice—and most of the amateurs in noncommercial productions are novices or little more—will need to have things explained thoroughly and then to be shown in the bargain. Some actors learn quickly at first, but soon stop improving in their interpretations. Others are slow to start with, but keep forging ahead. Some can

portray a wide variety of roles, others have difficulty in adapting themselves to characters that are new to them.

Whatever their problems, it is up to the director to help them arrive at the proper solutions. As work goes on, he may find it necessary to call special rehearsal sessions for a single actor, or for groups of two or three, instead of for the cast as a whole. In this way he can concentrate on the particular scenes that need improvement without forcing the rest of the cast to stand around waiting idly. At the same time, he avoids too greatly embarrassing the actors who are not getting along well in their parts.

But the direction of the actors is only a part of the director's duties. He will consult, argue, and sometimes regrettably fly into a rage with producer, author, scene designer, costume designer, and any other member of the production whose work affects what he is trying to do on the stage. He must help decide questions of make-up and lighting, and revision of the script, as well as acting. He must see that everything contributes to the unified meaning of the play.

Sometimes a director will assume one or more of the other functions in a play. He may not only direct, but take care of production as well. Or, on occasion, he will direct and also have



8. Newell Tarrant, the director of the Erie Playhouse, a community theatre, explains a piece of business to a cast in rehearsal.

Courtesy of Erie Playhouse. Photo by Bryce Currie

a leading role as an actor. In relatively rare cases he will produce, direct, and act in the same play.

Now, when he does this, he faces special problems. For one thing, he stands a good chance of breaking down from overwork. But even more dangerous is the possibility that his views will become too narrow, too limited, too personal. The average director may disagree with his leading man about how a role should be played. In that case, the question is thrashed out between them—and this verbal thrashing gives each a chance to learn from the other. But when director and leading actor are the same person, the whole struggle may take place in that person's single head—and that sort of struggle is too often a sham battle.

In a case of this kind, what does the director do? We asked José Ferrer, who at any moment is likely to be acting in one play which he has produced and directed, while producing another and directing still a third. Mr. Ferrer's reply was: "Any conscientious director welcomes suggestions from the actors, the playwright, and others who are working with him, and accords them the greatest consideration. In a case like *The Shrike,* in which I double as an actor and a director, such co-operation is absolutely essential, especially from the viewpoint of those who can watch from out front while I myself am on stage. With *The Shrike,* we were particularly fortunate in that our playwright, Joseph Kramm, is also a director and worked with me closely."

Mr. Ferrer also lays great emphasis on audience reaction. It is almost unheard of on Broadway to have a "run-through" before an audience a week after a play has started rehearsal. Nevertheless, here Mr. Ferrer does the unheard-of. Why?

"Audiences," he pointed out, "are, of course, the final judge of any director's work, but they can also be collaborators. Their reactions at 'run-throughs' and dress rehearsals quickly indicate weaknesses in a play and its direction which can be corrected at further rehearsals and re-tested at additional 'invitation dress rehearsals.' Important to any director of actor, these preliminary audience reactions are invaluable to the man who is doing both jobs at once."

Invaluable in another way are the hints you can get from Shaw, who read his own plays marvelously, and directed some of them. Shaw believed in working out the stage business be-

Photo by Vandamm

9. Jose Ferrer as Iago restraining Douglas Watson while Paul Robeson Shakespeare's Othello.

forehand, as he tells in his booklet, *The Art of Rehearsal,* but beyond that, many of his suggestions show an uncommon sort of common sense. They are especially important for noncommercial groups.

Don't criticize. Instead, explain. If a thing is wrong, and you don't know how to set it right, keep quiet. If you can't help the actors, leave them alone. Don't confuse and worry them by telling them that something is wrong and that you can't put your finger on it.

Don't try to cram too much into an actor at a single rehearsal. If he learns two or three important points at a session, he is doing fine. Don't bring up anything that doesn't really matter. Forget about trifles.

Don't get angry and lose your temper or your patience, don't cry to heaven that the actors are a pack of fools for not understanding what you are trying to tell them. They'll resent it, and do even worse. Don't be annoyed because you have to repeat the same thing several times. You don't learn everything the first time either, and some things you never learn.

If a scene isn't going right, don't keep repeating it and getting the actors in the habit of doing it wrong. Cut it short, and start again when everybody can come to it with a new approach.

Shaw believed that after the first rehearsals were out of the way, the actors should be permitted to run through their scenes without comment or interruption from the direcor until the end of the act. The act must be regarded as a whole, and not chopped up, by interruptions, into little pieces. And he warned against allowing the actors to take their tone and speed from one another, instead of from what the author had written. One wrong interpretation can infect an entire cast.

After the first week or so, the actors will begin to memorize their lines. Some will have no trouble. Words, gestures, inflections, all will have been learned together as the meaning of the parts became apparent. Others will find a great deal of difficulty in retaining the words, and in their desperation will seem to forget everything else. The best thing for the director to do is not to interfere and not to lose patience. After a time, the words will begin to come without trouble, and then the director can devote his time to perfecting the characterizations, to eliminating all the smaller flaws in the performance.

However, in some cases actors have too little trouble with words. That is, they tend to substitute their own for those of the author. Sometimes they do so in the belief that they are making improvements; at other times, their alterations of the text will be simply due to lapse of memory. Whatever the cause, the director must not permit unauthorized changes. Actors who like to improvise dialogue should be encouraged to write their own plays.

The director will make hundreds and perhaps thousands of notes. He will enter in his prompt-book dozens of details about errors to watch out for, possible danger spots, lighting cues, and so on. This incessant attention to detail is hard work, and makes it more difficult for the director to act as the part-

time Pollyanna of the production—and that too is part of his job, for there will be numerous occasions when the author is disgusted with his own script, the producer with the people he has hired, and the actors with their roles. The director must keep up morale, aided to some extent by the cheerful releases of the press agent.

In his concern with details—and such a concern is inevitable if the production is to avoid the dozens of awkward spots that will sometimes crop up—the director must never forget his main task: the staging of the play as a whole. The play must make sense to the audience. The pace, the method of speaking the lines, the nature of the scenery, everything must conform to the play's central meaning. If the director slips up in a detail or two, he will be able to correct his mistakes easily enough later. But if he fails in his main approach to the play, he fails in everything.

Sometimes the play is nearing the end of rehearsals when it becomes evident that things are not going right. The producer and the director discover at this late stage that they have completely different ideas of the play. The director learns to his amazement that all the actors have been shrugging off his interpretation of the characters and sticking to their own. The star proves incapable of fitting in with the other actors. The sets turn out to be too brilliant or too gloomy. Glaring weaknesses suddenly become apparent in the script.

Why, you may ask, didn't these things hit everyone in the eye in the first place? Why did all these experienced men and women of the theatre require so much work and so much time to discover the obvious?

Well, *nothing* was obvious in the first place, except the general nature of the script. All the weaknesses that were inherent in the production have been excused on the ground that you can't expect things to be done right at first. It has been assumed that hard work and the passing of time would eliminate absurdities in the plotting, would give the actors a better idea of the characters, would make for better teamwork. Everybody's imagination has been working overtime, anticipating improvements and glossing over inconsistencies.

And, in many cases, this assumption that everything would turn out all right is largely justified. When it is not—then there are explosions, resignations, dismissals (subject to Equity rules),

a hasty search for a co-author or "play doctor," the bringing in of a new director, new actors.

If the director survives this stage, if he is not forced to start hurried rehearsals with a completely revised and practically new script, or with new leading actors, he devotes his time to smoothing out all the rough spots of the production and preparing for the dress rehearsal. In most cases the actors will have started becoming accustomed to their costumes and to the settings long before this, especially if the costumes are awkward and unfamiliar, or if the action requires tricky entrances or exits. But the dress rehearsal is more than a rehearsal with costumes and setting. It is a run-through of an actual performance, with only the audience missing.

A commercial dress rehearsal is a solemn and expensive affair. It requires the use of a theatre instead of a rehearsal room, and the hiring of a full stage crew. Producer, director, author, scene designer, all sit in the orchestra with their secretaries and notebooks, making their last-minute suggestions for change or improvement. All the details of acting, lighting, dialogue and stage management are subjected to their critical inspection. The action does not stop. An actor may slip up on his lines, a spotlight may pick out the wrong person on the stage. Whatever the mishap, it is noted while the show goes grimly on.

Between acts, the director will visit the actors and try to correct any alarming tendencies he sees. In a noncommercial play, especially, there is a tendency to start off full of energy and then to let down as the performance goes on, since the discipline which the professional has learned in a hard school is lacking. Nothing could be more fatal to a play, for the audience's attention is keenest at the beginning, and needs more and more stimulation from one act to the next. The director must be on the alert for this, and keep the pace and the vitality of the players up to the proper level.

The dress rehearsal almost never runs off smoothly. There is too much tension, and because this is the first complete run-through under conditions simulating those of actual performance, everyone is in a sense playing his role for the first time. Hence it is taken for granted that there will be a fair number of minor flaws. But if something seriously wrong appears, the opening may have to be postponed.

In a commercial production, the first opening may itself be little more than a dress rehearsal. It may take place in New Haven or Philadelphia, or some other traditional tryout city, to test the reactions of audiences and critics. And a short run in these towns may be followed once more by revisions and rehearsals, until all concerned seem on the verge of nervous breakdowns, and the producer tears his hair at the thought of all the money this is costing, money that may never by repaid.

In some ways, commercial play production resembles those children's games in which, at any moment, no matter how far along the action has gone, an unfavorable spin of the arrow may set everything back halfway or even all the way to the beginning. The author may have to look for a new producer, the producer for a new director, the director for new actors.

If these perils have been escaped, if dress rehearsal and tryout have been survived, if a fairly suitable theatre can be hired, the play finally opens before a first-night audience of critics, amateur and professional. Some of those present are there to see the play. Others want the honor of being at a first night, of being a "celebrity" among other celebrities.

The reaction of the first-night audience helps determine the success or failure of the play. Its favor or disapproval affects critics; its word-of-mouth reports lure many playgoers into the theatre or keep them away. But it is usually a completely atypical audience. And it is almost never the audience for which the play was written. Everyone connected with the play knows this, and is under greater strain because of it.

Once the play has opened, the director's work is done. From now on it is the stage manager who sees to it that everything goes on well, while the director wonders what ever led him to direct. His work is difficult, wearing, and nerve-wracking. And he is a favorite target of critics, who often find even more serious mistakes in his direction than in the author's script.

None the less, directing has its rewards, both artistic and financial, especially if the play is successful. And there is not the deadening effect from which the actor suffers, for instance, when he is lucky enough to be in a hit and must repeat the same role night after night for months.

By contrast, the director often feels lucky—until it is time for him to start directing another play.

How to Direct Comedy and Melodrama

GEORGE ABBOTT

As author, director, and producer, George Abbott has long played an important part on the Broadway stage. He has put on a wide variety of productions, from farces like *Three Men On a Horse* and melodramas like *Broadway* (of which he was co-author) to musical comedies like *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (where again he was co-author). To a great number of theatre-goers his name has become synonymous with the skill and smoothness of staging that only our professional theatre—and by no means all of that—is able to supply.

Anything that kills the interest of the audience is his enemy. But few of the people who enjoy his shows realize how he has managed to produce their enjoyment. To most theatre-goers, a George Abbott show is one that is fast and swiftly paced all the way through.

Is the action really so fast? Or is that just an illusion that you create?

G A. Like so many other things in the theatre, it's an illusion. It's caused by a change of pace in the writing and direction. If you just go fast, you create a jumble of sheer noise. Sometimes the illusion of speed is created by cutting the script, so that the scene is trimmed to dimensions that make it seem faster. You make use of contrast, just as a symphony orchestra will play a slow passage and then a fast passage for dramatic effect. If you keep your audience's interest, it will think that the action on the stage is taking place rapidly, although actually the action may be very slow.

Take *Three Men On a Horse,* for instance. In the scene where the gambler played by Sam Levene is excitedly begging Irwin to give him the name of a winning horse, nothing much happens for a time. He simply keeps demanding the name of a horse. But the audience is kept interested and amused—and then, suddenly, a man runs in to announce the winner of a

10. Teddy Hart, William Lynn, Shirley Booth, Horace McMahon and Sam Levene in a scene from Three Men on a Horse, *written by Cecil Holm and George Abbott, and directed by Mr. Abbott.*

Courtesy of George Abbott. Photo by Vandamm

race that's important to the characters. That happens fast, there's a quick laugh, and the audience gets the impression that the entire scene has taken place at a rapid clip. Actually, it hasn't.

Do you believe in plotting every detail of a production beforehand, or do you like to improvise as you go along?

G A. I improvise as I go along. I'm working with actors, not automatons. As they begin to talk and act, I get a picture of what I want to do. When I'm working in a dual capacity, as writer and director, I may very often throw aside my own script directions. The fact and my imagination don't always jibe, and I don't always follow my own visualizations.

Suppose, Mr. Abbott, that you are directing someone else's play?

G A. The same thing can happen. I don't let the stage directions become a straitjacket. If they cramp the play, out they go.

Do you feel that you have had enough experience to know what will please an audience, or do you find that tastes change, so that you still have to depend on tryouts?

G A. Out-of-town tryouts help. Certain moods in the public mind will not accept certain types of plays. Many present-day audiences avoid serious plays, and go to see nonsensical shows. Some productions that wouldn't have lasted more than a week a few years ago are now great hits.

How, in reading a farce, can you tell whether it will be funny on stage—or just silly?

G A. If a farce is to be any good, it has to have character and honesty. When you get a script with just an exaggerated situation, you know it will be silly. In certain kinds of high comedy, even in the highest comedy of a man like Shaw, there's usually an emotional reaction. It has to be there for good comedy.

Do you think that farces are more difficult to stage than other plays?

G A. They're difficult—but no more than other kinds of plays. To me, the hardest thing to do would be fantasy. I try to create reality on stage, and there I'm on sure ground.

The critics write long essays on the difference between farce and comedy, and on humor in general. Do you find that their ideas are of any great help to a director or producer?

G A. They can't give you definite advice on how to put on your play, or they'd be producers instead of critics. But all thoughts on the theatre contribute to our general knowledge and awareness, and the theatre has progressed in many ways through the critics. They're right on an average, although they're prejudiced in some details. And producers pay attention to them, before or after putting on a show. If the criticism comes too late to affect one show, it will affect the next.

Critics have had a part to play, for instance, in the new importance of musicals. Musicals, right now, are the most progressive and vital form of the living theatre. They're making the

most changes, doing the most experimenting. And the critics have had a hand in encouraging them.

Aren't there certain plays, Mr. Abbot, where success is more a matter of writing and direction than of acting ability?

G A. I think that, with a few exceptions, if a play is a good solid play, it will go with almost any capable cast. We sometimes change actors frantically in tryouts. But I feel that when that happens, it's generally the play that isn't right, and it's the script that needs changing more than the actors.

Sometimes appearance is even more important than ability. An actress who plays a beauty-contest winner must look the part. Each producer has his own bent as far as casting goes. I happen to like to experiment with new people, partly because I trust my own judgment, and partly because I remember when I was looking for a job myself.

What, in general, are the pitfalls that youngsters should avoid in acting and staging?

G A. The main pitfall is phoniness. I'd say, try not to pose, do what you really think the character would do. Don't adopt someone else's mannerisms. Don't try to do too much. You have to grow and learn.

I think that no talent goes undiscovered too long. Hometown clippings don't help with me, or with most directors or producers. But if actors can find a producer who'll be impressed by their experience, by all means let them use their clippings. Personally, I see actors when I cast a show, and I judge by the results of their experience, not by the amount of it.

If an actor has dramatic instinct, taste will help him, and will warn him to avoid bad acting styles. I remember, when I was a beginner, getting lessons in ham acting from an old-time stock actor. I just wouldn't learn it. I couldn't have explained why, I didn't have any theoretical reasons for it, but I knew that the style he was trying to teach me was wrong.

The important thing for an actor is to act. He should go into the little theatres, do anything that gets him on the stage. It's only then that he has a chance to get anywhere.

The Kind of Theatre We Have

HAROLD CLURMAN

One of the original directors of the famous Group Theatre, and later its sole director, Harold Clurman has worked and written about the theatre from 1924 on. For the Group Theatre he directed such famous plays as *Awake and Sing* and *Golden Boy*. In recent years he has directed among others *The Member of the Wedding* and *The Time of the Cuckoo*. Almost from the beginning of his career he has been writing articles and reviews which have greatly influenced people of the theater, and he is the author of *The Fervent Years*, the story of the Group Theater.

What would you say are the characteristics of the American theatre? What, for example, about realism and naturalism on our stage?

H C. First of all, from the time O'Neill came on the scene, there has been much more emphasis on naturalism and realism with us than in the English theatre. The English have a tendency to revert back to the models of classic theatre, they tend to fall back on rhetoric and elocution. In this respect, the French are like the English. They too rely on beautiful elocution, on witty speech and clever writing.

Since about 1915, our own theatre has more and more developed in the direction of realism, of mirroring actuality. This tendency has been urged along to a great extent by the influence of the movies, which actually photograph reality. In the old days, when we wanted a fat man on stage, we made one, padding the actor's clothes and puffing out his cheeks. In the movies, when they want a fat man, they cast one, and nowadays we have a tendency to do the same thing in the theatre. This has its bad aspects as well as good. It requires fine art to project the illusion of a fat man when the actor himself is thin, and this art can be lost.

Incidentally, "realism" and "naturalism" are very often used as synonyms. There's a difference. Sound realism tries to

11. Dino DiLuca, José Perez, and Shirley Booth in a scene from The Time of the Cuckoo, *written by Arthur Laurents and directed by Harold Clurman.*

Courtesy of Robert Whitehead Productions. Photo by Vandamm

capture the inner, psychological reality, to create characters whose behavior we recognize as true to life. Naturalism tries to recreate just the outward image of reality. You can get naturalism in a museum of wax dummies. where every character looks lifelike and has not a trace of flesh and blood about him.

The English have more naturalism, in a way, offstage than on. That is, their actors always *look* like actors, whereas ours might be taken for longshoremen, truck drivers, businessmen. The good aspect of our way is that it makes our theatre more expressive of the times we live in, it brings us closer to reality when the actors go on stage.

We no longer have so much of the Belasco type of natural-

ism in our scenery. In its day realism brought something vital in our acting. Now, though, there are people who are rebelling, who would like more of theatrical artificiality back.

How about pace, Mr. Clurman? Do you think that high speed is part of our American theatre tradition?

H C. Yes, American plays are paced much faster than English or French. The way plays are staged and cut makes them move more rapidly. In France, as in England, the audiences don't mind long conversations. Here audiences are bored with talk unless there's violent stage action to go along with it.

We exaggerate the need for speed. It's as if the only things we understand are nervously paced. This is a fault, because often we miss the nuances, the fine artistic points.

You can't dissociate the subject matter from the tempo. The feeling of a play, the inner rhythm, should set the pace. *Desire Under the Elms* has a tempo suited to its feeling. To speed it up would destroy it. All this business of speed is silly. Anyone can make a play go fast by simply telling the actors to talk fast, move fast.

On the question of the feeling of different plays, Mr. Clurman: Do you think that the style of our theatre can be sharply separated from the plays it deals with?

H C. No, they go very much together. This is so much the case that when we do Shakespeare, whose approach to life was so different from our own, we're at a loss as to how to tackle him, and we fall back on English-inspired productions. Our American actors aren't trained to do Shakespeare, they haven't the English traditions, social, national, or dramatic. As a result, they feel uncomfortable and try to imitate the English style.

Would you say then that the American theatre has a single distinctive style of its own—or does it have many styles?

H C. It doesn't have enough different styles, it lacks variety. We have a musical-comedy style, and a non-musical style. All our styles tend to come back to one, to realism. The minute you get away from a straight story, our audiences tend to become

bewildered. Wilder's *Skin of Our Teeth,* for instance, which had a fantastic quality, threw them. In *Death of a Salesman,* however, both the dream and life sequences were presented in a purely literal, realistic way, and the audiences had no difficulty in following the transitions.

There are many more styles in the theatre than you can see in a Broadway season. We don't often see eighteenth-century comedies like those of Congreve because the style is too artificial for us. We can't do Strindberg's *Spook Sonata* because that has to be done in an expressionist way, and expressionism has had little influence on our stage. It was never very strong here. It made possible some fantastic scenes, but created no deep impression. Pirandello was likewise never too successful here, because he can't be played realistically either. And yet, all these styles should be attempted. They are all part of our dramatic culture.

We don't even try to experiment with new styles. I'm not committing myself for Cocteau, but he does represent a modern style, and it's valid to do that type of play. But we don't do it because we want everything to be uniform. That isn't a sign of health in either the theatre or the audience.

Are there any single plays whose style and direction have greatly influenced the American stage?

H C. Yes. *Broadway* and *The Front Page* both made a great impression in the 'twenties. Their hard-hitting speed and realism had great influence. Recently, *The Member of the Wedding* has made people realize that a play needn't have speed if it has mood and character.

Do you think our theatre is as near dying as some people feel, Mr. Clurman? Or does it seem to you to have enough vigor to stay alive for a while?

H C. It is vigorous in so far as we have a number of playwrights who are writing serious plays. Clifford Odets, Tennesee Williams, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, William Inge, and Arthur Laurents as a group represent an attempt to mirror American life. In this sense we're more vigorous than England, which since Shaw's death has only Christopher Fry. The French have

produced no playwrights who interest us except Giraudoux, Sartre, and Anouilh. And the latter isn't liked here. His basic feeling is a bitter one, and both his American-produced plays were failures.

But we don't have a permanent company, or a national theatre, or a theatre devoted to classics. There is less variety in the American theatre, there is less production in general. France has twice as many theatres as we do, always operating. England and Germany have very important theatres in the provinces. Our road is weak and almost completely dependent on Broadway.

Another weakness of ours is that our actors don't get enough of a chance to play in the theatre. They have to get jobs in the movies, radio, and television, so that very few have a chance to develop as interestingly as actors should.

We hear a great many complaints, Mr. Clurman, that few good plays are being written. What do you think stops them from being written? Is it lack of talent, fear of censorship?

H C. It isn't true that no good plays are being written. Several good plays are produced each season. What many people really complain about is that not enough plays are sure to make money. We exhaust our playwrights. We don't give them the time or opportunity to grow. We insist that all plays be successes or masterpieces.

Then, we don't supplement new plays by old plays. Museums are full of "old" art, orchestras play Mozart symphonies as well as the newest compositions. We enjoy and understand them more with each experience. Plays are also works of art that should be produced again and again. European theatres insist on old plays. In England, John Gielgud has done only one or two new plays in ten years, and can depend successfully on putting on old ones.

Our playwrights work under still another handicap. There's a kind of censorship that affects them not only politically, but with regard to style, social standards as shown in the moral behavior of the characters, method of dramatic approach. Because it was different, *The Member of the Wedding* had difficulty in finding first a producer and then a theatre. Now

12. Brandon de Wilde, Ethel Waters, and Julie Harris in a scene from A Member of the Wedding, *written by Carson McCullers and directed by Harold Clurman.*

Courtesy of Robert Whitehead Productions. Photo by Alfredo Valente

producers ask for another play that will be sure-fire like *Member.*

Do you feel that just as Broadway producers type-cast actors, they also tend to choose directors according to type?

HC. Unfortunately, they do. Producers judge a director on the basis of the plays that he has already done, and they want him to work in a standard way. After *Awake and Sing* I was asked to do only plays with a New York setting. I had a hard time

escaping. I'd like to do any form of play—a poetic play, a musical comedy, anything I thought was good.

How do you think your own methods of direction differ from those of other directors in the American theatre, Mr. Clurman?

H C. It's hard for me to say. I always try to direct according to the content of the play. Therefore the direction must have variety. Some directors have a tendency to do everything the same way, whether they're doing a serious drama or musical comedy.

What about your own personal experience, Mr. Clurman? Do you think your being an actor was an advantage?

H C. It's useful to be an actor, but it isn't essential. What is essential is to live backstage. There's no such thing as becoming just a director. You have to go through activity in the theatre. You have to experience some aspect of theatre life such as stage managing, designing, producing, etc. I have taught directors through work in the Group. The Group, incidentally, immersed its members in backstage life, and with all its weaknesses was one of the greatest influences on the American theatre. It had an enormous effect, and developed outstanding talent of many kinds.

To anyone who wants to become a director, I'd say that the best way is to get a job in the theatre and watch directors at work. See a play not once, for enjoyment, but many times, to study it. Work in a community, get small parts as an actor, and read and think over everything that's been written on the subject.

How to Cast a Play

MARGARET WEBSTER

In both England and the United States, Margaret Webster has directed plays of the great dramatists of the English stage, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Othello, The Tempest,* and *Richard II,* to Shaw's *Saint Joan.* She has also directed modern plays, and has staged such operas for the Metropolitan Opera Company as Verdi's *Don Carlo* and *Aida.* A fine actress herself, she is always interested in discovering talent that is still unrecognized. When we interviewed her, she had just finished auditioning several actors, not for any specific play, but for the purpose of discovering people she might cast in later productions.

Miss Webster, how does one become a director?

M W. (throwing up her hands): I could speak for hours about that—and you want a one-minute answer!

Well, you become a director by learning to do everything. You should have some acting experience. You needn't be a great actor, but you must know what an actor has to do. You must know how to tackle all problems, from high finance and diplomacy to the proverbial "sweeping the stage." You must be prepared to do anything and everything in the theatre. Stage managing, prompting, everything.

Once you consider yourself a director, you have to convince a producer that you are one. That isn't so easy. There is no short cut to getting a job. Many directors graduate from the stage management field, and from writing their own plays—or producing them.

Does a director attempt all types of plays, or stick to one form?

M W. That depends on the individual. Most directors handle better those plays for which they not only have sympathy, but with whose background material they have some familiarity and

Courtesy of New York City Theatre Company. Photo by Halsman

13. Maurice Evans (front), Marsha Hunt (center rear), and members of the supporting cast in a scene from George Bernard Shaw's The Devil's Disciple, in production directed by Margaret Webster.

personal experience. Their imagination is more active with such plays. Other directors take a less subjective attitude, they tackle anything that comes their way.

How can young people put on Shakespeare, Shaw, and Ibsen so that the plays seem to be alive, and not museum pieces?

M W. By making the plays come alive for themselves first. By studying not only the plays, but the period in which they were written, the life of the people. By treating the characters as human beings.

When you direct a play, and plan the action, do you know just how the stage will be set?

M W. In almost every detail. I plan the action very carefully beforehand. It is absolutely essential for the director to work very closely with the designer from the beginning.

How do you select actors? By reputation, or by experience?

M W. All the people concerned in the play—author, producer, director, and so on—make up a list of actors. Generally, casting agents are consulted. Usually we have a good idea of whom we want in the leading roles. Sometimes we get recommendations, or we know the personal quality of the actor. We attend off-Broadway performances to look for actors. The Theatre Guild has a casting director and several scouts. But generally a number of auditions and/or interviews are held for the smaller parts. In most cases, a director will not audition actors except for a specific play. In this respect, my auditions of a few moments ago were exceptions to the rule, for they were in response to letters or recommendations I had received and had no special purpose.

Acting is a heartbreaking profession, and there is not nearly enough employment. In fact, anyone who wants to go into the professional theatre in any capacity had better think twice about it. I believe that no brilliant talent really gets blocked. But I also believe that a great deal of run-of-the-mill talent is completely lost in the shuffle.

How can you tell talent in an actor?

M W. When you go to the theatre, how do you explain why you like a performance? There's no easy way to tell. After a while, with experience, you develop a sixth sense about acting, and you can judge quickly whether an actor has the personal quality necessary for a part and is also able to project it to an audience. The latter qualification is harder to judge under the quite different and special conditions of a reading or audition.

Can you tell much from the way an actor reads a script?

M W. Sometimes. But often a man or woman who reads well can't go much further than this first impression, and at times a bad reader turns out to be the more sensitive.

Miss Webster, do you think that British young people are more actively interested in the living theatre than American youngsters?

M W. As audiences, yes. As participants, no.

To get back to that high finance that a director must know about. Are directors well paid? And is it on a fee or a royalty basis?

M W. Pay varies, depending on the individual, and a director is usually paid both a fee and a royalty. But don't get illusions about directing being a road to riches. The directing field is not as crowded as the acting field, but it is unusual for a young director to get a Broadway assignment.

If Broadway assignments are hard to get, do you think that more directors should go out of town and help high-school and college theatres put on plays?

M W. I myself used to direct amateur and school or college groups. That is one way in which a person with capacity can learn a great deal, and there is a definite value in the exchange of experience between professionals and non-professionals.

But once a director has attained experience, he wants to direct and get the best result in terms of standard. And you see the highest standards, necessarily, with professional actors, who have spent their lives learning their craft.

From the amateur's point of view, isn't it a good idea to have at least one professional on the staff?

M W. Yes, the professional has breadth of knowledge, he is accustomed to higher standards. When no one knows anything—and sometimes that's the case in the amateur theatre—no one learns anything. Amateurs should have help from someone who has had experience in the theatre, whether as actor or director, from someone who has objective judgement. High-school students, for instance, may be told by their friends and relatives that they're wonderful actors, that they should be on Broadway, and so on. These opinions may be slightly biased.

Before getting delusions of grandeur, the students, for their own good, had better get some objective criticism from an honest professional.

Community theatres face many dangers. One of the first is that they're not clear what they want. What are their aims—to develop new writing talent, or acting talent? To make a contribution to society? Or simply to have fun? If the first, then they should concentrate on new plays. If the second, then they'll work mostly with well-established plays. It's easier to give good performances in such plays. It isn't easy for an amateur to create a new role in an untested play. The third may lead to professionalism in the end, the fourth is an end in itself.

Another danger facing community theatres is that they sometimes tend to think that they are perfect, that the commercial theatre has nothing to offer.

Can the commercial theatre do anything to correct this delusion? Can it help young theatre people in general?

M W. It can, by getting good productions to their communities. That isn't easy. The expense and difficulty of taking the theatre off the beaten track of the biggest cities make touring a tremendous risk. The theatre has to evolve new methods of getting back to the road. But this is also a two-way process. The public has to demand good plays, and be willing to support them by securing advance subscriptions, including low-cost student subscriptions.

There are endless problems involved. And you can take everything I've said as no more than an indication of their nature. To explore any aspect of the subject thoroughly, I would have to pre-empt your entire book.

THE SCENE AND COSTUME DESIGNER

Is THE SCENE DESIGNER necessary in the theatre?

There are people who think he isn't. Some individuals claim that more plays have been hurt by scenery than have been helped by it. They point to the ancient Greek theatre, which started with only an altar of Dionysus and never had very much scenery, and yet was one of the world's greatest theatres. They refer you to Shakespeare's apron stage, where the actors were often without benefit of scenery altogether (although they did wear elaborate costumes, and there *was* always scenery on the inner stages), the place of action being announced by a mere sign.

These arguments convince few people. A producer who is desperately trying to cut costs never eliminates scenery and costumes. When a play is done on a bare stage or in modern dress it is chiefly for experimental reasons, and not to reduce expenses. And the very people who talk with regret of the theatres of the past do not suggest that we stage all our plays with masks, as the Greeks did, or tear a hole in the roof to let the rain come in, as it did on Shakespeare's audiences.

Scenery has a very important part to play in the modern theatre, not only to create illusion in the spectators, but for an additional purpose. You must remember that the task of creating illusion belongs chiefly to the actors. It is they who convince an audience that the play takes place in a Siamese palace, or a London drawing room, or a tropical jungle. Unless they are skilled enough to do so, the audience will keep remembering that the supposed palace or jungle is nothing more than painted canvas on the lighted stage of a darkened theatre. But in order that the actors may convince the audience—who will first convince the actors?

That is one purpose of the scenery and costumes, and, according to Stanislavsky, the main purpose (although few designers would agree with him). An actor with sufficient genius may be able, by the power of his unaided imagination, to transform himself into any character, anywhere, without

scenery or special costume. But a more ordinary actor needs some help. We may say, inverting Shakespeare, that all the stage is a world. The actor cannot entirely believe it is the world in which he is a Danish prince or an English farmer or an American sailor unless it looks and feels the part.

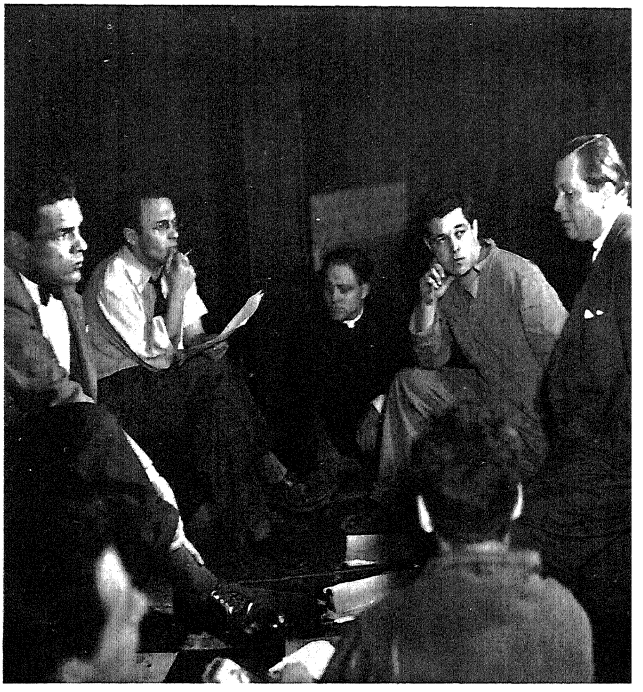
The more removed the setting is from the ordinary life of actors and audience, the greater the need for imaginative scenery. To create the illusion of a business office, all you need is a desk, a couple of chairs, and a few telephones. To create the appearance of a modern factory, you need a lathe or two, or the suggestion of an assembly line. But to build the palace of a king of Siam, the imagination of actors and audience requires considerable help. So, for that matter, does the imagination of the scene designer, who must do a great deal of research to learn what a Siamese palace actually looked like.

The scene designer first reads and studies the play. He must decide what action and what moods he wants to emphasize with his scenery. All designers know how to create striking effects, how to make audiences gasp. But a striking effect must not be obtained at the expense of the actors and the play itself. Actors and audience must be influenced by the set and then accept it without being continually disturbed by it, any more than you are continually distracted by the furnishings of your own home. The set exists for the sake of the play, and not the other way around.

How does the designer create environment, or "flavor," or whatever he seeks?

First, he must decide what the playwright's purpose is in each case. His decision will depend on his ideas concerning the theatre in general and the given play in particular. If the play is *Romeo and Juliet,* for instance, one American designer might be most impressed by the tragedy caused by love; another might see chiefly the power of hate to corrupt the lives of innocent victims; while a Soviet designer might see the characters in the grip of vast social forces they do not understand. If Shakespeare were alive, he might disagree with all of them. But, as Shakespeare is dead, he needn't be consulted.

The director, however, *must* be consulted, and so must an author who is present and living. If the playwright's purpose



14. Stage designer Jo Mielziner (right), director Alan Schneider (second from left), members of the faculty, and students discuss set for a new play at Catholic University.

Courtesy of Catholic University

is systematically altered, the result may not be what he intended, but it may still be interesting and moving (think of the production of *Julius Caesar* in modern dress, for instance). If, however, designer, director, and author all move in different directions, the play will not merely be distorted, it will be wrecked.

Having decided what he must emphasize, the designer will sketch the different settings roughly, in black and white. He may note what objects should be in the set, and what colors and lighting effects he will want.

This too, of course, will be done in consultation with the director, as well as with the producer and possibly the author. If there is agreement on the nature of the settings, the designer will carry out the necessary research in museums and books, and wherever else he finds it convenient, and make detailed scale drawings and ground plans. He may construct a tiny model of the most important or complicated set, and the director may run through the play within the model, possibly using doll characters that can be moved about by hand.

If the drawing and model are satisfactory, the designer will now make water-color sketches. If there is time, most designers will also do the costumes and the lighting as well as the sets, in order to insure that costumes and sets work together to achieve the desired result. If the sets themselves take up too much of his time, the designing of the costumes may be assigned to others.

The actual scenery will be created from the working drawings and model, and then painted in the manner shown by the water colors. But before paints are applied or fabrics used, they must be tested under the various lights to which the sets will be subjected. Paints and fabrics sometimes change color under lights of different kinds as unexpectedly as if they were experiencing human emotions.

The designer will carefully supervise the actual creation by carpenters and painters of the sets he has sketched, and will then plot the lighting. By this time, the actors are far along in their rehearsals. It would be desirable for the designer to see the actors in contact with his scenery, to decide once more whether his work is satisfactory and to alter it if it is not. If he works for the off-Broadway stage, he may be able to do so. But on Broadway it is by now usually too late. Whether the sets are appropriate or not, the production is stuck with them.

At most, the designer may make minor changes. Usually he will be able to make drastic—and expensive—alterations only if there have been radical revisions of the script. And this will be the case only if producer and director have decided that the situation is desperate and that the expense of a new setting is inevitable.

So much, then, for the technical process of designing. But there are many artistic problems to the choice of design, and these influence the technical methods all along.

Suppose you are designing for a community theatre. Only rarely will you have at your disposal either the money or the trained professional workers of the commercial producer. Hence you will be forced to simplify as much as possible.

Some community theatres substitute drapes for setting. Drapes are simple, inexpensive, and as conventional as the screens of the Chinese theatre. They have a neutral effect; they do not destory illusion, as a bare stage does, but, on the other hand, neither do they create it, as a setting does.

Thus, a company acting before drapes starts off under a definite handicap. If the play is not too difficult and the actors not too unskilled, however, drapes may suffice for an enjoyable production.

If you are dissatisfied with drapes, you may try to introduce simple, symbolic scenery. The effectiveness of such scenery will depend greatly on the mood of the play. If the play is modern and realistic, the setting had better be fairly realistic too. But if the play is poetic, or the time and place of action are far removed from our own—ancient Greece, for example—the unfamiliar costumes will themselves suggest the scene, and the illusion will be strengthened by a simple set which portrays an altar to one of the gods, the throne of a king, and so on.

However, such settings depend greatly for their mood on the lighting, and the effort that can be saved in the construction of drops and flats must be made up for by great skill and artistry in the use of a complicated lighting system. And many community groups have only the simplest lights.

If your community theatre has painters and carpenters who can create more elaborate sets, you can get a closer approach to realism. No community group aims any longer at the Belasco type of naturalism, in which the stage is cluttered up with a complete replica of a farmhouse, ship, etc. You select those portions of the actual scene that you need, and you modify them for stage purposes.

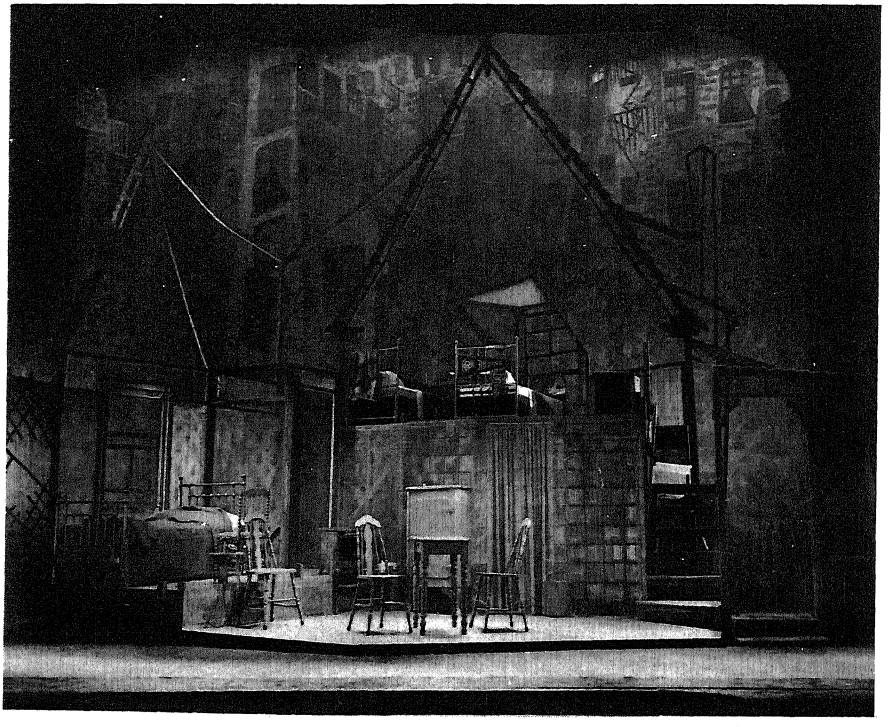
You don't use actual wallpaper, for instance—the spectators are too far away, and the details of the design will be lost to them. Instead you paint your flats with an enlarged design to give the effect of wallpaper. You don't show a kitchen with all the pots and pans, all the boxes and containers of food, that a real kitchen would have. You show only as many as are needed to convince the audience that the scene is a kitchen. You simplify, both to make your work of set construction easier, and to keep from drowning your scenes with unnecessary detail.

If the production is to be stylized, you not only simplify most of the details, but you exaggerate some feature of the set. Here, however, you must be warned that you are playing with fire. Exaggerate the size of a spider web in a corner, use dim lights, and you may convey a mood of gloom and neglect

—and also, without intending to, an impression of artiness and absurdity. Scatter large frisking lambs over your walls, toss a huge Teddy bear into the center of a rug, and you make it clear—perhaps painfully so—that the scene is a happy nursery.

Stylization and "expressionism" have, in the views of many professionals, been among the more distressing ailments which have afflicted American amateur and community theatres. They seem so easy, their effects are so simple to produce! Build a crooked door or window, have your chimneys and lamp posts leaning at odd angles—and presto, you have "poetry" and "art" in your production!

It usually doesn't work out quite that way. Nevertheless, if you are putting on an expressionist play (and there are a few such plays that *do* retain their interest), a realistic setting is out of place. You will have to risk the pitfalls of expressionist design.



Courtesy of Kermit Bloomgarden. Photo by Eileen Darby, Graphic House

***15. Stage set designed by Jo Mielziner for Arthur Miller's* Death of a Salesman.**

Remember, then, that the exaggeration of some features implies the complete neglect of others, so that in this case too you can often simplify set-building. But, again, any simplification of the work of carpenters and painters must be made up for by great skill in designing what set there is, and by careful handling of the lights. You must have an eye for the contrast of light and dark, of one color with another, of one shape with another. You must remember that you are designing for the actors, and that no scene is complete without them. And, once more, you must never forget that one lapse of taste, one exaggeration of the wrong kind, may make your entire production ridiculous.

If you want to design for the stage, you have good reason to study architecture. The designers are the architects, as Lee Simonson has called them, of stage space. A century ago, designers were scene painters. The stage setting consisted of flats, and the living actors, along with their own flickering shadows and the shadows of the furniture, mingled with the painted people and the fixed shadows on the flats. In those days, an actor would pretend to lean for support on the painted pillar of a building. Nowadays, audiences would laugh at such a sight, and anything the actor is to lean on must be solid and three-dimensional.

With the extension of scene designing into three dimensions, lighting took on a new importance. The art of lighting began when theatres were moved indoors and performances were given at night. Gradually, designers learned how to heighten the effect of their settings by centering all the lights on the stage, leaving the audience in relative darkness. During the past half-century, the art of lighting has grown tremendously. On some stages, as in theatre-in-the-round, light serves as the curtain which separates actors and audience. It begins and ends scenes. It changes the entire effect of scenery and costumes from one moment to another.

Many different kinds of lights are now used—footlights, which illuminate the actors from below; border lights, from the side and from above; focusing spotlights, which direct sharp beams; and soft-focus spotlights, which cast a directed but more diffused light. The art of proper manipulation of lights cannot be learned offhand, and in a community theatre any amateur in charge of lighting had better do a great deal

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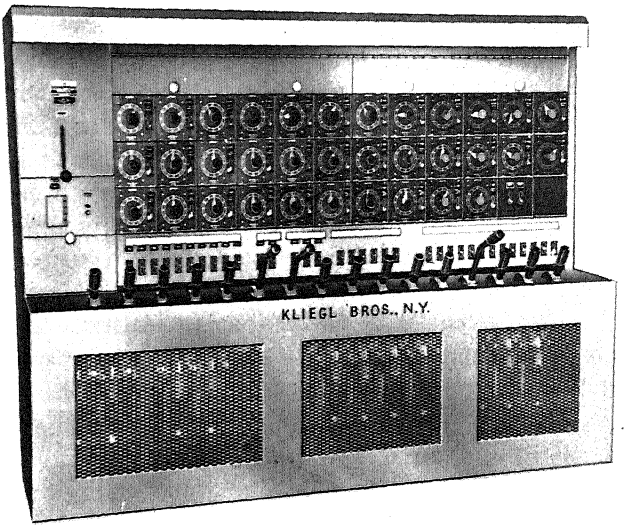
CONNECTOR STRIP

No. 610
BORDERLIGHT

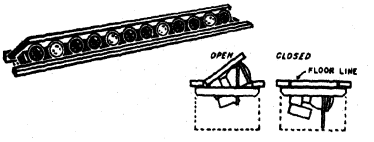


16. A lighting board of the type used in some high schools.

Courtesy of Kliegl Bros. Lighting

of experimenting before settling on the final lighting scheme for any play.

The center of illumination must be the actors. Thus, most stages need to be lighted at the bottom (where the set forms a background for those characters who do not fly or mount stairways, etc.) and the center, toward which the actors tend to gravitate. A long finger of light pointing downward gives the effect of depth, while a horizontal shaft, which leaves the space above it dark and mysterious, may emphasize the smallness and loneliness of the setting. The pattern of light may change sharply as there is a sharp change in the mood of the



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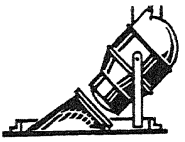
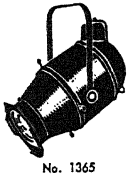
FOOTLIGHT

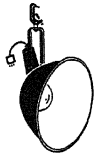


No. 2165
ANGULAR DOWNLIGHT

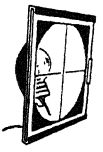
No 43N6
FRESNEL SPOTLIGHT



No. 1365
KLIEGLIGHT



No. 1155
FLOODLIGHT



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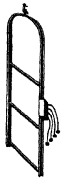
FLOODLIGHT.



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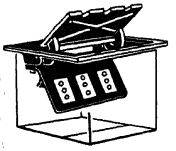
KLIEGLADDER



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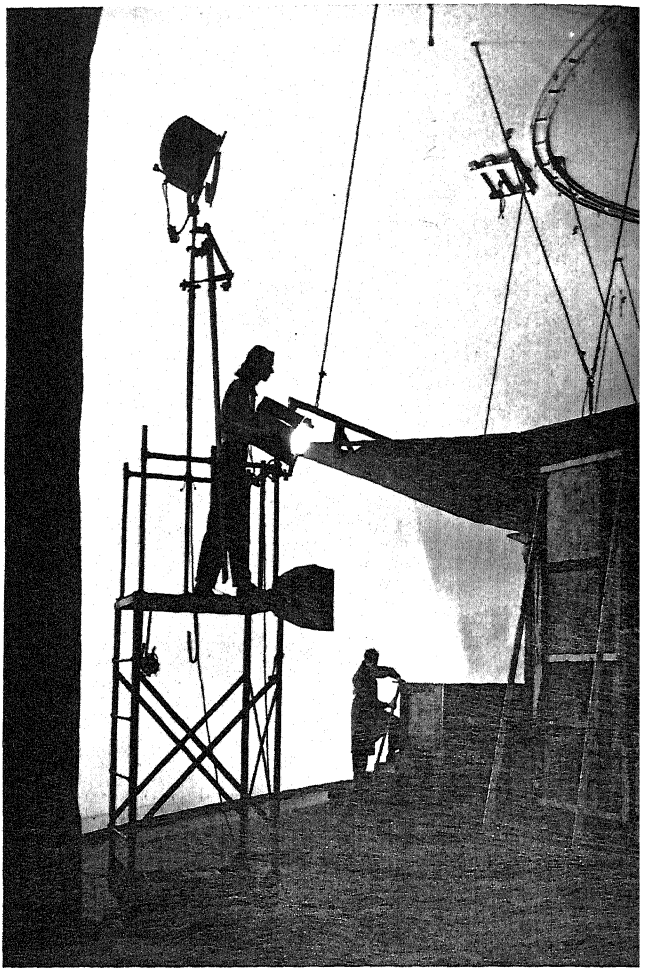
play; or it may alter so slowly and imperceptibly that the audience doesn't realize it is changing at all and thus helping the tension to mount toward a climax.

The scene designer may use lights to solve the problems posed by exteriors, which are usually more troublesome than interior sets. The attempt to create the illusion of distance by the use of perspective has always run into difficulties. For one thing, perspective that is correct from a seat in the front of the orchestra may be seriously distorted from a seat in a balcony. It is usually safer to rely on *atmospheric perspective*, which creates the effect of distance by the increased blurring of details. As we recede into the background, the lighting becomes dimmer, and at a certain point a gauze drop still further conceals the details of the scene.

Along with a knowledge of lighting must go a knowledge of how to paint sets. In stage scenery, every type of material—wood, steel, concrete, brick—is simulated with paint. But the paint must not only give the appearance of the genuine material. If it covers a large and prominent area it must create an interesting surface in its own right. Thus, a red background, for instance, is never painted a single shade of red, for this would look dull and drab, and it would seem to lose intensity as the light altered. (The nature of the light *always* varies slightly, due to such causes as fluctuations of the line voltage, aging of lamps, etc.) Instead, the flats are painted with many washes of red which differ from one another in shade and value, or different colors are stippled in against the red background. This gives the effect of a rich texture which does not lose its effect as the light varies.

One thing that every designer must take into account is the size of the stage on which the play is to be given. No two commercial theatres are built to the same dimensions. And a designer for a community theatre, which must often rely on whatever stage it can find in auditoriums or high schools, is in an even worse fix than the commercial designer. The stage may be far too small, and there may be practically no space for the storage of scenery. This is the more common

17. Various types of stage lights that can be used in school productions. See also top and bottom of page 92.



18. Lighting a stage set.

Courtesy of Goodman Memorial Theatre

case, and when you are faced with a situation of this sort you have no choice but to simplify your scenery to the limit, cut down the size of your borders, and try by every means possible, including type of design and method of lighting, to give the illusion of more space than you have.

Once in a while, however, you will have a stage that is too big, one that dwarfs your players and makes them look lost. Here, of course, you try to give the illusion that your stage isn't so big after all. But you have, in addition, another choice. On a large stage you can arrange several sets, and you can shunt the action from one to another, as was done on the

Elizabethan stage, without any delay for scene shifting. The trick again lies in skill and simplicity of design, and in the effective use of lighting.

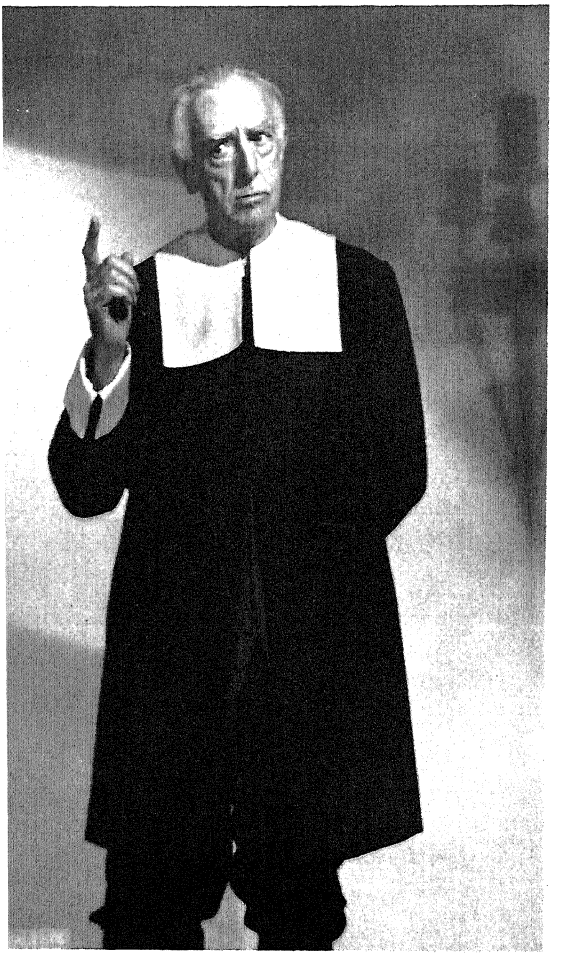
Not only the stage, but the orchestra and the balconies, must be taken into account. Half your effects will be wasted if the audience at the sides of the theatre or in the balconies cannot see a good part of the sets. Before settling on your final design, consider the sight lines from every part of the theatre.

As a designer for a noncommercial theatre you may have to depend on amateur stage hands. That is another reason for keeping your scenery simple and the flats small. On the other hand, if you design a single set that can be left permanently on stage, you won't have to worry about limiting the width of your flats to five feet nine, which is the maximum that will permit the flat to be loaded conveniently on a box car for touring.

When it comes to costumes, you must have a considerable knowledge of the fabrics that can be used to imitate the clothes of different periods. The most important thing about stage clothing is that it helps create the role of the actor. For this purpose, less depends on the color pattern (although this must be effective and must either harmonize or contrast properly with the scenery) than on the manner in which a garment drapes the figure. It is this, more than any other aspect of a costume, that gives both the actor and the audience the feeling of a character. A costume must not be so awkward as to prevent the person wearing it from moving properly. On the other hand, discomfort may be a part of the effect you want.

For instance, the ruff that a dandy wore in Shakespeare's day will choke a modern actor almost to death; but it will also force him to keep his head up and impose the proper dandyish manner upon him, just as a whalebone corset will give the proper feeling of old-fashioned artificiality and imprisonment to an actress accustomed to the greater freedom of modern clothes.

You see that although the scene and costume designer must start from the loftiest considerations of the meaning of drama, and of the proper use of light and space, none of his intentions can be realized without an intimate and thorough knowledge of a great number of practical details—the nature



19. Walter Hampden in costume for The Crucible.

Courtesy of Kermit Bloomgarden. Photo by Alfredo Valente

of flats, which are bolted to the floor, and of drops, which hang down from near the ceiling–the functions of different kinds of lights, paints and fabrics, and so on. The designer must be continually immersed in what seem like trifles, without forgetting the larger purpose of what he is doing–that he is working with inanimate materials to create a world for living actors.

Perhaps something of what he has to do can be made clearer by presenting at this point interviews with Howard Bay and Mordecai Gorelik, two designers who are among the most respected in the American theatre.

What Every Young Designer Should Know

HOWARD BAY

If you follow the reviews of Broadway plays, you have proabably come across the name of Howard Bay over so long a period that you think he is one of the older generation of stage designers. He is nothing of the kind. Although he has been active in the theatre for years, he is still one of its younger artists. We interviewed him immediately after the final rehearsal of *Two on the Aisle,* with frequent interruptions because of the need to make last-minute corrections and changes in the sets.

What do you have to know to become a scene designer?

H B. Standard art training is essential. However, that isn't even the minimum. You'll have to study the architecture of different periods, so that no matter where and when the scenes of your play are laid, you'll be capable of designing appropriate scenery. But you'll have to know more than just the architecture of a given period. Haunt the museums, read books, find out how the people lived. Learn enough so that, if necessary, you'll be able to stage Shakespeare as he was staged in Elizabethan England.

Then as a stage designer you must do considerable research?

H B. Yes—and, most important of all, you must never stop doing it. Not just in museums, but in the day-to-day living habits of the people of your own times. Develop a third eye which automatically retains all impressions of how different people live, how they dress, how they furnish their homes. Sooner or later, the most unexpected bits of information may turn out to be useful.

But primarily you must be an artist?

H B. An artist and a craftsman both. And you must know something about science. About paints, for instance. Scenic painting is a highly skilled art, with many differences from easel painting. So far as I know, there is no school that teaches it, and it can be learned only in the studios where the work is done.

You'll have to know something about electricity, in order to be able to handle the lighting of your sets. Some productions have special lighting experts, and some of these, like Jean Rosenthal of the New York City Center, are fine artists. But you shouldn't have to rely upon anyone else. In general, you're responsible for lighting the play whose sets you have designed. You must know how to handle a switchboard, and how to handle lighting effects so as to get the exact result that you want.

It doesn't sound easy. Are all scenic designers so capable?

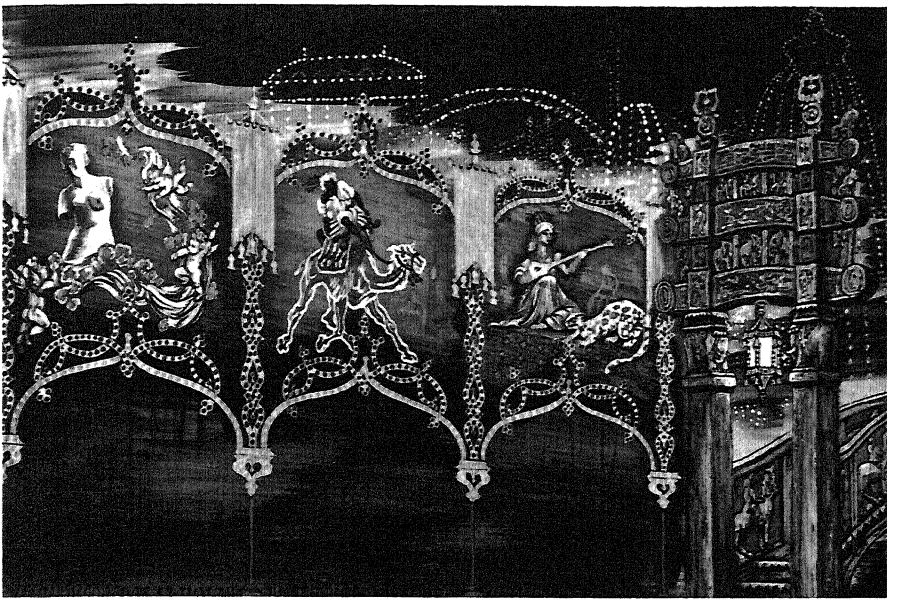
H B. Of course, not all are on the same level, but there are really no incompetent scenic designers in the professional theater. We—the Scenic Designers Union—take care of that. Membership is open to everybody who can pass the qualifications and pay the initiation fee. But those qualifications are set deliberately high. An actor can get by for a time on looks or personality, a producer on the ability to raise money. But scenic designers must know their business from the start.

Is it worth knowing from the financial point of view?

H B. It is, these days. Television has meant considerable work for scenic artists.

Designing for television must usually be more like designing for a musical comedy or revue than for a nonmusical drama. Are these sets more difficult to handle?

H B. Sometimes. The revues are much more difficult to design than musical comedies. There is greater stylistic latitude in musicals. They have a book which provides a certain unity of conception from one scene to the next. But revues lack this



Courtesy of Theatre Arts Magazine. *Photo by Walter Rosenblum*

20. *Stage design by Howard Bay for a scene in the 1946 revival of* Show Boat, *by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II.*

Courtesy of Theatre Arts Magazine. *Photo by Vandamm*

21. *Stage set by Howard Bay for* Come Back, Little Sheba, *by William Inge.*

unity. You finish one revue scene, and you begin the next from scratch.

What about designing for school and community theatres? Where can you learn that?

H B. Partly in the theatres themselves. These theatres don't face exactly the same problems we face on Broadway. And with all their disadvantages, they have the one great advantage that their labor, being voluntary, doesn't shoot expenses up too high. The materials, lumber and so on, are relatively inexpensive.

Remember too that the noncommercial theatres are at least to some extent experimental theatres, and their scenic artists must experiment too. They have no need for elaborate sets. They can paint scenery on a simpler scale, and while painting they can learn.

Don't universities with theatre departments have professors who can teach scene designing?

H B. If there are professors who have worked as scenic designers themselves, fine. Unfortunately, there aren't many.

Then you have a low opinion of university and other non-Broadway theatres?

H B. Oh, no. Not in general. I have a low opinion of them when they're not as good as they should be—when they try to ape Broadway, instead of striking out for themselves, and succeed only in aping its weaknesses and not its strength.

I think that's the big danger that these theatres face—imitating other theatres. And for their scene designers, here's one special form of this danger I'd like to warn against—"artiness." The theatre is an art, yes, and scene designing is a part of that art, but don't try to imitate "arty" settings. I've seen a bad imitation ruin an entire production.

On Broadway, we've had productions ruined by bad writing, bad acting, bad directing, bad producing—but not so often, I'm happy to say, by bad scene designing.

The Designer As Creative Artist

MORDECAI GORELIK

Mordecai Gorelik designed the scenery for such plays as *Processional, Men in White, Golden Boy,* and *All My Sons,* and for such movies as *None But the Lonely Heart* and *Give Us This Day.* Author of the book *New Theatres for Old,* and of the article on Theatre in the *Encyclopedia Americana,* he has been a Fellow of both the Guggenheim and the Rockefeller Foundations, and was sent to Europe by the National Theatre Conference to study the conditions of the theatre abroad.

What is the best way to learn stage designing?

M G. The American universities give good courses in stagecraft. But we underestimate what theory means in relation to practice. I had an example of this when I taught design to G.I.'s at the American University at Biarritz. I talked to them about dramatic metaphor—the poetic relationship of the setting to the theme. But too many were interested only in knowing how to get stage effects.

We Americans are pragmatic, we want to get things done —but we sometimes forget that things can't be done right unless we understand the theory as well as the practice of what we're doing.

Can you show how that applies in designing a set?

M G. If I were running a class, the first thing I'd ask a student designer is: "What do you contribute to the production?" It isn't enough to contribute atmosphere. A set is made for living actors, and I'd make clear to the students that they can't begin to design until they know what the actors are going to do in relation to the setting.

In other words, you must know the script thoroughly?

M G. More than that. I must direct it in my own mind. The director then works out the action on the basis of my model, about which, of course, we have consulted in advance. The designer's direction is in some ways more complete than the director's direction. The director spends the four weeks of rehearsal making discoveries, and he may end up with a totally different conception from the one he started with, because the four weeks haven't been merely a mechanical unfolding of what he planned. The designer, on the other hand, has to have his conception complete before rehearsals start. In some ways, therefore, he has to be a better guesser than the director.

Courtesy of ANTA

22. *Stage design by Mordecai Gorelik for* Desire Under the Elms, *by Eugene O'Neill.*

Does the director realize that?

M G. Usually. But few others do. I am convinced that not many critics or producers, for example, have any real notion of what the designer is doing for or against the play.

Can a young designer in a community theatre be of value to the production?

M G. More than many people realize. The setting has a subtle influence on the play, and on people's reaction to it. Before a youngter starts to make a drawing, he should ask himself what the play will mean to the audience. He must keep in mind what interesting points the play makes scenically, and what he can contribute to these.

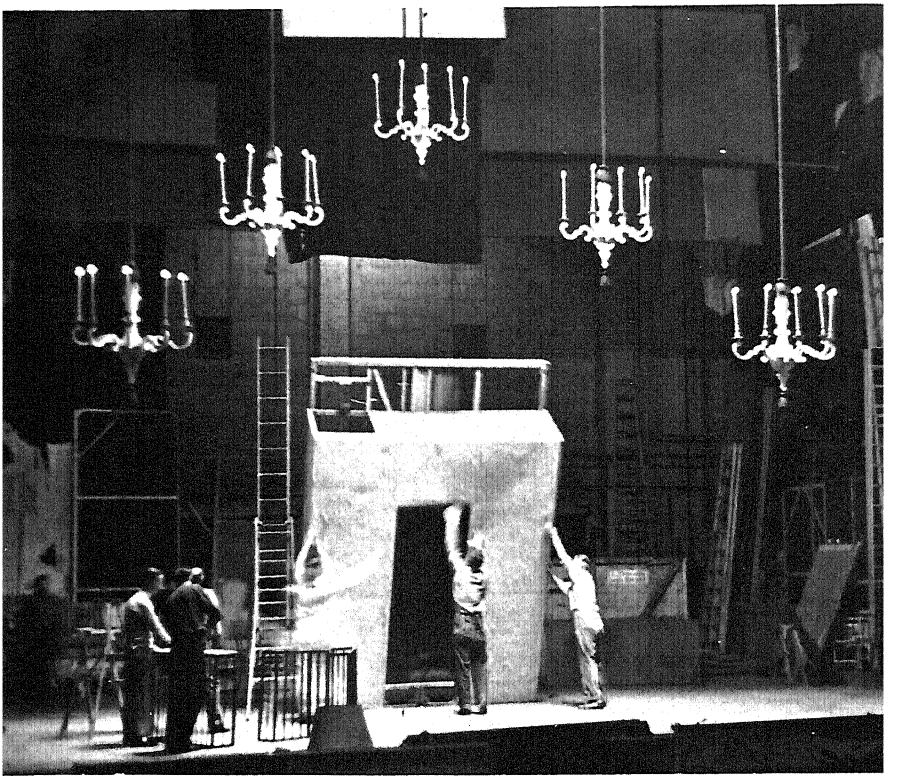
He must remember that a set is environment. It may be a house that people have built, as in *All My Sons*, or a hospital where they work, as in *Men in White*. Environment is something more concrete than "atmosphere." Environment affects the lives of people, and people in turn make their impression on environment.

I like actors to come into contact with the scenery, and I therefore tend to put scenery in the middle of the stage, where the actors can deal with it and feel an immediate relationship to it.

How about designers in Europe, Mr. Gorelik? How do they compare with ours?

M G. Design in Europe is on a high level, and there is a more solid understanding of the designer's contribution. In some ways designers have it easier there because they do not work under such great financial strain as we do here. Here, at every turn, we must think of how to cut costs.

In the 'twenties and 'thirties Europe experimented with different forms of stylized theatre and produced outstanding designers and directors. The technique used by these was known as "theatricalist," because it emphasized the theatrical aspects of the play. Theatricalism was opposed to the "picture-frame" or "fourth-wall" stage; it believed in getting back to



Courtesy of ANTA. Photo by Guy Gillette

23. Setting up the scenery for the American production of L'Ecole des Femmes (School for Wives), by Molière, which was performed by a French company starring Louis Jouvet.

the old platform theatre, as in Shakespeare's day. And it was responsible for many brilliant productions.

But they don't produce in the same way now, do they?

M G. No, the era of brilliant technical experiment seems to have passed. In Western Europe and America we seem to have returned to an attenuated sort of naturalism, except in musical shows, where theatricalism still has great influence. In Eastern Europe—well, here the whole question of ideology is concerned. In 1934 the Soviet theatres adopted a policy which was called "socialist realism" (which, they explained, means that the plays have to be "realistic in technique and socialist in

content"). This means that they expect plays to have a perspective of social, economic, and political explanation. And that applies to design, too: for instance, a setting of the Middle Ages may stress the military basis of feudal architecture.

On the one hand, they are against what they now call "formalism" and "faddism," meaning technical brilliance which shows itself off at the expense of the content of the plays. On the other hand, they object to the naturalism of Antoine and Belasco as producing mere facsimiles, giving no insight into the meaning of environment. I am told that Belasco once reproduced an Automat in its entirety. Audiences gasped in admiration at the lifelike quality of the setting. But his sort of naturalism is objected to by Soviet designers. They call it a kind of snapshot which tells nothing about the Automat as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, their designers look upon environment as being always in process of change—which is the reason, perhaps, why so many designs of the Soviet theatre of the theatricalist period were conspicuously dynamic. But the doctrine of socialist realism is still being fought over in Eastern Europe, and how the whole thing has worked out in practice I don't know. I didn't visit the Soviet theatre on my trip.

But you did see most of the rest of Europe?

M G. I visited nine countries, from Ireland to Poland. Italy has a few good theatres, but, in general, their theatre work is below the level of their best movies. There is very interesting theatre in Berlin and Munich. Both Central and Eastern Europe have decentralized theatres, meaning that there are fine companies outside the large cities. You can get recognition by working in the smaller cities. In Eastern Europe the dramatic companies are well subsidized, and are further aided by national campaigns to organize and increase the size of audiences. Ticket prices are low to start with, and factory workers and students get seventy per cent discounts. Our American theatre, too, needs that kind of support or it will not survive.

Don't we also have playwrights, producers, actors, and de-

signers, who get recognition by working in our smaller cities?

M G. True, but to a lesser extent, and with us Broadway usually remains the goal. However, I think that even in our own country, decentralization has to a large extent already been accomplished. And my impression is that theatre is healthier when it is decentralized. Of course, the quality of theatre varies greatly from one community to another. The National Theatre Conference realizes that there is still much to do here, and that is one reason they sent me abroad, to learn what foreign theatres are doing in the face of problems similar to their own.

And you think that the picture is encouraging?

M G. It is if we take a serious attitude toward the theatre and work hard for it. It begins to look as if Broadway is in for a long period of discouragement, made even more critical by high production costs and the competition of TV. This is the time when the university and community theatres can really take the initiative, if they can show the capacity and courage to do worth-while productions—not merely warmed-over Broadway hits. Production costs are still low in the playhouses scattered all over the United States, and the local designer often has a chance to experiment—something which Broadway can rarely afford today.

THE ACTOR

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW once remarked that from the point of view of the author, acting is the art of making an audience believe that real things are happening to real people. (Occasionally, Shaw might have added, unreal things happening to unreal animals, such as the lion in his *Androcles and the Lion.*) Therefore, the actor's first need is to know how real people feel and behave.

If you had been in a Moscow streetcar some fifty years ago, you might have seen two men engaged in a loud argument over who had stepped on whose foot. Actually, neither man was guilty. The real culprit was sitting quietly at one side, noting the way the two angry disputants raised their voices, held their bodies, expressed their feelings on their faces. He was an actor, sent out by Stanislavsky to observe people, to start little arguments and see how his victims reacted. That was one of the ways in which Stanislavsky trained his actors.

Unfortunately for the actor, real people are not always involved in exciting arguments. Sometimes they behave in very undramatic ways and seem downright dull—that, in fact, is why many of us go to the theatre to see imaginary people. Therefore, the actor must know how to arouse an audience's interest. He must learn a technique, a way of making the audience pay attention even when he is doing nothing more exciting than eating an apple, or listening to some other actor talk.

Acting is thus something different from merely imitating a real action. How different? Actors disagree violently, and their disagreement produces many conflicting schools and methods of training actors. And every school has a different approach to the many problems that the actor and the director must solve.

You are Hamlet, standing downstage—that is, near the audience—talking to Polonius, who is upstage. Should you face the other man, as is natural in ordinary life, and thus deprive the unfortunate audience of a view of your face? Or should

you face the audience, and thus seem unnecessarily impolite to the older man?

In the more or less good old days, the rule was to face the spectators, who had, after all, paid to see you, and Devil take the other actors. When actors and audiences learned, to their astonishment, that there was such a thing as realism, some actors began to perform "naturally" and turned their backs on their audiences. Nowadays, the tendency is to eat half the cake and keep half of it too. That is, the actor finds some plausible, "realistic" reason why he shouldn't turn his back completely to the audience. He may turn his face away because shame keeps him from looking the other man in the eye. Or he may turn half away to warm his hands at a fireplace, etc.

Three men find themselves on stage having an intimate conversation. If they were to perform naturally, they would group themselves together in one corner and talk in ordinary tones, that is, loud enough to be heard in the first row of the orchestra. That, however, would leave most of the stage empty, and create an unbalanced picture. So the three men scatter, forming a triangle (they do not stand or sit in a straight line, as that is also bad stage composition) and do their talking in loud tones that are supposed to convey the impression of quiet intimacy.

Now, not every actor can stand upstage center, the most effective stage position, with every other actor to stare at him and focus the audience's attention upon him. And in not every scene can the actors scatter themselves convincingly over the stage to produce pretty pictures. Thus, if the desire for effectiveness is carried too far, the audience will not be convinced that the scene is real, and the very effect aimed at will be lost.

What is true of the arrangement of actors on the stage is also true of the use of the voice, of gesture, of bodily movement. A vocal inflection that is natural may be barely noticeable, and if noticed may be flat and uninteresting, while one that is exaggerated may be rejected by the audience as too "theatrical." At every turn, compromise is necessary.

Exactly where should the compromise be made—in the direction of greater stage effect, or greater realism?

The answer will depend not only on the director and the

actor but on the play. If the play was written by Aeschylus or Shakespeare or Molière, then it was not meant to be acted realistically. But that does not mean that the actor must not make his character a "real" person who actually seems to experience the emotions the playwright has given him. It does mean that the degree of realism of the acting, as of the setting, is affected by the playwright's own conception of the characters and by the lines he has written for them. These characters, though living, are grander, more tragic, more villainous, or more ridiculous, than life. And now and then they step partly out of their scenes to confide little secrets to the audience, in soliloquies or "asides."

Most modern plays are written in a more realistic manner. They must be played with less obvious exaggeration, or the characters will seem false and the audience will not believe in them. This is not true, however, of poetic plays, which must often be acted in a stylized manner indicated by the playwright's dialogue and stage directions.

Granted that as an actor you must give the impression that you are a real individual the author has created, there remains the further question: How do you achieve this realism? Do you really feel the emotions this character is supposed to feel, or do you just pretend to?

On this point, actors and critics have conducted two hundred years of warfare. One group, traditionally associated with French acting, has maintained that to the degree an actor loses himself in the part, he stops being an actor, stops affecting the audience. The actor, according to this theory, must be calm and unemotional, aware of himself at each moment. He must be able to perform each gesture, produce each inflection, in a manner carefully calculated beforehand. An acting method which accepts this theory, like the Delsarte method, divides the body and the stage into dozens and hundreds of "zones," and teaches the student innumerable gestures, movements, and vocal inflections to be employed for the purpose of achieving definite effects.

However, this theory has lost considerable ground during the past century, and especially since the work of Stanislavsky has become known. To Stanislavsky, the actor is not pretending; during the play, and sometimes longer, he *is* the character he pretends to be. He must "creep under the character's skin,"

he must experience the character's emotions and live a life different from his own. And the more thoroughly he can do this, the more effectively he will persuade the audience that it is watching real things happen to real people.

Now, here too there must be a certain compromise. The actor may live the part of a murderer—but he'd better not stab his victim with a real knife. Or, what would be even more fatal, he must not turn his face away from the audience and confine the play of expression to his back during his big speech of the evening. That stage, as Stanislavsky said, is his world, and the audience has no part of it—but in the back of his mind is the knowledge that the audience is there, and that if not for this audience, the stage world would not trouble to exist.

Much depends on the personal temperament of the actor. Whatever their theories, some actors find it difficult to assume their stage parts. For an hour before the play, they must work hard to get in the mood, to forget their own feelings for the feelings of the character they are to become. But once in the mood, many actors cannot help being emotionally torn by their parts. They finish their roles emotionally exhausted, and for a time have difficulty in escaping from the shadows of their stage world and adjusting to the real world around them.

On the other hand, many famous actors have no difficulty whatever in snapping in and out of a part at a moment's notice. They put on and take off a character with less trouble than if it were a pair of shoes. Some of them play emotional roles with no emotions of their own. Others, despite the ease with which they don their roles, *do* feel strongly.

On the whole, as Uta Hagen indicates in one of the following interviews, actors these days tend more to the Stanislavsky method. They learn how their characters feel, and they try to share these feelings.

This is especially important for young actors, not only for the reasons Miss Hagen indicates, but because young actors tend to be self-conscious and nervous. Very few performers ever overcome nervousness entirely, especially on first nights, when they feel that their fate is in the hands of an audience which is making up its mind whether or not to use those hands for applause. But the presence of an audience is

especially terrifying to the inexperienced, and there is no better protection against this terror than to become absorbed in the character.

Everything you do on stage must be done in character, in such a way as to be in accord with your feelings and to indicate these feelings. If you sit down, you do so for a purpose —because you have received bad news and are too weak to stand, because you want to relax, because you want someone to sit beside you. This purpose will determine the manner in which you sit. If your only reason for doing a thing is that the author has written: *He sits,* or *She turns away and covers her face with her hands,* or *He stands motionless, his hands clenched,* the audience will immediately sense your lack of purpose and refuse to believe you are the person you pretend to be. Modern playwrights give elaborate stage directions describing the motives and states of mind of their characters, in order to help you convince the audience.

However, as we have seen, it is not enough to get beneath the skin of a character. You must project the character's feelings far beyond the skin, in such a way that the audience will unmistakably understand what they are. For this you need the control of voice and body and facial expression that comes from continual study, practice, and experience. You must have both a keen eye and a good ear. You needn't involve people in quarrels, but you must note how individuals behave under all the circumstances of life—when they are happy or angry, when they receive good news or bad, when they make plans or drift. You must know how a young girl's reactions differ from those of a middle-aged woman, how the voice and posture of a man change as he grows older.

You must do a great deal of reading, and you must learn something about art, music, and science, as well as many other interests which people have—or else you will not be able to portray a wide range of characters on stage. If you have ever seen a young Hollywood leading man pretending to be a world-famous surgeon, and have noted the laughter of the audience, you will realize how silly it is to try to play people you do not understand. You will increase your chance of getting parts if you can play musical instruments, fence, dance, or do acrobatic stunts. Even as an experienced actor, you will

be continually taking lessons to increase your range of abilities.

You will have to learn how to work with other actors, for a play is not a solo performance. You will have to learn how to pick up a cue at exactly the right moment, so that you neither interrupt the previous speech nor permit a pause in which the tempo drags and the audience falls asleep. You will be forced to learn how to protect yourself against mistakes of other actors, so that the wrong cues do not throw you off balance, or the wrong interpretations induce you to follow their lead. And you will have to guard against throwing other actors off. Despite the director's attempt to cast a group that can work together, you may come up against styles of acting that conflict with yours. Someone who overacts may make your own performance seem tame, someone who underacts may make you seem too loud and pretentious. It should be the director's task to see that there is no conflict, but if the director fails, you must be capable of protecting yourself.

You will have to adjust to all sorts of theatres, with different kinds of stages and acoustics. On one stage you may speak in your normal manner and be heard in every seat of the house; on the next, you may be inaudible past the first three or four rows.

You will have to know something about audiences too. Some are quicker to grasp a point than others; some applaud at the drop of a hat, or the lift of a voice, or laugh every time at the fall of a comedian's trousers; others sit on their hands. Beware of too much acting before audiences that are easy to please. The audience is one of your teachers, and you must be on guard against the bad teaching that will give you a dangerous smugness and lead you to develop sloppy acting habits. Avoid like the plague, however, audiences that are too arty and precious, for if you succeed in gaining their approval (you can't really *please* them) you may be hissed off a more down-to-earth stage. Shun the smilers who are so well-bred that they never laugh.

You will have to learn all the rules of acting, not that you may be able to follow them, but that you may know what has been done before and what can be done again. A rule in any art is simply a way of doing things that a previous artist has found to be effective. But every method

24. Sarah Bernhardt as the Queen in Ruy Blas, *by Victor Hugo.*

Courtesy of French Embassy—Information Division

loses its effectiveness in time, and then new methods have to be found. Learn to break rules—not accidentally, because then you may miss a way of doing things that is still effective, but deliberately, with an understanding of what you gain by the breaking.

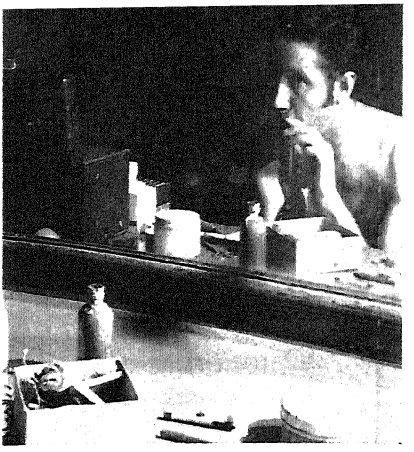
Every new play is a new problem. You may start with the intention of making your character a real human being—and then find that the playwright has created absurd puppets, creatures who no more behave like human beings than does Donald Duck. It's up to you then to fill the void with your own personality, to make the audience forget that the playwright has failed. But if a character has depth, as in the plays of Shakespeare or Chekhov, better submerge your personality and play the part, to the best of your ability, as the author intended. Shaw and other discerning critics rated Eleanor Duse above Sarah Bernhardt because, although Bernhardt had great skill, she was always herself no matter what the part, and was thus actually at her best in bad and silly

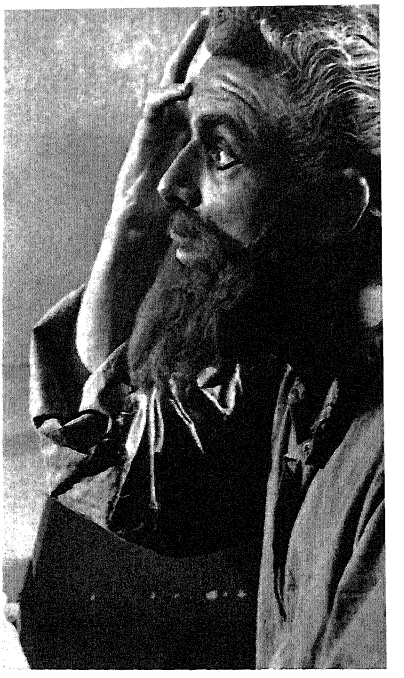
plays. There are a few old movies of Bernhardt in which her style of acting appears, to modern eyes, ridiculous. But Duse was always the person she played, and real people do not go out of fashion. Bernhardt impressed audiences; Duse moved them.

You may, after helping to bring a weak play to life, end up with a contempt for playwrights and the feeling that the author is nothing, the actor everything. Don't let your ego swell too much. Many a star has felt that he could shine in anything, and has let himself be lured into a play whose one virtue was that it gave him all the important scenes—only to fall flat on his face, as much a failure as the play itself. Authors are of some importance after all, and some of the best of them, from Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Molière down to modern playwrights, have been skilled actors themselves. Don't bite the hand that feeds you your lines.

You will have to learn how to be at home in all sorts of uncomfortable and possibly ridiculous costumes, and with various kinds of make-up. You will have to experiment with *straight* make-up, which is used to counteract the effects of artificial lighting and of distance from the audience, and with *character* make-up. For straight make-up you will add red to the lips and pink to the complexion, as well as emphasis to the eyes. You begin by rubbing cold cream into the entire face and neck, removing the excess, and then applying greasepaint in streaks to every part of the face and neck not covered by costume, and blending it in. The exact shades will depend on your complexion. The entire purpose of this kind of make-up is to emphasize your good features and make them more perceptible to the audience.

With character make-up, on the other hand, you must learn how to create an entirely different appearance. You must learn to apply crepe paper and make it look like a natural beard or mustache, how to change the shape of eyes, nose, and face, how to add or subtract years from your apparent age. As Edith Atwater suggests later on, once you can make yourself seem genuinely old, you have essentially mastered the trick. But this is not merely a matter of wrinkles, shadows, and white hair. You must stand, move, and talk with the weight of years upon you.





Courtesy of Goodman Memorial Theatre. Photo by Vories Fisher

25A & 25B. *Making up for the part of John Brown in* The Moon Besieged, *an original play by Seyril Schochen produced at the Goodman Memorial Theatre, Chicago.*

We shall see, in the interviews with Helen Hayes and Uta Hagen, among others, how greatly actors emphasize the need for training their voices and bodies. The author's script and the director's interpretation of it are conveyed to the audience almost entirely by the things the actors do and say. And if there are any limitations on their ability to move or speak, the actors are handicapped from the start.

The training of both voice and body is a matter of practice. In many respects, body training is a simpler matter. Muscular strength and flexibility are attained through certain kinds of work and through sports, gymnastics, and dancing of various kinds—ballroom, modern, ballet, ethnic, and tap. If you are at all like the average individual, you have taken part in some sports as a small child and in others as you grew older. And nowadays, even the elementary-schoolchild has a chance to learn to dance. Body training, therefore, is merely a systematic continuation of things you have begun to do long before.

Things are different with regard to voice training. From the age of a few months on, we learn our habits of speech unconsciously from those around us. Our ears are gradually

accustomed to noting certain differences in sound and to paying no attention to others. By the age of three or four, we have already undergone, without being conscious of it, considerable voice and ear training—much of it harmful from an actor's point of view. Long before our teens, most of us have formed habits of speech that will last us throughout our lives, unless we make deliberate efforts to change them.

Why should we change them at all? Well, try making a public speech, or try reading a passage from Shakespeare, and you'll see, or rather hear. If you do your trying out in a fairly large hall, someone in your audience is almost certain to cry: "Louder!" And if you attempt to respond, you are likely to find yourself shouting, still without being heard clearly in the back of the hall. Some of your words may be unintelligible because you mumble them, or pronounce them sloppily. You may find yourself out of breath in the middle of a sentence, or stumble over combinations of consonants that never twisted your tongue before. (The word "consonants" itself may throw you for a loss.) You may be disconcerted to find that your voice becomes shrill and thin, that your audience finds it boring or even unpleasant to listen to.

In short, you may find that your voice is in the grip of bad habits, and will not do what you, or the author of a play, want it to do. Every would-be performer on the stage goes through a similar experience. Some famous actors, like Sir Henry Irving, have had to overcome stammering, in addition to the more usual difficulties.

Do you want to hear what proper training can do for the voice? Listen to a third-rate radio serial, and note how a trained actor can create a character, or several characters, with sound alone. Observe how the voice, rather than the dialogue, holds whatever interest you can find in such a play.

Granted the need to train your voice, then, how do you go about it? The first thing to understand is that you cannot do it alone. Unless you have listened to a good recording of your own speech, you can have no idea of how you sound to others. And unless you have a well-trained ear, you can hardly realize, even after listening to a record, how many faults you have acquired.

You need a good teacher—and for many individuals, finding a good one may be perhaps the most difficult part of

26. A speech class at Catholic University concentrating on oral interpretation.

Courtesy of Catholic University

voice training. The ignorance of a teacher of voice can ruin the pupil's instrument. For a voice is not merely a combination of mouth, nose, larynx, and so on, which remain unchanged no matter what is done to them. Improper training can result in bad habits which are very difficult to correct, and it can also strain the vocal organs and leave them permanently injured.

How do you select a good teacher? You cannot do it by taking at face value the claims made in personal advertisements. Some are downright frauds who know nothing at all about the voice. Others are incompetent to various degrees—usually to very great degrees. A few—singers or actors who have had both good voice training and considerable stage experience themselves—are competent to teach others. So are a large proportion of the teachers of voice and speech in high schools, colleges, and the better dramatic schools. If you cannot study voice in one of these schools, you might, at any rate, speak or write to the teachers in them, and see whether they cannot recommend a good teacher in your locality.

When you go to a good teacher, you will find that before you begin your actual studying, he or she will study you. If

your voice is very nasal, or hoarse, the teacher may recommend that you see a nose and throat specialist to find out whether there is any physical difficulty that should be cleared up before you begin your training.

Once your teacher knows that your vocal apparatus is reasonably healthy, he will begin teaching you how to breathe. Most of us knew how to breathe properly when we were infants, but have picked up bad habits since. We tend to emphasize the motion of the chest and shoulders, whereas, proper breathing emphasizes the use of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles. Incorrect breathing is usually shallow breathing. The lungs do not get enough air, and neither the inhalation nor exhalation of what air is taken in can be well controlled.

You will have to learn again to breathe from the diaphragm and abdomen, and when you speak you will have to practice breathing rapidly—that is, through the mouth, as swimmers breathe. You will have to keep up this practice until you can breathe correctly without any longer having to think of *how* you are breathing.

Breath control is the beginning of voice control. When we are asked to speak more loudly, most of us tighten our vocal cords, or vocal bands, as they should more properly be called. The result is a feeling of strain and a rise in pitch, alongside an increase in volume. After a time, the strain becomes too much, and our voices grow weaker. Volume is properly attained without strain by increased pressure of the abdominal muscles.

Proper breathing also permits better control of pitch. When our bodies as a whole are tense, our vocal bands are tense too, and the pitch of our voices rises. A voice that is too high is exhausting for the speaker, and often unpleasant for the listener. And the fact is that most of us habitually speak in voices that are too high. Note the pitch of your own voice—or better still, the voice of someone in your family—immediately upon rising in the morning, when the vocal bands are still relaxed, and later in the day, after fatigue and tension have done their work. You will note that the pitch is lowest in the morning, and rises after the hours of activity.

An important part of vocal training is therefore the avoidance of tension. Many teachers give exercises to train you to relax. You may not be able to prevent unpleasant events that

upset you and contribute to general tension. But proper breathing and voice production, along with special exercises for muscular relaxation, will help you to avoid tension in the vocal bands.

One of the results of voice training is thus likely to be a slight lowering of your normal speaking voice, accompanied by an improvement in its quality. At the same time, as you learn to speak without strain, and you are farther away from the top of your register, your voice acquires greater flexibility.

During the early part of your vocal training, you may feel that what you are doing is very artificial and affected. And in some cases this may be true. If you have been used to speaking in a monotone, you may, when you begin to train your voice, exaggerate the inflections, the changes of pitch, that are needed to arouse interest. If you have been accustomed to mumbling the ends of your sentences, you may overcompensate by making unnecessarily painful efforts to articulate clearly. And if you carry these and other undesirable effects over into your general conversation, your friends will undoubtedly think that you are putting on airs.

It will be your teacher's task to remind you that the object of voice training is to help you communicate more effectively with others, not to set you apart from them. Any method of speech that calls attention to the peculiarities of the voice and its use, instead of to what that voice has to say, is a bad one. A good teacher will not let you acquire affected mannerisms.

Both as an actor and as an individual you want your voice to be pleasant to listen to. You don't ordinarily want it to be hoarse or throaty, or squeaky. It is true that some actors have peculiarly husky or otherwise unusual voices which have become almost like trademarks. But these actors are occasionally limited in the roles they can play. It is much better for you to have a voice so flexible that you can make it hoarse or squeaky as a part requires, and make it sound entirely different in another role.

You want to be able to speak English that is correct, without offensively calling attention to its correctness. A good part of your work will therefore consist of studying phonetics, the science of language sounds, and practicing diction. You will very likely prefer a teacher whose natural accent is not

strikingly different from your own. That is, if you were born in Kansas City or Omaha, you do not want to end up with an Oxford accent. Whatever your place of birth, you will find it advisable as an actor to speak English that is clear and easily understood, and lacks striking peculiarities that indicate any particular region.

In your role as actor, in contrast to your manner of speech in private life, an important characteristic your voice must have is flexibility. Your own life may be quiet and relatively unadventurous, without moments of great sorrow or tremendous tragedy. A voice with a narrow range may suffice to express your meanings and emotions. But on the stage you must be able to express extremes of passion. You must be able to handle your voice as a singer does, almost as if it were an instrument apart from you, but under your control.

If you don't have clarity, or pleasant quality, or flexibility of voice before you start, you cannot achieve them without considerable practice. A good part of it must be done under the direct guidance of your teacher. Much of it, however, must be done alone from the beginning. Good teachers recommend frequent short practice sessions during the day, instead of one long one, in order to avoid strain. If you run across a teacher who favors long exhausting sessions in order to "strengthen" the voice, better leave him and find some one else.

As you continue to study, you will find that you are training not only your voice but your ear. In fact, unless both sorts of training go together, you are wasting a good part of your time. For eventually, unless you go to Hollywood and a movie studio pays for your vocal coach, you will have to stand on your own feet, or rather listen with your own ears. You yourself must be able to hear what is happening to your own voice. After a time you will not need to take lessons so frequently, and eventually you will be able to discontinue them altogether.

But before that time comes, you may have to do considerable work. It will be effort well spent. In most plays, no single characteristic so clearly distinguishes the good actor from the bad as skill in the use of the voice.

Possibly some of the greatest problems you face will be those you encounter offstage. What do you do when you

don't have a job with a show? How do you live? What opportunities are there for actors in community theatres? How do you remain an actor while selling shoes or waiting on table? You would be surprised to know how grateful many well-known performers are for what little unemployment insurance they can get. But to face your everyday problems, you will need more than unemployment insurance. You will have to cooperate with your fellow actors in Actors' Equity, and you will find it useful to take advantage of the training and help offered by a service organization like the American Theatre Wing.

Offstage you will encounter people who regard you as a glamorous figure—and at the same time watch you warily for fear that you will try to borrow money from them or steal their hats. The old Elizabethan idea of the actor as vagabond, rogue, and thief has not been entirely eradicated from many people's minds. Very few of us think of the actor as a priest, which he was in ancient Egypt and medieval Europe, or as an honored representative of the people, which he often was in Greece. A few producers tend to regard him as a slave, as in ancient Rome.

Actually, the social position of the actor has been rising for the past few centuries, and it attained great respectability when Sir Henry Irving was knighted in England in 1895. But too many of us—the actor himself included—still think of the acting profession as something akin to quackery.

Actually, the actor is, or should be, an individual who has attained skill in a certain field of endeavor that most people find difficult. His profession teaches him often—but by no means always—a certain openness of mind, a tolerance for others. An actor, for instance, is less likely to be seriously affected than the average person by racial prejudice. As an artist, he comes into contact with an important area of human culture, and he helps spread this culture to others. He cannot help absorbing some of it himself.

Contrary to the impression of many people, he is not a fraud who is always putting on an act in real life. The strain of his profession is too great. Two or three hours of acting at a stretch on the stage are enough.

Beyond his special art, he is still human, with all the normal human hopes and fears. But he is by no means an

average person—not if he has attained some measure of success in a profession that nowadays is so full of discouragement and uncertainty. He has demonstrated unusual courage and persistence—and other qualities which may become more evident as you read the interviews which follow, arranged in alphabetical order.

Problems the Actor Faces

EDITH ATWATER

A Broadway producer who has a casting problem with regard to a woman's role is likely to think of Edith Atwater to solve it. Widely experienced, though still young, she is both skillful and talented, and is versatile enough to have played in such varied productions as *Tomorrow the World, The Man Who Came to Dinner, King Lear,* and the musical *Flahooley.*

You will read occasionally of actors who started their careers at the age of six months, when they were carried on the stage and made to utter loud shrieks. Miss Atwater's interest in the stage didn't begin quite that young. But it began early enough.

E A. I was interested in the theatre as a child. I made my own scenery, and put on plays in the neighborhood. Later on I studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and with Richard Boleslavsky. It's a sad commentary on the state of the theatre that a lot of the people I started with—some of them very talented—have since left the profession.

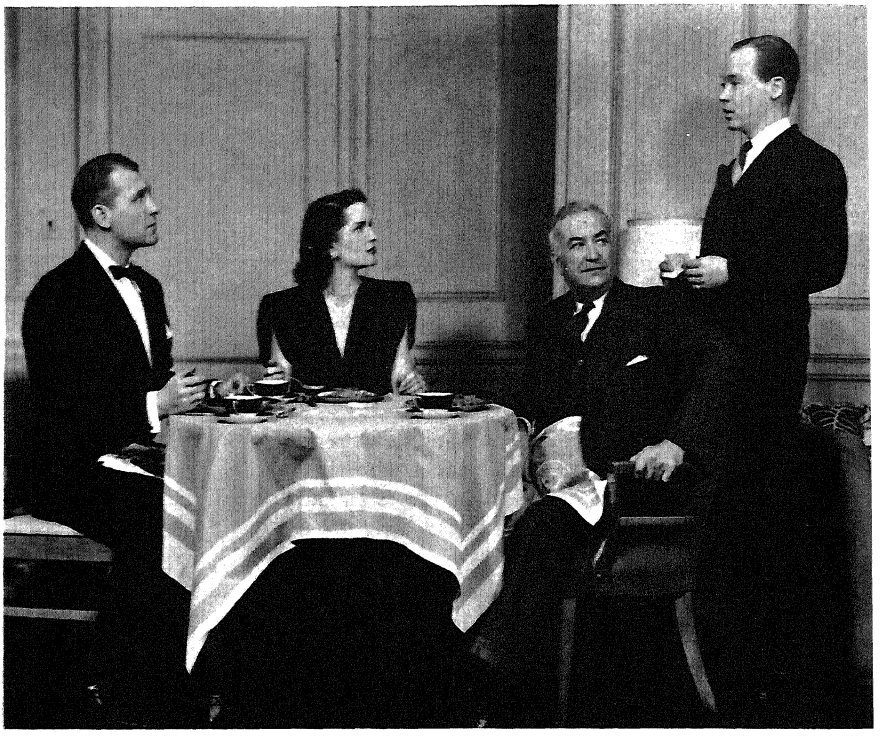
What sort of training did you have?

E A. Some dancing, some singing—that has to be part of any training for the stage. But mostly acting. The most important thing is to act and to keep on studying. The best training is with a stock company.

Aren't some of the stock companies pretty bad?

E A. That doesn't matter so much. Even if you have a bad director, it's better than not having a chance to act at all. Besides, when you're a novice, you can't take advantage of good direction when you get it, any more than a young pupil just starting to scrape a violin can benefit much by studying with Heifetz. After you've had some experience, however, you'll profit tremendously when you do run across a good director.

It's good experience to put on a new play, to create a part. It would be wonderful if we could find more creative writers who could write new plays worth producing.



Courtesy of Leland Hayward. Photo by Vandamm

27. Ralph Bellamy, Edith Atwater, Minor Watson, and Myron McCormick in a scene from State of the Union, *by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.*

Then, you must read the classics, like Shakespeare and Ibsen. Shakespeare wrote to be played, and is very easy to play, sometimes easier than a modern playwright. Everybody can learn a lot from putting on his plays. For instance, a community theatre that wants to do inexpensive productions can learn how to work without scenery and with a minimum of props. Actors can learn how to show they are at ease without lighting a cigarette. Yes, it's very good training.

But suppose some of your group don't feel quite at home with Shakespeare, or any other playwright you choose?

E A. They'll feel at home once they understand the characters. The entire group should discuss them, fill in their backgrounds,

learn why these characters, who seem so strange to us, didn't seem strange to their original audiences. Once you understand a character, you can bring it to life.

But being an actress is much more than a matter of learning parts. One of the problems that bothers young people in the theatre is make-up. Now, the first principles of make-up have to be taught. Other people have learned what creams and paints to use and how to apply them, and you may as well profit by their experience. The most difficult thing is to learn the trick of making a young face look old. If you can do that, you can do anything. But once you've acquired that ability, you have to do some experimenting. You must try to understand your own face. Dramatic schools give courses on make-up, but you don't need a long course if you have an aptitude for it and are willing to experiment.

If you want to know how different types of people look, at different ages, and with different hair styles, go to a museum or library. A playwright may give you all the description in the world, but the only way to know how a period hair-do looks is to find a picture, best in a museum or library. And the same thing goes for costumes.

Once you are an actress, how do you go about getting a job?

E A. I don't know any more. I, and many other actors, used to work all the time. But there are so very few plays in production now that it's often a long wait between parts. It must be frightfully discouraging for young people. The search for jobs has become a rat race. You have to be awfully lucky, look just right, meet just the right person at the right time.

It sounds like a gloomy picture.

E A. It is. The only way out that I can see is a sponsored theatre. Decentralization of the theatre is absolutely necessary. There's no growth now except in some small groups. Television is pushing the theatre further into the background, and the only answer the theatre can make—in terms of quality—costs too much money. That's why the commercial level is so low. Good theatre costs so much that tickets are priced too high. Take *King Lear*, for instance. The audience that sup-

ported it was composed of people who love the classics—and they're not wealthy. So the orchestra was empty, and the balcony packed, and the result was that the production lost money and the show had to close—despite the tremendous number of people who wanted to see it at balcony prices or less.

I don't see any way out for the commercial theatre. I know that the first thing a young actor thinks of is Broadway, but actually the best place to start is in a community theatre. The young actor has a painful thing to realize: that the theatre does not support its own people, even those who have been successful enough to have their talent recognized. The only exceptions are a few stars who receive high salaries—provided they can find the right parts and are lucky in choosing plays that have long runs. And sometimes they're not lucky, and they too are out of work for years. I think it would benefit both the community theatres and Broadway if stars were sent out to play with the community theatres.

From what you've said, it would seem that most people don't gain much from the theatre.

E A. Not in terms of money, no. That's why so many leave it, although they hate to do so. Being an actress drives you on from one part to the next, and each new part is a new problem. That's what makes the theatre interesting—the problems rather than the "glamour." There's no glamour on the inside, only hard work, and the realization of all the things you have to learn. It's taken me years to learn to be any good.

It takes a while, too, to get rid of some of the preconceived ideas you hold about actors. Most people think that an actor is necessarily an extrovert, always trying to be the center of attention. But that isn't necessarily so. The extrovert has certain advantages to start with. But an actor may be shy, introverted—and the very fact that he's so sensitive may make him a better actor in the long run, after he's learned the tricks of the trade.

How do you feel personally? With the commercial theatre in so sad a state, would you want to give it up?

E A. Personally, I don't want to change. With all its weaknesses, I prefer to stay in the theatre. On the other hand, if I had known in the beginning the terrific work that's needed, the drain on my vitality, the discouragements and difficulties I'd meet, I might have thought twice. And then possibly done exactly the same thing I've already done!

What a Star Looks for in a Play

KATHARINE CORNELL

It takes the fingers of only one hand (and not all of them) to count the actresses who hold a special position as leading ladies both on the stage itself and in the hearts of theatre-goers. One of these leading ladies is Katharine Cornell.

It is difficult, within the limits of a few words, to introduce Miss Cornell properly. Perhaps we needn't even try, for to those who know our theatre at all, no introduction is necessary. It may be enough to recall that she was one of the greatest of Juliets in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and has starred in such Shaw plays as *Candida*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and *Saint Joan*, as well as in Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* and other fine plays.

As an actress-manager who has a wide choice of new works, she has put on her own productions for twenty-one years. Her acting has a quality which has insured success for plays by less exalted playwrights than those we have named, and it may seem odd, therefore, that she does not appear more often in new plays.

Is it especially difficult, Miss Cornell, for an actress who has achieved your position to find a suitable new work? Do you demand too much of a play?

KC. It's nice of you to speak so kindly of my position in the theatre, but I must disclaim it. However, as for your question itself—I do demand a great deal of a play. It must have not only a role that suits me, but the right general atmosphere as well. And that's difficult to find, either in a comedy or tragedy.

I feel very strongly about the dignity of human beings and about the warmth that can be found in people, and I want to convey these feelings in a play. I look for parts that are close to me, for the speeches that express what I want to say. Sometimes the play itself doesn't express this, or does so in a very vague manner But you know that there are

many ways of interpreting a play, of bringing out values which the playwright himself may not have intended. So sometimes, by the manner of production, I can bring the play around to saying what I want it to say.

I feel, too, that I have the responsibility of bringing good plays to people, plays in which the authors speak as honestly as they can. Youngsters, especially, are able to recognize what's good. During the war, we did *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* for our troops abroad. Many of the young men in the Army had never before seen a live play, but the tour was most successful. I've never seen such enthusiastic responses from audiences. It made me realize once more that if you give young people the best theatre, they'll accept it and demand more.

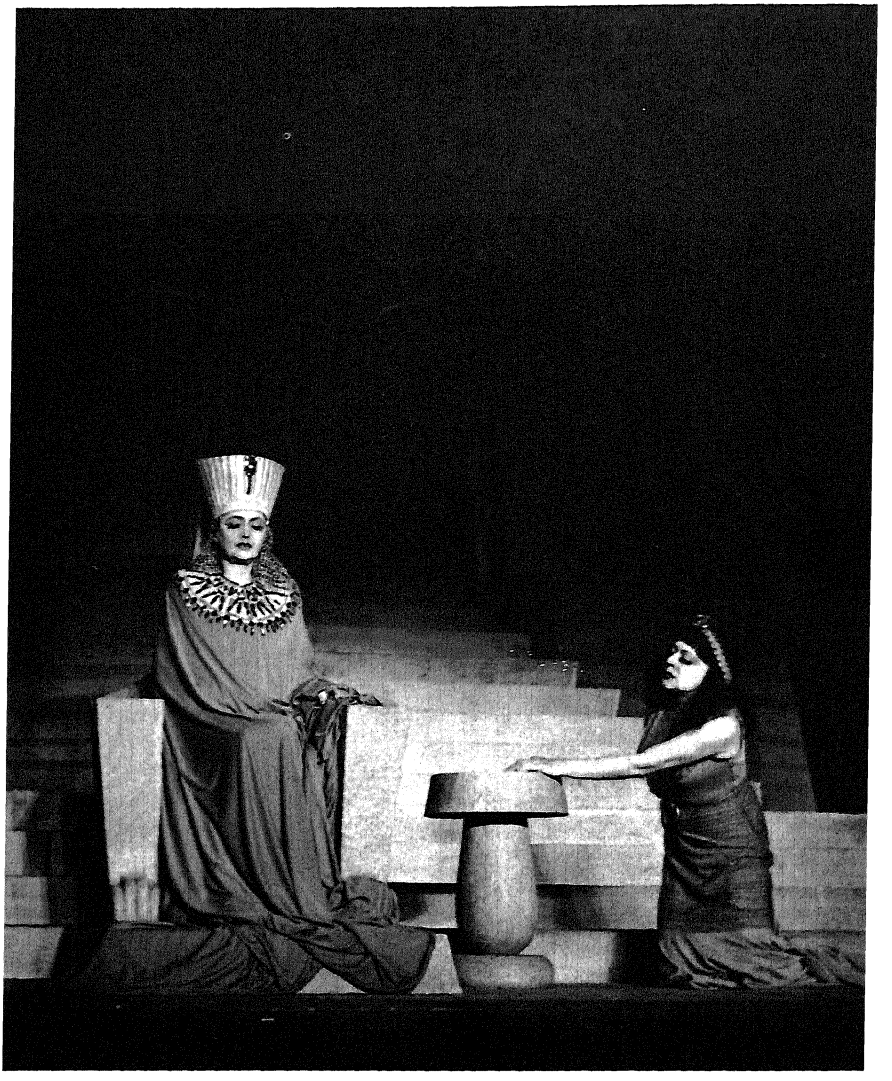
Aren't these among the reasons why you have done so many of the classics, which are often considered so unprofitable to produce? Isn't it true that such playwrights as Shakespeare and Shaw offer not only the best roles and the most effective scenes, but the qualities you want, as well?

K C. Yes, it's in the classics that we find the most profound expression of human dignity. That's why they've become classics. Of course, to most schoolchildren, Shakespeare's plays do not express dignity at all—they are merely indignities to which the helpless students are subjected. Shakespeare should be taught only by people who understand and love the beauty and meaning of his plays, and have the desire to find and impart them. Shakespeare can't be imposed on people. They must be free to accept or reject him.

But I don't want to imply that it's only in the classics that I can find the things I'm looking for. Sometimes, when I'm reading plays, I begin to think there are so few new writers—and yet there are many young authors who have great talent, like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, for example. They write fine plays. They don't, however, write the kind of roles in which I can appear.

Doesn't the very strength of your personality prevent you from playing certain roles?

K C. I don't think it's a question of strength of personality. It is



Courtesy of Katharine Cornell. Photo by Graphic House

28. Katharine Cornell and Lenore Ulric in a scene from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra.

true that there are certain roles I wouldn't try to play. But there are others which the critics don't want me to play. They're the ones who do much of the type-casting. They have an idea of the kind of person I am, and they have their conceptions about how certain roles should be played. For instance, some

critics, and many spectators, think of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* as a tart. Now, Cleopatra was a cultured woman who spoke eight or nine languages and ruled a great country. She was a queen, with the dignity of a queen. But when I played her that way, there were objections.

Do you think you could overcome these ideas about your sticking to a certain type of role by having an author write a different type of role just for you?

K C. I don't think great plays can be written for any one actress. Sardou tailored his scenes to Bernhardt's measurements—but his plays are hardly alive today. Shaw sometimes tried to write for a specific actress, like Ellen Terry. But if the play is good, the characters come alive and carry the author along with them, and then the entire contour of the play is changed. That's what happened in Shaw's case. Ellen Terry wasn't always satisfied with the way the finished work fit her. Shaw didn't make as skillful a tailor as Sardou. He was too fine a playwright.

Suppose, Miss Cornell, we had a repertory system, or some system of production that involved a smaller investment of money. Wouldn't you find it easier to discover suitable plays, to risk going against the type-casting to which you have been subjected?

K C. Very likely. It would be wonderful to have repertory on a year-round basis. There's been a great deal of talk about it, although little has been done. The trouble is that there is a terrible circle of expenses involved in production. If that could be broken through, all of us in the theatre would benefit. As it is, many of us need a great deal of determination to stay in the theatre.

How about young people who aren't in it yet, but are trying to get in?

K C. I think that the best thing they can do is stay in their communities, and act there or write there because they feel they must. Sooner or later, if they're good, they'll attain the professional theatre, become part of it, and help give it new life. And perhaps then we'll get more and more of those good new plays all of us are looking for.

What Makes a Character Actor

CLARENCE DERWENT

Clarence Derwent has acted in a tremendous variety of roles and has had very wide experience in the theatre. He has been president of Actors' Equity, and during the time of this interview was head of ANTA and chairman of the American branch of the International Theatre Institute. He has taught acting to university students as well as to young professional actors, and has written an autobiography, *The Derwent Story*. He is known as one of the best of character actors. What a character actor is, he can best explain for himself.

C D. Today, a character actor is nothing more than an actor who has passed the age when he can perform juvenile parts. It's a very unfortunate interpretation, because fifty years ago all acting was character acting in the real sense, that is, in the art of impersonation. Because repertory abounded, as it still does in England, there was no danger of type-casting. A company had to use what actors it had available. Versatility was sought, and naturally it was infinitely better experience to play a round of highly diversified parts than to do the same part and reproduce one's own personality over and over again during a long run on Broadway.

My first week on stage, I played Horatio in *Hamlet*, Sir Benjamin Backbite in *The School for Scandal*, and roles in *East Lynne* and Schiller's *Mary, Queen of Scots*. These were completely contrasted parts, and although I'm sure that my performances were abominable, I learned more in that one week than the average actor learns during a year on Broadway. You've seen those advertisements that invite you to "Learn while you earn." Well, for the young actor, that was repertory. It was a school for acting in which the audience gave frequent examinations and made awards. Sometimes the examinations were difficult, as when at the age of nineteen I had to play an old roué of eighty in *Sappho*, but the training in characterization was first-class.

Is character acting anything new, Mr. Derwent, or is it something that has had a long history?

C D. Character acting has existed as long as the theatre. It is the stimulus in the art that makes acting worth while. But methods have changed. In England this resulted chiefly from the work of two people, Granville Barker and Miss Annie Horniman, in Manchester. They introduced the realistic school, which affected the British theatre to the same extent that the Moscow Art Theatre affected the Russian.

Formerly, reliance on make-up was too great. We've veered away nowadays from heavy wigs and lines, from make-up that is too heavy and draws attention to itself. Now the actor must rely on his ability to act and sound like the character he is impersonating. That's why he needs training to cover a range outside his own personality. Unfortunately, it isn't often that he gets it. Most actors don't even develop their voices.

Doesn't voice training help?

C D. That isn't enough. There has to be a motive behind the training. The actor must feel the need for greater ability than he has. For example, one night I would play Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and the next night a witch in *Macbeth*. That obviously required an extended range of voice. But most acting today doesn't require it so obviously, and most actors use only the middle register.

How is it, Mr. Derwent, that they develop so little variety?

C D. Partly, it's due to the use of a microphone in radio and television. With a microphone in front of your lips, you need project even less than when talking in a room. And then again, there's type-casting. An actor isn't usually called on to do a part too different from the kind he's already done. The average young actor would be ghastly, not ghostly, as the Ghost in *Hamlet*. He doesn't have the necessary depth of voice. But he *would* have it if he trained.

Most of us today have no idea of what a tremendous range an actor's voice can have, what a wonderful instrument it can be. Harvard and a few other places have old records of Edwin

Booth as Othello, as well as of Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt and other great stars of the past. Listen to those records when you get the chance, and you'll understand how they could hold their audiences in good plays and bad. The music in their voices made up for any deficiencies in the script.

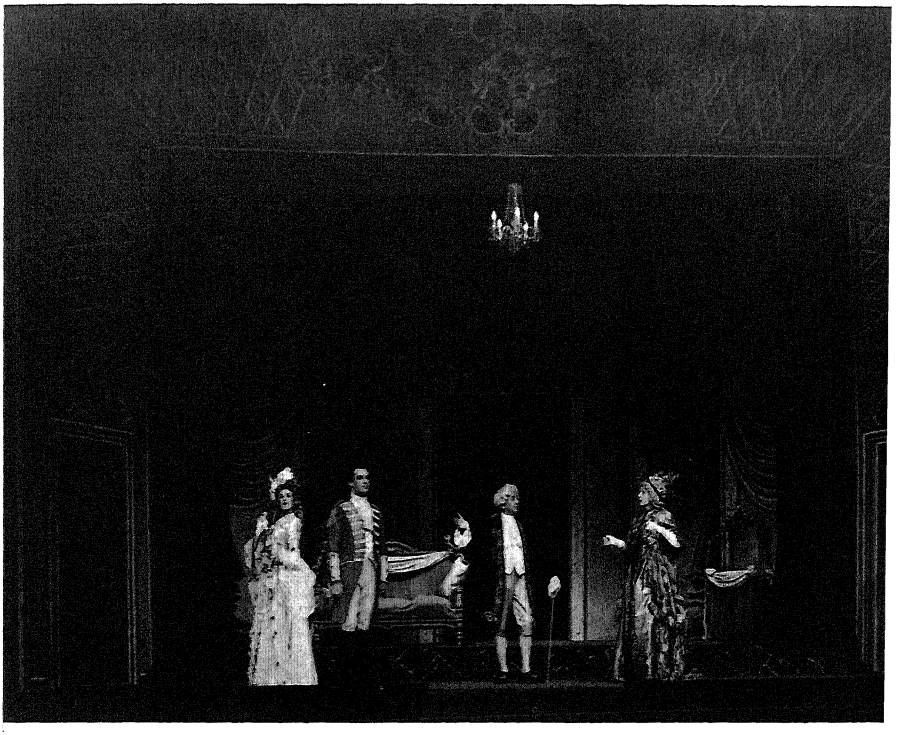
We sometimes hear complaints, Mr. Derwent, that people in the audience can't understand what the actor says. Would voice training remedy that?

C D. Voice training—and some knowledge. The troubles with audibility and articulation in the current theatre are largely due to ignorance. The average actor doesn't realize that his audibility is dependent not on the vowels but on the consonants. Nine times out of ten, if you tell him he can't be heard, he'll apply vocal pressure, and blast. If he'd only bite his consonants, he wouldn't have to apply pressure, and would yet be heard. Double consonants, especially, seem to be difficult, not only for actors, but for most other people. The remedy lies in taking care, and in practicing.

Do you think it's a good idea for professional and amateur actors to play in the same production?

C D. An excellent idea. Until a few years ago, we in Equity didn't allow our members to play with non-Equity members. Then, because we realized there were reciprocal advantages, we very wisely let down the bars. I'm not saying that the professional is always better, but there's no question that the contact gives a student something which no director can teach him. Take the question of timing, for instance. In real life, when you ask a question, the reply doesn't come immediately. But a student who hears his cue picks it up immediately and gives an unrealistic effect. The experienced actor invariably allows a split second before picking up his cue, and this gives the scene life and truthfulness. You don't get the same result when the director tells the student to delay his answer. Then you usually get a pause through which you could drive a horse and buggy.

The professional can help in a dozen ways. The student always has difficulty with gestures. The French, both the



Courtesy of Stanford University

29. A scene from the Stanford University production of Sheridan's* The Rivals. *Clarence Derwent and Aline MacMahon (center and right), Artists in Residence, performing with students.

actors and the people as a whole fit movements very naturally to what they are saying. But in England and the United States we don't do that, we have a habit of restraint. Well, an actor can't be restrained, and when the student realizes that, he sometimes begins to gesture all over the place. But a gesture should as a rule be felt, not seen. It's the same thing as with make-up. The moment you're aware of it as make-up, it defeats its own purpose. With certain exceptions —as when you pound a table or gesture without speech—an audience should feel the effect of the gesture as lending weight to what the actor is saying, rather than be aware of it as a gesture. The professional can show the student how the thing is done, he can help him develop a mobility and flow of gestures.

But what does the professional gain from the association?

C D. For one thing, a chance to play a greater variety of roles, and improve his own range. And for another, he can acquire some of the student's enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a most useful thing to have in the theatre.

When a professional acts in a university play, Mr. Derwent, do you notice any tendency for him to take over?

C D. Not usually. Speaking for myself, when I'm acting, I don't intrude on the director's province unless I'm asked to. If I'm supposed to be an actor, I remain in character as an actor.

In your character as head of the American branch of the International Theatre Institute, Mr. Derwent, what would you say about our relations with the theatres of other countries?

C D. Intercultural exchanges are very important. Thirty-five years ago, when I toured Holland, I started off with the idea that I was going to bring enlightenment to theatrically backward and ignorant audiences. When I saw the excellent scenery and efficient backstage equipment for my first play, I changed my views in a hurry. It's always useful to learn about the theatre abroad, as well as in different parts of our own country. It shakes us out of our complacent little ruts, gives us new ideas, awakens us to new possibilities.

Technically, we're probably ahead here, but in other respects we do need to awaken to new possibilities. One of the most tragic things about our theatre is that each year hundreds of young people with theatrical training are poured out of schools—and find no place to exercise and develop their skills. It's our loss as well as theirs. We need among other things permanent resident companies for repertory. We need to develop our theatre far beyond the bounds of Broadway. That's one of the things we're working on now in ANTA. As for our success—that depends on the support we get from the theatre-loving public at large.

How an Actress Prepares for Her Part

UTA HAGEN

Uta Hagen has triumphed in roles as different as those of the neurotic Blanche in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the strong-willed Joan of Arc in Shaw's *Saint Joan.* Before that she had acted in Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* with the Lunts, and in Shakespeare's *Othello* with Paul Robeson and José Ferrer. Her brilliant performance in Clifford Odets' *The Country Girl* won her the Donaldson Award and the Antoinette Perry Award, as well as the New York Drama Critics' acclaim as the best actress of 1951.

We interviewed her just before a performance of *Saint Joan,* while she was applying her make-up for the role.

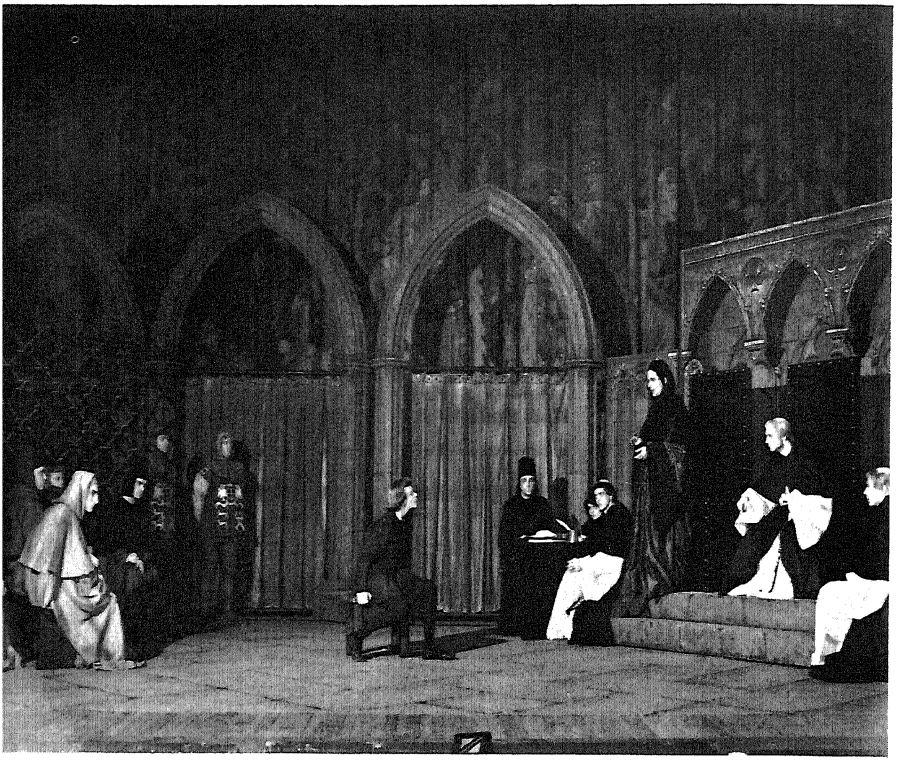
How do you learn a part?

U H. If, by learning a part, you mean learning lines and memorizing gestures—I don't. I never memorize lines and gestures. I search for the behavior of the character the author has suggested through the words, and try to identify myself with its actions. It's all in Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares.*

Do all actors and directors use the Stanislavsky method these days?

U H. I think, basically, every good theatre artist does. Some say, they don't, and then proceed to work in the way Stanislavsky suggested. Among directors I can name many who use his methods. Offhand, I can't think of any good ones who don't—either knowingly or unknowingly.

Acting isn't the art of showing off a bag of tricks. Acting is a creative process. And the creative part of acting comes from the artist. In any role, it will differ. Think, for instance, how many actors have portrayed Hamlet. If there were only one way to do the part, then, for the past three hundred



Courtesy of Theatre Arts Magazine. *Photo by Talbot-Giles*

30. Uta Hagen as Joan of Arc facing her inquisitors in a scene from Shaw's* Saint Joan, *directed by Margaret Webster.

years or so, each actor would have been nothing but a stronger or weaker carbon copy of the one who went before him.

So, in creating a part like Saint Joan you probably found it necessary to study a great deal about her?

U H. I went to libraries and museums to learn about Joan and the time in which she lived. I had seen other actresses in the play, and I studied a film made in 1928 in which the Italian actress Falconetti portrayed Joan. My intention through the research was not to imitate, but to see what others had done toward uncovering facets of Joan that would make me understand her better within myself, attain an understanding which is of course subject to more than the research of the material.

You know, Miss Hagen, that the country is full of young hopefuls who want to be great actresses. How can you test yourself before setting your mind on the professional stage? How can you find out whether or not you have talent?

U H. You can't. The need within yourself can be a guide for you. If you are aware that from eighty to ninety per cent of professional actors are out of work, and you are still determined to act, go right ahead. Nobody can stop you.

But as a teacher of acting, can't you help the beginner in that respect? Can't you discern talent where it exists and encourage the student, or note its absence and advise her not to waste her time?

U H. It isn't easy to tell talent. Talent evolves through mastery of a technique. Before I started teaching I had specific opinions about who was talented and who wasn't. Now I no longer presume to judge. Some people show a big talent at first and you think they are destined to go far. But often vanity, arrogance, or laziness prevents them from developing. Others seem incompetent at the beginning, but they work hard at their craft and conquer their failings and then become fine artists.

Suppose you're a beginner who wants to study acting, and you live in a small town where there are no dramatic schools?

U H. You can still prepare for an acting career. A town has to be very small not to have a teacher of singing and a dancing teacher. The tools of the actor are his body and his voice. Singing develops the entire vocal apparatus so that later your voice will respond freely and unself-consciously to any demands made by a role. And in the same way, dancing gives you the necessary physical coordination and limberness that will later serve the inner technique you must develop. And of course there is a library of plays and theatre in the smallest town.

Can you learn acting by studying other actors?

U H. From watching the work of non-professional theatres, I would say that the greatest misunderstanding most people have about working on a part is that acting is, to them, an imitation of "acting," instead of the full extension and artistic expression of themselves. If you have an understanding of yourself at various stages of your personal development, you will find that you are limited *only* by your own apparatus, by your own personal experience—which is limitless compared to an imitation process. Therefore the examination of your own reactions, of how you and other human beings function, is of the essence.

When these young people you talk about study by themselves they always copy an actress, usually someone in the movies, because those are the actresses they see most. By the time they come to study with a good teacher it takes six months to undo the imitative habits. On the other hand, the study of a performance such as Laurette Taylor's was should be invaluable if you are able to study it on the basis of a sound technical knowledge.

It's only recently that the theatre in New York has made a big step forward in training actors. In the past, only the most unusual could survive. There were only isolated places where really creative teaching could be had.

Does it make any difference what kind of play a youngster starts to work on?

U H. With regard to acting problems, yes. In the beginning it's more to the point to work on a simple play. A young person can again get many bad habits by trying to push for the result demanded by a play where the characters have a subtle inner life too complex for the beginner to comprehend. Also, verse plays are extremely difficult for the beginner—as well as for many professional actors, for that matter.

The most important thing is that the beginner learn to evaluate and develop his work rather than dream of success. One of the tragedies of the American theatre is that young people try to become a part of it not because of their need for expression and the love of the work itself, but because they think of it as the means for worldly success. This is good neither for them nor for the theatre!

You've played throughout the country, Miss Hagen. What sort of theatre audiences did you find?

U H. Every city has its own personality. Usually, university towns have the best audiences, because the people who go to the theatre are interested in the specific play they are going to see. The audiences I dislike most are those who go to the theatre to be seen, and not to see.

What is life like on the road? Do you learn much about acting and the theatre that way?

U H. Nothing that you can't learn by staying in one city. You have, perhaps, an extra stimulus in continually being reviewed and having to prove yourself anew in each city, but the life is extremely wearing, not, as some people think, because there's too much to do, but because there's too little to do. It's very lonely, and hotel rooms, trains, and the same faces of your colleagues morning, noon, and night for months at a time can become quite a strain. Still, it is a joyful obligation to be able to bring your work to people throughout the United States.

What about community theatres? Have you had much chance to see them?

U H. Most of those I've seen need professional leadership and time to mature. They don't contribute to the growth of the theatre because they are a hobby rather than a full-time occupation. Theatre is not something that can be done after hours. It needs complete concentration.

Well, Miss Hagen, with the Broadway theatre in such a sad state, and the community theatres apparently not yet doing the job they should—what do you think the theatre will have to do to survive?

U H. Work terribly hard, and hope devoutly!

What an Actor Uses for Money

ALFRED HARDING

Every actor knows Alfred Harding, editor of *Equity Magazine*, and assistant to the president of Actors' Equity Association. Called in as a newspaperman, he has edited the magazine since the November 1923 issue and is probably the only executive of Actors' Equity who has not been an actor himself. But because of his unfailing kindness and helpfulness, actors have forgiven him this fault, and regard him with both affection and respect.

He has fought for the rights of actors for so many years that he has identified his own interest with theirs. He knows that they do not have an easy time of it.

Equity is affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and gains much of its strength from its labor support. We were interested first in getting a picture of the organization.

How many members does Equity have?

A H. The figure varies from week to week. The top figure is about sixty-five hundred.

And how many of these sixty-five hundred earn their living solely in the theatre?

A H. Very few. Right now, about sixteen per cent of our membership is employed. There is a median employment of about ten weeks—that is, about half our members have ten weeks' employment or more per year, and about half have less. During a season, seventy-five to eighty per cent of the entire membership will get some employment in the legitimate theatre. But the average yearly income, including the incomes of the very top level, is about eight hundred and forty dollars a year. Actors can't live on that.

Does Equity try to find them jobs?

A H. Equity has no placement division, but Chorus Equity does make announcements of openings in its placement office. If we receive a call for twenty-four girls, we'll make the announcement, but we won't send out any particular individuals unless we are requested to. There are not enough jobs to go around, and we don't want to play favorites, or be charged with playing favorites.

Does Equity cover the entire country?

A H. Yes. It covers road shows, summer stock, and so on. The entire professional theatre.

When was it organized?

A H. On May 26, 1913. It established its position in a bitterly fought strike in August 1919.

What are the dues, and what benefits has Equity gained for actors?

A H. The initiation fee is a hundred dollars, and the dues are eighteen dollars a year. An actor who has not paid up gets thirty days of grace, and he can be carried along for a year or seventeen months. If he wants to leave the profession, he can get an honorable withdrawal card.

As for benefits, Equity has transformed the entire position of the actor. In the old days, the actor who was starving would accept work under any conditions the producer wanted to impose. He would rehearse for weeks and then, if his play failed to open, be discharged without pay. He would go on the road and if his show closed, be left stranded far from home, without money for food and railroad fare. Moreover, before Equity, there was no minimum salary. Actors competing for a job would be forced to take ten dollars a week, or less.

Equity has changed all that. For rehearsals, an actor gets paid forty-five dollars a week for a minimum of four weeks for dramatic productions and five weeks for musicals and "spectacular productions." He receives guarantees against being stranded on the road. Equity has established minimum

scales for actors, and no longer does the actor lack bargaining power against the producer.

There are many minor benefits, but these are the most important.

What are the relations of Actors' Equity to other organizations in the theatrical world?

A H. There are close relations with Chorus Equity, which has its own office, treasury, and staff, and considerable local autonomy with respect to such matters as disciplinary action. The magazine, *Equity,* is the official organ of both Actors' Equity Association and Chorus Equity Association. Actors' Equity is a branch of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America. This makes transfer to other fields—movies, radio, and television—something that can be accomplished without difficulty. And along with the stagecraft unions, we belong to the A.F.L.

What equipment should a young actor or actress have to crash Broadway?

A H. The more an actor has, in money, training, and contacts, the better off he is. The chief requirement is the ability to persuade a producer that he approximates what the latter wants.

Once he is on Broadway, how does he get a job?

A H. There are three methods. First, to go to every office and present himself in the hope that he will get to see the producer and be able to show what he can do. In a good many offices that's impossible, because the actor can't even get past the receptionist.

The second method is to get an agent. However, agencies can place established actors more easily than unknowns, so they generally concentrate on known people, and those who need help most have the greatest difficulty in obtaining it.

The third method is to join an acting group, and act in off-Broadway plays, in the hope of coming to the attention of directors and producers.

The European system is quite different. In Europe, as-

pirants to the stage can apply to a government-supported dramatic school. If they can pass the entrance requirements, they have the opportunity to study, and after taking examinations they are graduated with diplomas. By contrast, here we have only private schools, some good, other useless, still others plain rackets. And there are some colleges which have good courses in the theatre.

In Europe they look upon the theatre as the repository of the best thought, as a means of presenting a nation's ideas, ideals, and aspirations to the people and to the world. With that feeling, they believe that they are justified in supporting the theatre financially. In this country, on the other hand, the theatre has always been considered a form of entertainment which must stand on its own feet and pay its own way.

Congress showed this indifference or hostility to the theatre when it specifically wrote the Federal Theatre out of the W.P.A. bill in 1939.

Do you think that the theatre needs a government subsidy?

A H. A subsidy would be fine—but I'm afraid we can't hope for one. Something must be done about costs, however. They have gone up in every way, with the result that the theatre is no longer interested in medium runs. A play is either a hit or a flop these days. Moreover, for various reasons, including high living expenses, actors don't want to go on the road, and that makes for difficulties too.

How many Equity members, Mr. Harding, are working with community theatres throughout the country?

A H. I couldn't say. There are only a few—not nearly enough.

Our failings are two sides of the same coin. We should co-operate with each other to a much greater extent than we do. The professional theatre should regard the amateur theatre as a source of new talent from which there will flow new blood in all fields of theatre. We ought to encourage amateurs by making our members available for counsel and working with them. We should recognize that the amateur theatre is not a rival competing for dollars. We should serve as a model for them and should see that the best work is done in the amateur

field under the most favorable circumstances. Thus, the amateur theatre would win new audiences and make it easier for the professional theatre to survive.

Some of our members recognize the importance of the amateur theatre. For instance, Clarence Derwent, former president of Equity, was actor-in-residence at Stanford University for a term, and worked with dramatic groups there.

Amateur theatres are too often satisfied with less than they are capable of. One of the things they can get from professionals is the raising of their own standards. A prime requirement of progress in any of the arts is a "divine discontent" with your own achievements.

Too many of us, both amateur and professional, lack that. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of groups are springing up in the country who think themselves superior to the commercial theatre. On the other hand, many professionals consider their theatre to be *the* theatre. We are both wrong. Each of us has something the other needs, and the fault is as much ours as theirs. *The* theatre is the whole theatre and not any part of it. And whatever we do for it and wherever we do it, we are all members of one family and by our relationship always set apart from everyone else in the world who does not share that kinship.

From London to Broadway

REX HARRISON

On the screen, Rex Harrison has been familiar to audiences in such British-made films as Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* and Shaw's *Major Barbara,* as well as in the Hollywood productions of *Anna and the King of Siam* and *The Fourposter.* These titles serve as examples only, for the complete list is too long to repeat here. The plays in which Mr. Harrison has appeared include most notably Maxwell Anderson's *Anne of the Thousand Days,* S. N. Behrman's *No Time for Comedy,* John van Druten's *Bell, Book, and Candle,* and Christopher Fry's *Venus Observed.* In the latter two he played opposite his wife, Lilli Palmer, who had been enjoying a successful motion-picture and stage career in her own right.

Like many of our most gifted actors, Mr. Harrison is English by birth, and his first appearances were before English audiences.

How do English audiences differ from those of Broadway? Do they laugh, cry, and respond in general, in the same places?

R H. I don't think that audiences throughout the world react very differently to a good play that has wide appeal. Shakespeare is enjoyed everywhere, and has recently been given successfully in Japan, for example. In England, audiences love the excitement and vitality of American musicals.

There are some differences, of course. Conversation pieces don't go in America as they do in England. Shaw is an exception—and a dangerous example for lesser writers of conversation pieces to follow, at least as far as American audiences are concerned. London is slower than New York, and the tempo of the theatre mirrors the tempo of the town.

No audience, however, can become absorbed in characters whose emotional problems it can't understand. *Death of a Salesman* was a tremendous piece of Americana, but its problems were completely alien to the English and left them cold.

I think you'll find that true in general—when a play reflects the very special feelings and problems of one group or one nation, no matter how well it is done, its appeal to other groups will be greatly limited.

Are actors under less tension in England, where the dividing line between success and failure is not so sharp?

R H. Yes, I think so. A play doesn't have to be a smash hit, it can be a nice little success, without losing money. And that situation is reflected in the lessening of tension for the entire cast.

In England actors do suffer one torture that is spared them here. Tea is served during one of the matinee intermissions, and sometimes the dishes aren't completely cleared away before the performance resumes. The rattling can be very annoy-

Courtesy of Playwrights Company. Photo by John Swope

31. Rex Harrison as Henry VIII and Joyce Redman as Anne Boleyn in a scene from Anne of the Thousand Days, by Maxwell Anderson.

ing. I understand that you allow dishes only in your film theatres, where the actors don't mind the noise.

How about what's taking place on the stage itself, here in America? Playwrights like John Van Druten and Tennessee Williams write most of their fat parts for women. And most of the sensational successes appear to be scored by women. Surely there are as many gifted young actors as actresses. Does this mean that our theatre's emphasis is shifting toward women?

R H. To me it seems a case of cause and effect. During the last two decades the American theatre has had a wonderful crop of actresses and the English theatre a fine crop of actors. When you have great actresses, you have authors writing plays for women.

I think there are as many gifted young actors as actresses, but here in America they don't usually remain on the stage. For the past twenty years or more they have been leaving the theatre for Hollywood. And there are three thousand miles between Broadway and Hollywood. In England, London is both the film capital and the theatre capital. Actors can make films without leaving the theatre. Both the films and the theatre benefit, not to speak of the actors themselves.

However, the American theatre still has a large number of good male actors. Awards for acting are generally given, I believe, to both sexes.

Mr. Harrison, you and Miss Palmer have played together for years now. Is it easier to work with someone whose style you're familiar with? Community theatres differ from Broadway in that the same group is constantly working together. Is that helpful, or is it better to be working with new people all the time, as usually happens on Broadway?

R H. There are many advantages to group playing. You break down the barriers of working with people who don't know you or one another. So many actors, in unfamiliar company, are afraid of making fools of themselves. They become self-conscious, and tighten up. They shouldn't mind making fools of themselves in rehearsals. That's the place for it, and group

acting gives them the courage to do it. It's very good for an actor to experiment and to expand his range.

There's a danger in that for a novice, but the bigger danger is to be tight, to be too restrained. For teen-agers, rehearsals are the opportunity to let themselves go. They have to learn how to use their hands, how to scream hysterically, how to laugh convincingly. They can learn from actors they know more readily than from strangers. If they get too wild, a good director will check them.

Group work doesn't stop an individual from improving. As for disadvantages—well, I don't see any for the individual so long as the group itself remains healthy. There's a grave danger of doing too much, of putting on too many plays in too short a time. When that happens, the actor just does his best to get through and falls into all kinds of bad habits.

If the group avoids these dangers, the individual actors will benefit from playing in it. It's always good to come in contact with artists who can help young professionals. I know that London or Broadway is always the goal of a young actor, but it's dangerous to be exposed to either of them too early, before you have the ability to face the challenge of audiences who expect the best. Failure at an early stage can set you back for years.

Do you and Miss Palmer have difficulty in finding good scripts in which you can play together?

R H. One just has difficulty in finding good scripts. That's why English actors are always doing revivals of the classics. I know that American actors would like to do them too, but financial difficulties stand in the way here. The result is that American actors, although they're wonderful in American dramas, have difficulty in most period plays. They simply don't get the opportunity for proper training. Playing bits on television keeps the actor going financially, and it's better than no chance to act at all, but it isn't enough. What the actor needs is a chance to act in repertory. I'm grateful that I had it.

Mr. Harrison, how do you feel about directing a play while acting in it?

R H. To young people in the theatre I'd say, don't try to act and direct at the same time. Acting can be difficult enough in itself, especially when you're learning. Try to get into summer stock, or into some other group where you can play a variety of parts and everything doesn't depend on a single role. Avoid being exposed to the dangers of great success or great failure right away.

The American theatre needs a prime mover, something that will give it a good shove along the right path and get it back into the communities again. The young actor should prepare himself for the opportunities of the future by expanding his abilities and getting more experience in the theatre in every way he can.

Extending the Actress' Range

HELEN HAYES

The name of Helen Hayes is one that spells a special magic for theatre-goers. Miss Hayes has the ability to change her stage personality completely according to the needs of a role—and to maintain the attractiveness of that personality in all roles.

Think of the wide variety of parts she has played—as the heroine of Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows,* Ferenc Molnar's *The Good Fairy,* Maxwell Anderson's *Mary of Scotland,* Laurence Housman's *Victoria Regina,* Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* even a free adaptation by Joshua Logan of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard.* She has triumphed in farce and the lightest of comedy, as well as in serious and tragic drama.

To act such a variety of roles requires both a great native talent and tremendous skill.

How, Miss Hayes, did you acquire that skill? When you began your career, were teachers as concerned with theories and systems of acting as they are now?

H H. I began acting professionally at seven, and I wasn't exposed to teachers. The theatre was my teacher. I learned in stock companies as well as in shows, through the process of acting. In those days the stock companies had good actors and good directors, from whom I acquired a great deal.

By the time I was twenty, I had achieved stardom. But there were many things that my thirteen years on the stage hadn't taught me, and I felt that if I were ever to progress from being a charming young thing I had to study. So, as a star, I went to school—not to dramatic school, but to teachers of dancing, posture, and voice. I worked for about ten years in order to enlarge my scope. I needed this to play different roles. Without this training I couldn't have played Mary of Scotland, and other tragic roles.

I believe firmly that the right teaching is very important,

especially today, when the theatre doesn't offer the variety of roles it once did. You can't exercise your talents unless you go to school. My daughter went to drama school—to the American Academy—for two years.

Would you say, Miss Hayes, that there's a more serious approach to the theatre nowadays?

H H. There's a more desperate approach to the theatre, because of the shrinking of opportunities. Young actors and actresses feel a real inner sense of something to give, and they can't get a fair trial. And at the same time, among audiences throughout the country, there's a great hunger for the theatre. People always reach out to it for things their personal lives can't give them. Under present conditions, there are frustrations on both sides of the footlights.

You don't stick to a single type of play. How do you choose a play?

H H. I choose a play when I fall in love with it. I've had success with plays because I've retained that simplicity of approach. I don't worry about whether the critics will like them.

It isn't easy to keep that approach. Friends will tell you, "Your next play is your most important one," and try to make you forget your own tastes and choose a part that will be "different" from what you've done before. They're trying to be helpful, but all they do is confuse you. You have to be wary of that kind of help. There are always exceptions, but in general I feel that I have the taste of the public. Most of the plays that don't succeed are put on just as a gamble, without any real belief or liking on the part of the producers.

If anyone had told me, before the play was written, that he had the idea of a play like *Mrs. McThing,* with witches and gamblers, I'd have taken an aspirin. But once I read the play itself, I found it so full of warmth and human feeling that I fell in love with it. Several commercial producers saw it and hesitated to go ahead with a fantasy of this kind. Luckily, however, it was being done for ANTA, so we put it on.

Did Mrs. McThing *make you reach for the aspirins for any other reason? How about the children? How did you find working with them?*

H H. I was once advised by a great actress, Emily Stevens: "Never be in a play with a child, a dog, or a railroad train." To many professionals it's frightening and slightly discouraging to see children going out and giving such performances as they did in *Mrs. McThing.* To me, perhaps it was a kind of retribution. When I was seven, adult actresses had to contend with me, and later I had to contend with Brandon and Mimi. But it was a joy to work with them. They had honesty, and a pure instinctive approach to the right expression.

How about playing for *children, Miss Hayes? Are children as audience more difficult to please?*

H H. When the play is for children, it's just wonderful. They take it more literally than grown-ups do. They believe it, and it's thrilling to feel this wave of excitement come across the footlights.

But when it's an adult play—that's different. My lowest experience was a special children's matinee of *Harriet,* which was a play about Harriet Beecher Stowe, and was *not* aimed at children. Our intentions were wonderful—the price of a ticket was only twenty-five cents, and although financially the performance couldn't pay, we were happy at the thought of how the children would enjoy it. Well, they packed the place. And then, when the play began, they found that it bored them, and they let loose at us.

They made airplanes out of the programs and sailed them through the air, they ran up and down the aisles for drinks, they yelled at one another and they drove the ushers and actors wild. In the last act, one of the actresses could no longer help herself and burst into a fit of laughter. I couldn't keep from joining in, and so did the children. This was something they could appreciate. For that moment, they were with us.

But the play itself meant nothing to them. I learned my lesson—never again to do another adult play for children.

I might make an exception, though, for Shakespeare. Chil-

dren as a rule respond well to Shakespeare. For instance, they loved *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare was a wonderful story-teller, and they love the stories, the beautiful language, the action. My son, when he was nine years old, went to see Laurence Olivier in the movie version of *Hamlet* in London, and on his return said that was the best show he had ever seen. Children respond to Shakespeare more in the way the Elizabethans probably did. They are more direct than modern sophisticated audiences, and they like the physical action.

To go from childhood to the opposite extreme, Miss Hayes, how did you age yourself for the role of Victoria, which so greatly impressed everyone? Did you evolve your own make-up, or did you call in a technician?

H H. At first I called in a technician, a make-up artist, and he went to work on me. It took him three-quarters of an hour. But I had only twelve minutes between acts altogether—five minutes to clean my face of the previous make-up and take off the costume, and seven minutes for the new make-up and costume. In those seven minutes I had to rush madly. I had to put on lines, and insert cotton plumpers in my cheeks, and this had to be done with great exactness, with plumpers that were weighed each day and carefully balanced. If not the same size they would have been uncomfortable and created difficulties in speaking. And then had to come the hair-do, the padding, and the costume. It was a more frantic seven minutes than any I spent on stage, and that three-quarter-of-an-hour make-up was out of the question. So I evolved my own make-up.

While you wore it, did you feel yourself old, as if living the character, or was the effect almost entirely external?

H H. No, I didn't rely on the external effect. Actually, I'm not terribly impressed about make-up. I can't feel that it's so important, although that may seem like a paradox from a woman who became so famous for putting on make-up.

I had a vision of Victoria, and I projected that vision. The make-up was a springboard. In *Mary of Scotland,* short

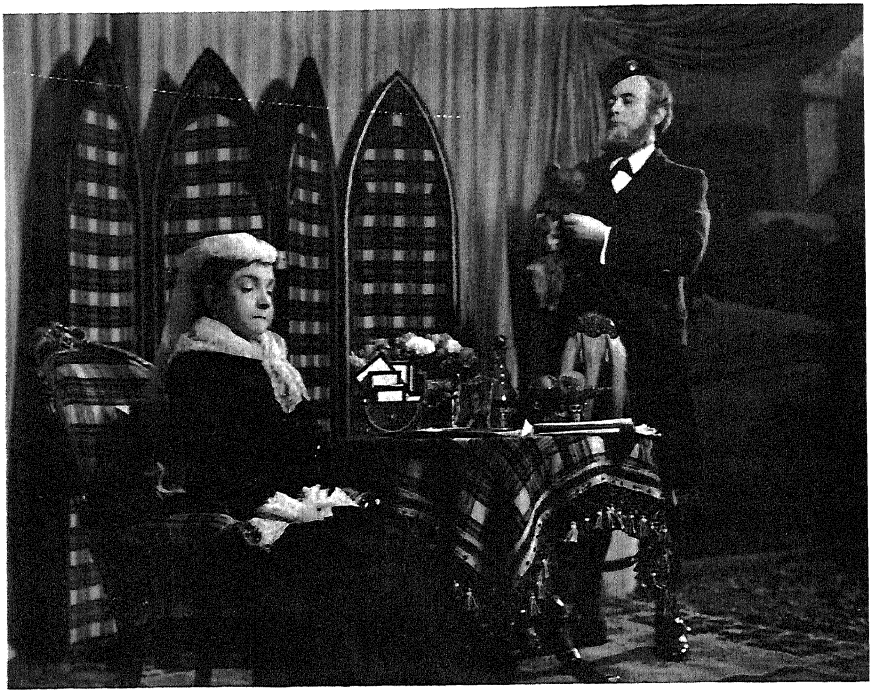


Photo by Vandamm

32. Helen Hayes as the aged Queen Victoria in a scene from Victoria Regina, *by Laurence Housman.*

as I am, I played the tallest queen in history. I thought tall, felt tall—all the work I did on posture helped—and I looked tall.

Miss Hayes, why do you voluntarily give so much time to ANTA? Do you think it will help the theatre very much?

H H. I certainly do. I became interested in ANTA because I believe that the theatre must live in communities. Companies must work in the communities the year round. Young people who want to be in the theatre should go back to the communities from which they came, and work there. They should join theatres, and organize them where none exist. It is of the utmost importance for them to explore the non-Broadway theatre, because the Broadway theatre is a shrinking one.

One trouble with that, though, is that community experience

means nothing on Broadway. You can get fine notices in Omaha or some other large city other than New York, but they won't impress commercial producers, or help you get a job in a Broadway production.

That makes it all the more important to decentralize the theatre, to bring it back to the people. I'm enthusiastically in favor of community theatres. However, too many of them still have a tendency to stage a play simply because it was a hit on Broadway. And they have other weaknesses which we professionals can be of assistance in eliminating. We both have much to gain from each other.

I think that in addition to helping the community theatres, ANTA should make its playhouse a testing ground for new plays and new talents, including those that the community theatres produce.

That will give you an idea of why I regard ANTA as important. I think it has a great part to play in bringing to the people all the good things the theatre has to offer.

How to Make People Laugh

BERT LAHR

Bert Lahr is one of those comic actors who look as if they couldn't stop being funny if they tried. If you have seen him as the Cowardly Lion in the movie version of *The Wizard of Oz,* or as a hero of opera and space opera in *Two on the Aisle,* or if you have listened to the sound of his raucous, penetrating voice, you may feel that here is a born comedian. But when we interviewed him in his dressing room before a performance, he was entirely serious, and he made it clear that he was funny only when he wanted to be.

How do you become a comedian?

B L. You have to have a basis of talent to start with. From then on, it's hard work that counts. But hard work without the talent does no good. You can knock yourself out learning how to get laughs—and if there's no talent, you still won't get them.

What's talent in acting? It's a kind of magnetism, something that makes you stand out in a crowd. I can't define it, but it's there. You can tell it's there when you walk on a stage and people stop looking at the other actors and start looking at you. Another actor falls on his face to attract attention, but all you have to do is pretend you're scared, and the audience forgets about him and looks at you instead. And for some reason it couldn't tell you, it laughs its head off. That's talent in acting.

Why do people become actors, Mr. Lahr?

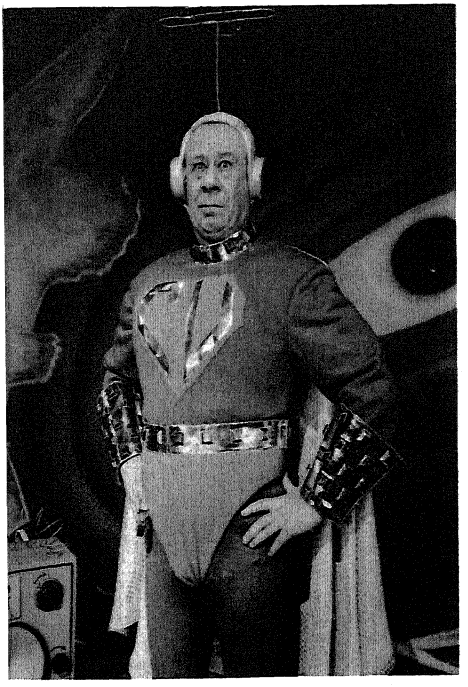
B L. Because ninety-nine per cent of them are exhibitionists at heart. I haven't made any Gallup poll, but I'd put the figure close to that. People like to show off. Some of them have to work for a living, so they can't get to a stage, and they become Lions and Rotarians instead of comedians.

How do you know when you have the necessary talent to go on to the hard work?

B L. You can't tell, yourself, but an audience will tell you. A lot of kids get the idea they're comics simply because they and their pals laugh at their own jokes. My advice to them—for their own good—is to be honest with themselves. If the audience doesn't laugh—forget it.

Doesn't a lot depend on your material?

B L. Sure, but a talented comedian will enhance bad material, just as a poor comedian will ruin all the good material that's given to him. However, if you know your business, you try not to accept bad material. And once you create a distinctive style, writers will write good stuff especially for you.



Courtesy of Arthur Lesser. Photo by Eileen Darby, Graphic House

33A & 33B. Bert Lahr in two scenes from the musical revue Two on the Aisle. Left, as Captain Universe—a satire on interplanetary TV heroes. Right, as Queen (shall we say) Victoria.

How about the producer? Can he make a star?

B L. That's one thing a producer can't do. He can help you, he can give you a chance to make yourself a star. From then on, it's up to you.

Of course, to become a star you need more than talent alone. A certain element of luck enters into it, fate, if you want to call it that. You need faith in yourself while you're working for a break. But if you've given acting enough tries, and you still have no luck, try another profession.

You don't get very much from college theatres. I don't know of a single good comedian who's come out of them. Maybe some of the professors are good comics, but if they are, they don't hand their talent over to their students. I don't think you can study to be an actor. I say it again, if you don't have definite talent, it's useless.

How about the experience to bring out that talent?

B L. Sure, you need experience. Experience will give a comedian the right sort of deportment, it'll teach a comedian to execute his talent more deftly. It'll mellow him, teach him what not to do—and that's as important as knowing what to do. It'll teach him good taste.

How about what the critics call "timing"?

B L. I guess they mean nothing but rhythm, a natural gift for knowing when and how fast to do a thing.

You say it's natural—it doesn't come from experience?

B L. Experience helps here too, but you have to have the basis for it to start with.

While we're on the subject of experience—where can a comedian get it?

B L. There aren't many good places nowadays. Summer stock is about the only way I can think of. Some actors think they can get into a chorus and wait for a break there, but choruses, with

a few outstanding exceptions, haven't brought out comic talent.

How about television and the movies?

B L. The trouble with television is that you think it gives you something for nothing. You get a bad program, but you don't turn it off because it's costing you nothing but your time. That means that some comedians can get by with anything, and they do. Getting by with bad acting isn't good experience. But when you pay six-sixty for a seat, you expect something good. And either you get it, or the show closes.

In movies, these days, the comedian usually doesn't have much to do. The pretty boy and girl are the stars. Besides, the people who make movies are always afraid of going over an audience's head. The legitimate theatre is aimed at a different type of patron, and it uses more sophisticated subject matter.

Sure, there are some things you can't say in the legitimate theatre either, not because there's much censorship, but because audiences won't go for it. You can't make satire too biting, for instance. They won't buy that. But maybe that depends on who gets bitten.

Perhaps there'll be another trend, and enough profit to support round entertainment, and make room for new faces. Then you'll have more great comedians. Right now there aren't so many. It used to be that a man with talent would mold himself by entertaining discerning audiences. Today, comics try to mold themselves by entertaining the average.

Young comics have a problem these days. They find a successful comedian and just copy him, because all they want is to make a lot of money, and they think they've found a short cut. Well, it may turn out to be a dead alley. Years ago you'd go out and fool around, try one thing after another, until you got something that was natural to you, and different from what the other fellow had. Today, everyone copies.

You say there aren't many great comedians. How do you judge?

B L. I take into account that there are different types of comedians. Some, for instance, get laughs by telling jokes. Personally, I have never told jokes. Children like one kind of humor, older

people another. I judge by a comic's method and deportment, by his individualism. I don't judge by his material or execution.

Does a comedian learn to act all sorts of roles, or had he better stick to comedy?

B L. Personally, I've done dramatic shows like *Burlesque* and *Harvey*. You hear that stuff about every comedian secretly wanting to do Hamlet—well, that isn't such a laugh. A great comedian *could* do Hamlet if he wanted to, at least as well as a lot of the actors who've played the part. A great comedian must be a good actor and should be able to make an audience cry as well as laugh, because there's a thin line between them. And an actor who knows when to cross that line can play all sorts of roles.

The Negro Actor and His Roles

FREDERICK O'NEAL

Frederick O'Neal is one of the best actors we have. He can speak perfectly in a great variety of dialects, and he can carry conviction in a wide range of roles, from that of Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* to that of a poor-white Georgia farmer or a Negro doctor or lawyer. He has narrated the story of *Ferdinand the Bull* with the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra; he has been in the moving picture *Pinky,* and in such plays as *A Lady Passing Fair, Head of the Family,* and *Take a Giant Step.* He was unforgettable in the all-Negro production of *Anna Lucasta.*

The fact that he is a Negro actor and has difficulty finding parts is the one thing that keeps him from being better known to our theatre audiences. But his fellow actors know his abilities, and they have elected him a member of the Equity Council, the top body of Actors' Equity Association.

Mr. O'Neal, how did you get your start in the theatre?

F O'N. That was in St. Louis, about twenty-five to twenty-seven years ago. School plays stimulated my interest, and I decided I was going to be an actor.

One of the best ways to learn the craft is to organize a community theatre. That's what I did. We organized the Aldridge Players in St. Louis in 1927. They're still alive, although not very active. We put on *Hallelujah, Emperor Jones, As You Like It,* and so on. Among the other members of the group there were Josephine Buck, a singer, and Winnie Scott, a pianist, who also went on to become professionals.

Later I was a member of the Rose McClendon Players in New York. Dick Campbell was Executive Director. Muriel Rahn and others were also members of this group. And I was one of the founders of the American Negro Theatre in New York.

34. Frederick O'Neal as the Judge in a scene from The Winner, *by Elmer Rice.*

Courtesy of Pix Incorporated. Photo by George Karger

You must have been very serious about the theatre to join so many acting groups.

F O'N. You have to be serious to get anyplace. Most of those in the American Negro Theatre were serious, even more so than a great number of professionals. The training program was complete, as it should be for every little theatre group. And it's worth noting that the people who taught acting, make-up, scenery construction, and so on, were all professionals, top people in their field.

And with all that experience you still find it difficult to get a job?

F O'N. It isn't easy for any actor to get a job. But it's more difficult for the young Negro actor. He has a very narrow choice of parts, slightly broader than it used to be, but not as broad by any means as it should be.

At present I know of only nine Negro actors working in the Broadway legitimate theatre.

Simply because there aren't enough parts for more?

F O'N. That isn't the only reason. Producers *could* cast according to the requirement of a part, without regard to color. Some producers do. At the University of Wisconsin, for instance, to a great extent they cast according to ability and not color. But most producers have preconceived ideas about what parts should be played by Negroes, and some have strong and definite prejudices.

So a Negro actor has plenty of difficulties to face?

F O'N. Yes, he has the same difficulties as a white actor, plus all those that arise because of his color. He knows that on the road, for instance, he'll have difficulty finding hotel accommodations. That's another thing that makes him hesitate. And he has less chance to learn his craft, for such knowledge comes mostly through doing.

There's another thing, too. You know that many people used to regard the theatre as a snare of the Devil, a den of iniquity. That belief persisted for a long time also among my own people, who were very religious, and it kept many of our young people from thinking of the theatre as a profession. The subjects the theatre dealt with didn't do much to change their minds. The Negro background has been systematically excluded from the history and traditions of our country. You'll read in history books, for instance, that Lincoln freed the slaves, but you won't read that the slaves fought hard for their own freedom. Well, the theatre, like most other institutions, paid little attention to the things that concerned our people. And Negroes weren't greatly interested in plays that dealt with problems that didn't concern them, or that had Negro characters only in the role of servants.

So a Negro actor has to think about a lot of other things besides acting.

F O'N. Yes, We have a Negro Actors Guild, which cares for sick and indigent Negro actors as part of the Theatre Authority set up by the Four A's to distribute funds. Various unions—American Guild of Variety Artists, Actors' Equity Association, Chorus Equity, and Television Authority—have set up committees to explore employment opportunities for Negroes. And Actors' Equity and Chorus Equity have arranged to meet the League of New York Theatres, and the Dramatists Guild, to discuss greater integration of Negroes in the legitimate theatre.

We don't spend our time on these problems because we want to. We'd rather spend it learning and acting new parts. But the problems are forced on us, and we have no choice but to face them.

THE STAGE MANAGER

WHEN A SHOW actually opens, the work of the author, the director, and the scene and costume designer is usually at an end. There are exceptions—cases where the play has received a mixed press and the producer hopes to keep it running with the help of considerable revision. But in the normal course of events, whether the first night has been successful or not, the captains and the kings depart (the producer-god remains, of course), and their task is taken over by the stage manager, who supervises all the details of putting on the play.

In a noncommercial group, the director and the others often will *not* depart, and will continue to work on a play for as long as it runs. Nevertheless, in every theatre there are a hundred details which they will relegate to others—tasks which must be performed by members of the cast and the stage crew. In amateur groups, these tasks are all too often neglected. Actors forget to be on stage at the right time, props are misplaced, the wrong lights are turned on. Frequently these mishaps result from the fact that no one is responsible for seeing that they don't occur.

In commercial productions, as in well-organized community theatres, there is no shirking this responsibility. It belongs to the stage manager, who must supervise the activities of the stage carpenters, electricians, and prop men as well as of the actors. Many duties, like prompting, will be relegated to an assistant. But even with assistance, the stage manager is still one of the busiest persons in the theatre.

Stage managing is not simple. At present, the American Theatre Wing is conducting courses in it backstage of all the shows now running on Broadway. The theatre will soon have stage managers to spare. But in the past, the art has not been easy to learn.

What a Stage Manager Does

RUTH MITCHELL

Some people—including some producers—think that a job of this sort requires a rough, touch approach that only a man can have. Ruth Mitchell, who as we write is stage manager of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The King and I*, does not fit into this picture at all. She is pretty and petite, and we mistook her at first for a dancer in the show. But we quickly found that it was only half a mistake.

R M. I did start out as a dancer and actress. But while I was in one show, the need for an assistant stage manager arose, and I volunteered. It meant only a small increase in salary at first, and the work was exhausting, as I kept my position as a dancer while learning my new job. However, I'm glad I did it, for it was the start of a whole new future.

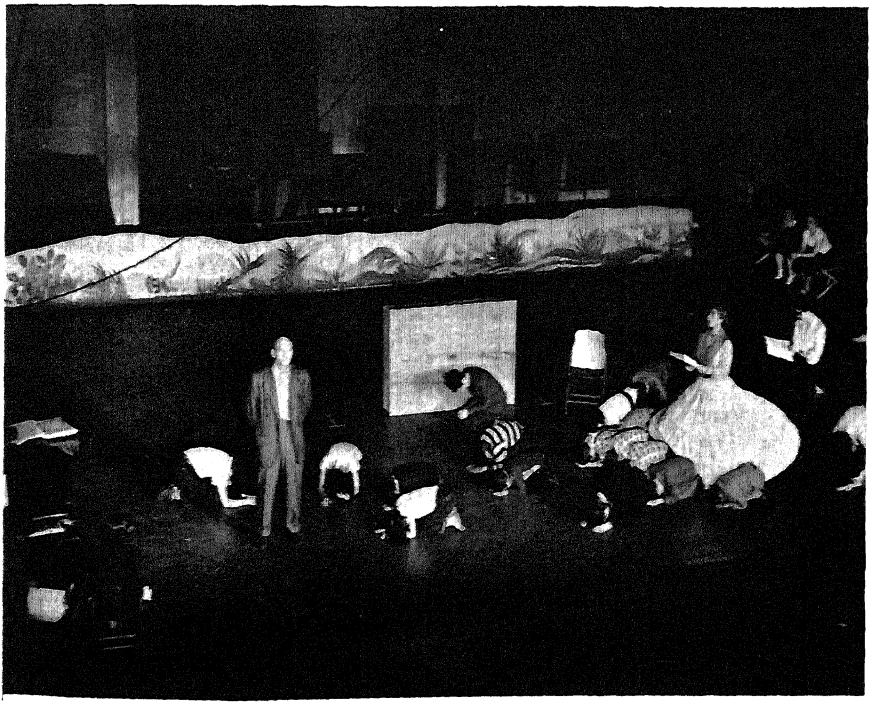
How does the average stage manager get experience?

R M. Usually, the best place is in summer stock. But it isn't easy to get into Equity—stage managing, you know, is part of Equity.

What are your duties?

R M. To keep up what the author, director, and the other artists have created. You work with them before the opening, so you know how things are done. You or your assistant notify the actors thirty minutes ahead of time, then fifteen minutes, and so on, finally warning them to be on stage with: "Places, please." You check the list of props, the things that are carried or used on stage, to see that they are in place. Usually, you and your assistant work on opposite sides of the stage, in order to check the exits and entrances on both sides.

You're responsible too for seeing that the sets are in place and the costumes in order, although here the wardrobe mis-



Courtesy of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Photo by Zinn Arthur

35. Ruth Mitchell, stage manager of The King and I, standing to the right of Yul Brynner as the King, and Constance Carpenter as Anna, during a rehearsal.

tress has actual charge. When the show starts, you time each scene, and you indicate where cuts are needed in case the show runs overtime.

You're in charge of the lighting. There's a lighting plot sheet to indicate the positions and intensities of all the lights, and you have to follow that. Sometimes the lighting is so complicated that you need a special assistant for that alone.

You're responsible for giving the stage hands the cues for offstage noises. That too can be a full-time job, as it was in *Mister Roberts,* where there were hundreds of ship noises, voices over the microphone, and other sounds that had to come in at exactly the right times.

You're busy from before the show starts until after it closes. All sorts of accidents can happen—curtains can foul, scenery can be misplaced, etc. You have to see that, despite

accidents, the show the audience watches runs smoothly. There's no time out during intermissions either, because you have to prepare for the next scene or act.

Then, between shows, you conduct the rehearsals of understudies, and you direct the new actors who come in as replacements. If the top star is replaced, the original director may be called back for a time, but otherwise the job of directing replacements is yours.

Such work can be creative, to a certain extent. Moreover, you do have a chance to learn how others create. And if you have the ability, you can go on to become a producer, director, or author, as some stage managers have done.

You make sure that all absentees in the cast are replaced. Sometimes you may have to go on stage yourself. Equity doesn't allow a stage manager to act as understudy, although it does allow an assistant stage manager to do so. But in case of emergency, say, when you learn a minute or two before curtain time that an actor is ill, you're permitted to replace him.

If any extra jobs turn up during the play, they're likely to be your responsibility. The cast of *The King and I* includes fourteen children—and I'm the nursemaid. They make the show just as exciting for me as for the audience, especially when they outgrow their parts and have to be replaced. They bawl like babies at the thought of leaving.

Are there any other executive jobs about the production that you haven't mentioned?

R M. Well, there's the production stage manager, who works with the producer in pre-production work. And the company manager, who is the producer's business manager for the show. He makes up the payroll, and so on. But he has to do with the front of the house, and has no part in the staging of the show.

Is stage managing especially difficult for a woman?

R M. No. The only physical difficulty is in the number of hours you must put in.

But there is still prejudice against women as stage managers?

R M. Definitely. However, producers will overcome it if you convince them you can do the job. Stage managing isn't easy, but it's a necessary part of the show. And I feel that for me it's been worth while.

MUSIC AND DANCE IN THE THEATRE

THERE IS AN OLD and cynical bit of advice which experienced critics have long given to new playwrights: if your words sound too silly to be said, have them sung. Nobody demands that the words of a song make sense.

That, as we say, is a bit of cynicism. It twists the truth. It *is* true that many musical productions do not make a great deal of sense as a whole, and that therefore nobody expects the songs in them to be much better. Music of all kinds, however, finds a home in the theatre, not in order to hide the silliness of a playwright's words, but to produce an emotional effect which words alone might not have. The same is true of dancing. Before words can affect us, they must not only be seen or heard, but understood. Some of Hamlet's most eloquent lines mean nothing to a young student who is unfamiliar with the words Shakespeare used, or baffled by his poetic images. But music and dancing act much more directly, and they have some emotional effect regardless of the degree of education of the spectator.

If the music and dancing are used *together* with a playwright's words, the emotional effect will be all the greater. That is why, from the earliest days of the theatre, they have been inseparable from drama, often being more important than the words themselves. Many of the Greek classics lose their effect upon us because the scripts we read cannot include the songs and dances that were so important in the original productions. And the same is true of scripts from Japan, China, and other countries.

In Shakespeare's time, songs and dances had still another purpose. They were used to break up what audiences considered the monotony of straight dialogue. Shakespeare's comedies were interrupted by frequent airs and jigs. Some of the songs for which Shakespeare himself supplied words have come down to us. But there were many others which the actors added *ad lib*, of their own free will. And there are works of

Molière which contain entire ballets which have nothing to do with the play proper.

In modern musicals like *Oklahoma!* or *Bloomer Girl*, the ballets, created by Agnes de Mille, are definitely part of the action. They contribute to the essential feeling of the play, and without them the performance would be incomplete. But in many of the older works, the jigs, airs, and ballets need be left in only if there are highly skilled performers to do them. Otherwise they will hurt the production, and had better be omitted.

You will find that the problems of combining music and dancing with the words of a play will face you in every kind of script. You can most obviously expect to meet them, of course, in a revue or musical comedy, where most of the performers may have to do less acting than singing and dancing, and will be chosen primarily for their abilities in these directions.

Now, even a high school of moderate size may have enough talented pupils to fill the cast of a musical production. Young pupils may lack the experience and polish of a cast of Broadway professionals. But with careful coaching they *can* put on a good show. The records of the Thespian Society prove that each year many high-school groups throughout the country do perform to the satisfaction of large audiences.

One of the danger spots of a high-school production, as of an amateur production generally, is likely to be the accompaniment. On any stage, amateur or professional, you are always faced with the problem of a singer who will omit a word, line, or even an entire chorus. When that or some other emergency occurs, an accompanist dare not go right on playing his part, or chaos will result. To keep the show from falling apart, you will need to have a good musical director, who will sit in the orchestral pit before the stage, and keep an alert eye and ear on what is happening. The moment something goes wrong, he will signal the accompanist.

A first-class pianist won't even need the musical director's signals. He'll hear what's happening, and follow every change the singer makes so skillfully that the audience won't even realize anything has gone wrong. A two-piano team, such as provides the accompaniment in the summer theatre, will have more trouble. And an orchestra will have to be very skilled

indeed for every one of its members to get the musical director's signals and respond to them correctly and without hesitation.

That is why the best form of accompaniment for the amateur stage is a single piano, played by a skilled performer, who should be at least as good a musician as any of the singers. Many high schools have such pianists, and they can add immeasurably to the success of a musical show. The musical director, usually a member of the faculty, will have to possess even more skill and experience.

What sort of musical should an amateur group give? That, to a large extent, depends on the talents the group has available. Gilbert and Sullivan operettas have long been popular with high schools, and so have the operettas of Victor Herbert and a few other composers. They make no great technical demands of the singers, but they do require pleasant and flexible voices, and Gilbert and Sullivan do call for a good sense of comedy. If properly performed, these operettas are almost uniformly entertaining.

Sometimes a high-school group will find it possible to give an old musical comedy that was once popular on Broadway. And occasionally it will be able to put on an original revue or musical written by its own members. You will find original musicals more often in colleges, where there are more students who have had the necessary training in writing and musical composition. But they have been given by a few high schools also.

A musical production has special requirements in addition to the obvious ones of singers and dancers. The lighting is different from the lighting of an ordinary play. It is intended to convey much more the mood of a song or dance than the appearance of a place, and there is a greater use of spotlights to center attention on the performers. The sets and costumes, too, are different. Like the lighting, they are less realistic and more stylized. Their purpose is to provide striking and effective stage pictures, and, as Howard Bay has pointed out, they offer difficulties that other stage settings do not. In a revue, for instance, the designer must start each scene from scratch, without regard to the previous scenes. And it is not easy to be continually starting all over again.

Some straight dramatic plays call for songs or dances as

part of the plot. In a story dealing with a musician or dancer, music and dancing would be almost inevitable. In *Death of a Salesman,* on the other hand, none of the characters actually sings or plays a musical instrument. But there is a musical background which continues throughout the play and contributes greatly to the emotional effect produced by the words and action. No performance of *Death of a Salesman* would be complete without this music.

In the examples we have considered, with the exception of some of the operettas, it is the play, and not the music or dancing, which is the main thing. If you sacrifice the play for the music, you will have an opera; if your play exists chiefly to provide a framework for the dancing, you will have a ballet or other form of dance which tells a story. Both opera and ballet are part of the theatre. We are not considering them here because they have special problems of their own, and are outside the limits we have set for ourselves in this book.

There are some plays which have no songs or dances in them, and were written without any thought of a musical accompaniment. Even a play of this nature sometimes finds itself being acted to music. But you had better be careful of the kind of music you add. The movies long ago found out that a musical accompaniment should not distract the audience's attention from the story itself. Music that is too powerful and melodies that are too striking make us forget the action going on upon the stage, instead of centering our attention upon it.

One of the things every dramatist learns is that no play consists merely of words. Not only what the actor says but what he does helps carry out the playwright's purpose. In fact, entire plays have been given in pantomime, with gestures and movements and bits of business, and possibly with sound effects, but without a single word. In the movies and on television you will find stretches two or three minutes long of action without words. And even in the living theatre, which cannot change scenes as rapidly as the movies and television can, you will find long and effective stretches of pantomime.

Much of dancing is pantomime with the addition of stylized motion (as in the ballet, for instance). In order to increase the effect upon an audience, an actor not only approaches his stage enemy with a defiant expression on his face, but whirls

around and then bounds into the air as he does so. A sane individual in real life is hardly likely to act that way. But the whirling and the bounding do help make clear to the audience what the character feels. And such methods are, after all, no more than exaggerated forms of the gestures and movements used in ordinary acting.

For acting does not consist merely of gestures and movements borrowed from real life. What the actor does is intended to be seen or heard by an audience. On the street, a man may clench his fist so imperceptibly that none of the people around him notice it. Or his voice may tighten almost imperceptibly with the anger he feels. But no actor wants his stage emotions to go unnoticed. *He* will clench his fist in so conspicuous a fashion that the spectators in the back row are sure to see it. And his voice will make clear, to the best of his ability, that he is in a rage.

What the actor ordinarily does, then, is to use exaggerated methods for the sake of appearing realistic. In music and dancing, he exaggerates still further and appears frankly unrealistic, for the sake of conveying genuine emotion.

We have seen that voice and body training, such as the singer and the dancer undergo, are almost indispensable to the actor. The methods of the composer and choreographer can be similarly useful to the play director. Good dance composition, for instance, involves not only the use of the dancer's body; it requires the proper utilization of the entire stage space. We talked about it to choreographer Zachary Solov, who had for the first time in the memories of most operagoers made ballet at the Metropolitan Opera a spectacle worth watching.

He pointed out that in order to get effective composition and variety, the choreographer must, even more than the play director, arrange his dancers carefully. He must balance left against right, upstage against down. Or he may set his dancers going in a circle. The director may do the same thing, in not so obvious a manner, when the effect he intends to create is that of a chase, either physical or emotional.

There is another kind of movement which the choreographer frequently uses—from one level to another. When he consigns his dancers to the floor level, they seem to be groveling near the earth; when they bound into the air or leap

up onto a platform, the effect is one of spiritual reaching up. The rapid change from one level to another provides very effective movement.

The stage director too can make good use of such movement. He can utilize steps and staircases and pieces of furniture, he can have a contrast between characters who are sitting and standing. In what is known as "plastic" staging, the set is designed with many different levels in order to emphasize the possibility of up and down movement.

There are times when it becomes difficult to say whether the actors are singing and dancing or not. When you *chant* your lines, as you may in a Greek play, you are already halfway between speech and song. When you rush wordlessly from one side of the stage to the other to express a kind of frustrated despair, your movements will not be "natural." They will be carefully stylized, in the manner of dance.

It becomes clear, then, that at least the elements of song and dance are present in every play, no matter how "straight." Singing and dancing, which were so conspicuous a part of the theatre in the beginning, may sometimes be less noticeable now. But they can no more be banished from it than can acting itself.

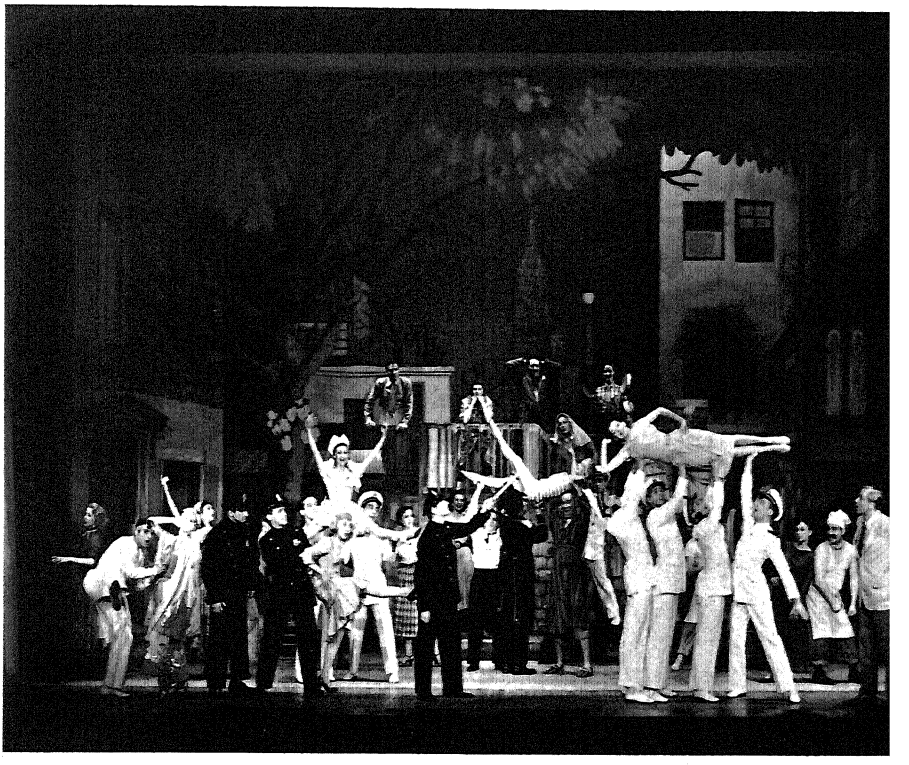
The Composer in the Theatre

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

A musical comedy stands or falls as much by its music as by its comedy. And just as there are few first-class actors who can play a comic scene for all it is worth, there are few top-notch composers who can write well for the stage. One exception is Leonard Bernstein. Still a young man, Mr. Bernstein has not only written the music for such Broadway successes as *On the Town* and *Wonderful Town,* but has composed in a more serious vein (notably the *Jeremiah Symphony* and his second symphony, *The Age of Anxiety*). He has done the music for *Fancy Free* and other outstanding ballets, has conducted all our leading orchestras, and has appeared with many of them as piano soloist. Mr. Bernstein is, for Broadway—or for that matter, anywhere—an extraordinarily accomplished musician, and we wondered whether that might not be regarded as a handicap by people who think a composer for the commercial theatre shouldn't know too much.

Does training in musical composition help you to write better musical comedies? How much do you really need to know about music to write for Broadway?

L B. The more training a composer has, the better equipped he is. Of course, at present the musical comedy is still, for all its sophistication, in a fairly primitive state, and there is a division of labor in writing the music. You can get away with being a composer on Broadway without knowing how to harmonize a simple tune. All you must be able to do—and that requires a great gift—is to compose the tune. Some of the highest-paid composers on Broadway can do no more than pick out their melodies at the piano. But after them comes a host of busy beavers, who take those melodies over. They do a lot of hard work harmonizing, arranging, orchestrating. As musicians they're much more skilled than the official composer. A good many of them, in fact, are frustrated composers themselves. But although they are fairly well paid, they receive little or no



Courtesy of Wonderful Town Company. Photo by Vandamm

36. Rosalind Russell held aloft by members of the Brazilian Navy in a scene from the musical comedy Wonderful Town.

credit. And yet they're the ones who give the composer's simple tunes the texture, the color, the richness, that make it worth listening to.

Personally, I like to do every phase of the music myself. I had time for that with *On the Town,* for which I did everything but the orchestration of the songs. *Wonderful Town* was more of a rush job, and the arrangements of songs and ballets had to be done by others. Of course they were well done, but I still prefer to handle all the music myself.

I think that when we finally get a school of American opera it will have its roots not in the European opera, which so many of our composers imitate, but in our own musicals. And the better the composer is equipped, the better for the future of the musical theatre.

To what extent is the knowledge of theatre helpful in writing music for the theatre?

L B. To the fullest extent. At present, knowledge of the theatre is more important for the musical-comedy composer than is musical knowledge. He has to know what kind of music is necessary and where. And no amount of dramatic *knowledge* can replace the dramatic *sense*, which you either have or don't have.

How do you put all this knowledge to work, Mr. Bernstein? Which comes first, the music or the words?

L B. Every team works in a different way. It depends on whether the book-writers are also doing the lyrics. When I worked with Betty Comden and Adolph Green on *On the Town*, we did it the hard way, all of us working together on everything. That may take a little longer, but it's more flexible, and the results are worth it. Usually, however, the lyricist writes the lyrics first and the music is then set to them. Jerome Kern, on the other hand, used to compose the music first, and the lyrics would be written to fit. To some extent it's a matter of personal preference, and to some extent it's a question of working according to a standard blueprint.

There is a cut-and-dried way for musicals to be born, and the formula has lasted for a long time. There's a rhythm song, a ballad, a ballet, etc., each set in its formula position in the play. One of the rules of the theatre has been not to have a ballad or a slow song near the end of the show, because after sitting for a couple of hours the audience is supposed to be too tired and restless to listen. But that formula can be broken, and, more and more, musical writers and composers are moving away from *all* mechanical formulas.

Isn't there a danger, Mr. Bernstein, of breaking with formulas too fast, of getting away from what audiences are used to, and being too highbrow?

L B. If you're highbrow in the wrong way, if you're heavy or pompous, or pretentious, of course the audience won't like it. I'm not for being highbrow on purpose. The lightness or

seriousness of the music should depend on the nature of the musical play. The distinction of the music must be in the handling of it.

Does the composer have any say as to where a song would be most effective, or is the decision just put up to the writers of the book?

L B. Of course he has a say. A show is a co-operative effort. There must be constant conferences among writers, choreographers, and composers. Everyone must have something to say about the final results.

Does the composer present the choreographer with music and just say: "Create a ballet"? Or is it done the other way around?

L B. The ballet is also a mutual effort. Sometimes the choreographer has more to say. She or he will tell the composer, "I need about thirty seconds of fast music, forty seconds of love music," and so on, but that makes it very difficult for the composer, and there are cases when the music comes first and the dancing is fitted to it. Composing for the theatre and ballet is a complicated business of give and take.

How can youngsters interested in musicals get into the field? Thousands of songs are written each year, many of them tuneful and catchy. How can you tell what will be a hit?

L B. If a youngster has an exceptional talent, he'll become known. But it may take time. If you are unknown, it is next to impossible to get a hearing at a song publisher, and I advise young people not to fall for the ads which promise publication on a small fee. You may have to spend years just trying to get your songs heard. And the situation is complicated by the fact that the success of a song doesn't depend just on its being good. It may be the result of a special publicity campaign, of a tie-in to some public event, or of some quirk of public taste that nobody could predict.

That's why when a young song-writer comes to me and shows me what he has written, I may think that the songs are

pretty bad, but I won't say, "Forget about them, don't waste time trying to sell them, you'll never be a success." He *may* be a success. Some very bad songs have become hits, and I'm not prophet enough to predict where the lightning will strike next.

What types of musicals do you think a school should put on? Will youngsters learn more from their own original work, or from producing an established work?

L B. If there's enough talent available, originals are more fun. On the other hand, inexperienced youngsters can learn by doing already established musicals. Because there are larger casts than in dramatic plays, a musical can involve a large part of a class and all students will learn a good deal about music, timing, rhythm, dancing, and singing a song. And, what is even more important, they'll be involved in a large-scale co-operative effort where they will learn to know one another better and find out how to work together. That's something they have to know, no matter what else they do.

Staging Dances in the Theatre

AGNES de MILLE

Ever since Agnes de Mille did the choreography for *Oklahoma!*, ballet has been a part of musical comedy. Before that there had been time-steps, kicks, and standard dance routines—most of them serving the same purpose as the pistol shots and firecracker explosions with which some comedians liked to awaken their audiences, and having no more claim to being art. Miss de Mille's ballets were lively, they didn't let the audiences fall asleep, and wonder of wonders, they were also art. They made those who watched them realize how essential a part of a play dancing could be, and left behind them dissatisfaction with the emptiness of the old routines.

But the dances for *Oklahoma!* are only a small part of Miss de Mille's creative work. She has also choreographed *Bloomer Girl, Carousel,* and such successful ballets as *Rodeo* and *Fall River Legend.* In all her dance work, as well as in her autobiographical book *Dance to the Piper,* there is evident a warmth of human feeling not easily matched on our stage. It is a warmth that audiences recognize and respond to.

How are these feelings expressed in gesture and movement? Do you express them the same way in a separate ballet as in a revue or musical?

A de M. There's a profound difference. In a revue the dancing has to startle and amuse an audience which doesn't want to be serious, which wants only to relax and watch something it can easily understand. In a musical you're less restricted in mood, but you're working with a book show and the dancing has to fit into the story. You have to deal with characters, costumes, and a set which are designed frequently for purposes other than dancing. Often you have to illustrate a song. In a ballet of your own the theatre is all yours.

In a musical I try to keep my patterns simple, direct, formal, and brisk. In fact, I can't help trying, for some one is always

putting a pistol to my head. Cut out three minutes of this dance, eliminate the most important section of that, throw out this one altogether. You have so little time to create the effects you want that you have to eliminate any gradual approach. Ballet for musicals is a compromise form, but sometimes a compromise can be very good. The very nature of the restrictions makes for compactness, and forces you to express a great deal in little time.

Do you aim chiefly to express a mood, or to advance the story?

de M. I generally have both kinds of dancing. I like the dancers to be characters in the play. I try to develop them. In the old ballets, gesture was based on the classic technique, the only exception allowed being in comedy. The new choreographers try to evolve the gestures from the characters and the situation. That isn't easy, and it may take me weeks of hard and lonely work, and great quantities of strong tea, before I even begin to work out the pattern of the dances. From the beginning I see my characters in color and costume, but I spend hours of thinking and moving before I'm sure of how any one of them will walk, stand, or gesture. I don't start on rehearsals until I have a fairly good idea of how the whole composition will look, and have made diagrams to help me. Rehearsals of a new ballet aren't like rehearsals of a musical composition, which is finished once it's put down on paper. I have to continue creating, now using the bodies of the dancers to experiment with. Good dancers are wonderful. They not only help create, they take part in the creation themselves, they invent gestures and movements, and they inspire you to invent. When you work with them, you're really collaborating.

Nowadays, the demands a ballet makes on both choreographer and dancers are greater than ever. A good dancer has to be able to act while dancing, and you have to direct the acting too. The dance is no longer merely a pattern of movement, it must convey emotion to the audience. But you're paid for your troubles in the actual performance. Once the conductor raises his baton, the whole show moves into a different dimension, without benefit of trick cameras or a wide screen. It doesn't matter whether a dance is good or not,

Courtesy of The Theatre Guild. Photo by Graphic House

37. A scene from the ballet in* Oklahoma!, *by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, choreography by Agnes de Mille.

there's a dynamic change from the moment it begins, and the straight actors suffer from the contrast.

Has the quality of the dancers in musicals changed much since Oklahoma! ?

A de M. The dancers are totally different. And so are the singers. You no longer have chorus girls who can barely carry a tune or perform the simple steps you show them. You have trained singers and dancers. The latter have graduated from the ballet and done modern dancing as well. A chorus girl of the old type, who could do no more than a time step and a break, couldn't get a job.

Now that we no longer have lines, size doesn't matter, within reason. Looks matter more, but not so much as they

once did. A girl should be healthy, fresh, and sweet-looking, a boy manly. A dancer needs talent and training. A choreographer won't insist on experience. Dancers have to be young, from sixteen or seventeen to twenty-five or six, and by the time they get their experience, they'll be finished as dancers, unless they have enough talent to become stars.

One thing a choreographer does look for is ability to work with people. The choreographer's own work is difficult and nerve-racking and he doesn't want a girl who sulks, has hysterics, is dependent on her mother, or starts quarrels in the company. He wants someone who knows her business—which is dancing—and will work her best at it.

When you've choreographed a ballet and you're forced to use a replacement who has less skill, can you simplify the dancing without losing much of the effect?

A de M. I frequently have dancers with limited technical ability. But I can't take a role that's tailored for one person and transfer it to another individual. It goes beyond technical skill. Character is all-important, the gestures flow from that, and if a dancer, for whatever reason, can't repeat the gestures as well as the facial and bodily expressions that go with her part, if she has to substitute different gestures and expressions, she's at the same time substituting a different character. That's why, if in a modern ballet you replace one performer by another in an important role, you usually change the entire effect not only of that single role, but of the entire ballet.

What happens to your work, Miss de Mille, when the musical goes on tour? Does it suffer from the changes in the size of the stage?

A de M. I have to use the space that the scene designer marks on the floor. Space limitation can be just as heartbreaking as time limitation, and can change the ballet completely. I lost a quarter of my best work in *Carousel* because of that. But once your dances are set, touring won't change them. Most theatres have fairly large stages, and if the scenery fits in them, there'll be enough space for dancing.

Sometimes a show suffers on tour, just as it does on Broad-

way when it has a long run, and the actors and dancers fall into a rut. But the cure for that is simply to insist on the original high standards. The stage manager and producer must keep the company on its toes. The mere fact that the show is on tour isn't responsible for its getting worse.

What type of movements would you suggest as best for inexperienced dancers who want to learn, say for the purpose of putting on a high school musical comedy?

A de M. They should learn folk and square dancing, with a good teacher. A folk dance has been tested by audiences over a period of generations, and you can be sure that if it is still danced, it works. Dancers and choreographers can both learn from it. It forms the basis of much modern work, certainly of my own. Folk dancing gives beautiful movement, and once a dancer has learned folk dances, he can go on with confidence to other forms of dancing.

A dancer who intends to work professionally should also study ballet for the placing of the spine and legs and feet—always with a qualified teacher. But I'd advise anyone who planned to become a professional dancer to think not twice but a hundred times before starting in. The difficulties are overwhelming, the disappointments heartrending. Even when you get to what so many people think of as "the top," you can't rest there. There's always the danger of making one mistake and sliding down. And women have to face special difficulties when they look for work as directors and choreographers.

When you overcome the difficulties, you have a wonderful feeling. But to most young people, I'd say that the way to enjoy the dancing in musical comedies most is from the audience, and not from behind the footlights.

The High-School Theatre

EACH BROADWAY SEASON brings before the public several young performers who prove that acting can be child's play. It is true that not every child of school age can act with professional ease. But with proper training and capable direction, most children can do very well, as an occasional grammar-school class will show. The real difficulty that young children face is in finding scripts that are suited to their needs and abilities—scripts neither too foreign to their interests on the one hand, nor too cute and cloying on the other. As it is, grammar-school children do manage to put on tens of thousands of plays. They are less self-conscious than, and as good as, many adult groups who do plays and skits in Parents' Associations, YMCA's, YMHA's, and clubs.

On a more ambitious level than young children are many of the high-school groups. Of approximately twenty-five thousand high schools in this country (we owe this and the other estimates and information concerning high schools to the kindness of Mr. Leon C. Miller, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the National Thespian Society), slightly more than half, possibly fifteen thousand, may produce a play now and then. Vocational, technical, and rural high schools are too ill-equipped to grasp often at the glamour of the stage. Of the fifteen thousand play-producing schools, possibly one-third cannot meet the standards of the Thespian Society. Of the others, approximately twelve hundred and fifty are at the present writing enrolled in the national organization.

Working under great difficulties, many high schools prefer to give one-acters, rather than full-length plays. During a school year, the Thespian troupes put on approximately twice as many productions of one-act as of full-length plays. Some, however, present a full evening of one-act plays in order to give more students a chance to perform. Relatively few schools have as many as four full-length productions per season. Most manage two or three, and some can give only a single per-

38. A scene from The Winslow Boy, *by Terence Rattigan, produced by the Bosse High School Thespians at Evansville, Indiana.*

Courtesy of The National Thespian Society

formance. Some schools also put on operettas, revues, and pageants.

Good full-length plays written especially for teen-agers are hard to find. For the most part the schools rely for their major productions on past Broadway hits, chiefly comedies, like *You Can't Take It With You* and *Arsenic and Old Lace,* and a few more serious plays, like *Our Town* and *Pride and Prejudice.* Classics, if given at all, are given rarely, either because they are considered too difficult, or because the taste for them has been killed.

Few high-school teachers have the time to establish contacts with college and professional theatres. In most cities, high-school theatre is extracurricular, and the play director may teach anything from chemistry and mathematics to history or English during the day. Very few high schools have a dramatic arts department.

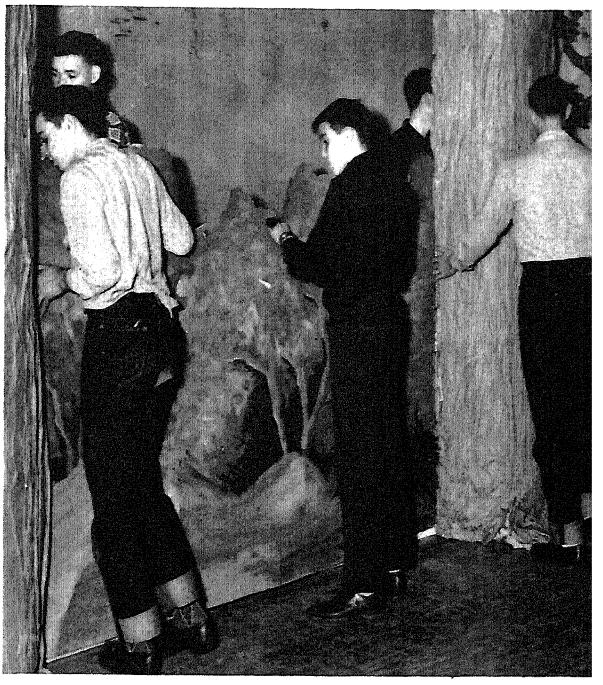
The scenery is usually made in the school workshops. But, according to Mr. Miller, only a few schools have elaborate lighting systems. Border lights and footlights are standard equipment, and only within the past twenty years are spotlights being commonly used. A large percentage of the high-school auditoriums do not have even old-fashioned resistance dimmers, let alone electronic dimmers. In such auditoriums. a light is either on or off, and there is little chance for the creation of subtle or complicated lighting effects.

For these high schools, the National Thespian Society, with its magazine *Dramatics,* and its newsletters, is their chief contact with the theatre.

Some of the secondary schools in large cities are better equipped, and receive more support from the local school authorities for their study of dramatic activities. For information about them, we spoke to Christine Edwards, one of the few teachers who have had extensive experience in the professional theatre. Miss Edwards is Chairman of the Department of Speech and Dramatics at Prospect Heights High School in Brooklyn, and teaches television and the psychology of speech at Hunter College. She has acted and staged plays in many theatres, as well as in radio and television, and the stars she has directed include Edith Atwater, Marlon Brando, John Loder, and Margaret Wycherly.

She has found excellent dramatic groups in many schools in the West. But she is most familiar with the school system in New York City. Here, she points out, there are special opportunities for students interested in the theatre. Not only is there a High School of Performing Arts. The Board of Education itself conducts a radio station, WNYE, and different schools put on radio plays in competition on a weekly program called *Drama Time.* The best students are selected to attend the all-city workshop conducted under the supervision of James F. Macandrew.

Miss Edwards herself teaches classes in acting and speech, which are accepted in the curriculum as replacements for the more usual courses in English. From the beginning, students of acting are carefully taught technique by means of the Stanislavsky method. They learn to develop their imagination, to get at a character from within. After the first term, they act in scenes from plays. As a rule, the students who are cast in the



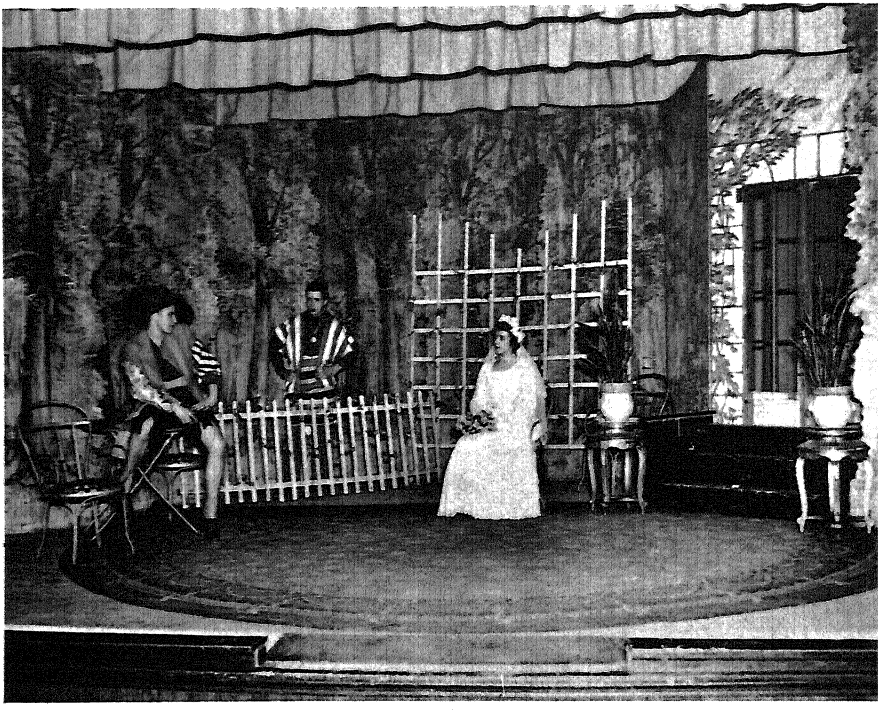
39. A high-school stage crew at Parkersburg, West Virginia, putting up a set.

Courtesy of The National Thespian Society

play for the school year come from these classes. A call for a general audition usually results in few volunteers from students outside the classes.

The acting classes are of the same size as others, with from thirty to thirty-five students in each. After the elementary classes, many students drop out, especially those who had no intention of becoming actors in the first place, but began their studies for other reasons. There are, therefore, fewer advanced classes. By the time a student reaches one of these, Miss Edwards knows his or her capabilities fairly well, and finds it simpler to cast the play.

How does she choose the play? "In consultation with the principal and the students," she said. "Every director usually has a list of pet plays, those that seem most enjoyable and instructive. One of mine is *Icebound,* a Pulitzer Prize winner by Owen Davis. But it isn't just a question of what I want, but of what the students want too. I had them read it aloud, and they liked it. And when the principal approved, we went ahead with it."



Courtesy of The National Thespian Society

40. A rehearsal scene from* Katherine and Petruchio *at Central Catholic High School, Canton, Ohio.

Students might do single scenes from Shakespeare and other classics, but she felt that an entire Shakespearean play was too difficult. It takes long experience and great skill for an actor to speak the lines without losing either their music or their meaning.

The time needed to prepare a single play is from October or November to May. A period of four months may be considered a minimum. The ideal method, Miss Edwards feels, would be to have the play studied by a class for some time before the tryouts, with groups of students concentrating on different aspects of the play—on the historical period during which the action takes place, on the reasons for conflict, the nature of the characters, and so on. In practice, there is not enough time for this.

Rehearsals take place three or four times a week, often to

six o'clock, and occasionally into the evening. Sometimes they are held on Saturdays and during Easter week. In some schools the students taking part in a three-act play receive credit toward their diplomas, and if they work long beyond school hours on certain days need not come in early the next morning. This is not true of most schools, however.

A good student production, well managed, may make a fair amount of money for the school's general organization fund, and benefit the entire student body. For that matter, a faculty performance can be equally good box-office. Miss Edwards put on one faculty production in which the leading role was played by the previous principal, a woman nearing seventy and almost at the point of retirement. Her acting was sensational and the show was a smash hit.

The big problems in high-school productions are connected with the physical nature of the stage and auditorium. Fire laws are strict and must be observed. Few high-school auditoriums have direct exits to the street. Lacking such exits, they must have either an asbestos curtain or a sprinkler system. The flats and drapes should be fireproofed.

Miss Edwards feels that one of the great opportunities a high-school play offers is for co-operation among students, parents, and faculty. Both the art and the manual training departments are of great help in the construction of sets. The music department can supply the singers or instrumentalists needed for a musical production. And girls from the sewing classes can help make some of the costumes.

Sometimes special costumes can be borrowed from the faculty or parents. Miss Edwards has found both groups very helpful in contributing to the success of a play. She suggests that notices of articles needed be posted on the bulletin board far ahead of time. She has had luck in picking up old chairs, rugs, and other furnishings by combing the neighborhood.

Co-operation can also be carried beyond the limits of a single school. An all-boy or all-girl school working alone is limited by the fact that there are few good plays which call for all-male or all-female casts. And it is psychologically inadvisable for girls to play male roles, or vice versa. The two schools working together can put on a much wider variety of plays, and can combine their talents in such skills as sewing and carpentry.

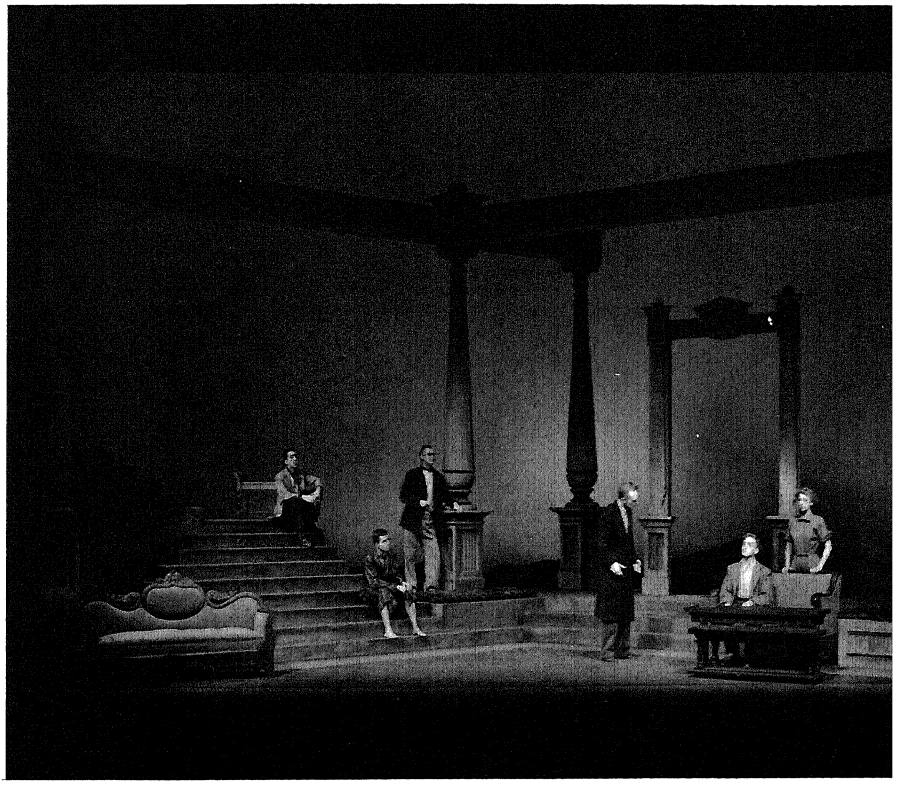
Miss Edwards finds that with a cast of students who have been taught the technique of acting before actually beginning work on the play, good performances can be obtained.

In addition to the play put on by the dramatic class, the high school may also do a senior class play, and a play to celebrate the holiday seasons. It is not until the students actually begin to work on such plays that they realize how much they can gain in a knowledge of English, speech, ability to co-operate, and even in emotional stability. In this last respect, psychologists have long recognized the value of the theatre, and Miss Edwards has given classes in therapeutic dramatics for emotionally disturbed children and teen-agers.

Educators have found dramatic classes to be instructive. Students find them to be fun. High schools would benefit from more of them.

The University Theatre

FROM THE HIGH-SCHOOL to the university theatre is a great step. College and university theatres are staffed with full-time teachers and are in many ways on a professional level. They often have advantages that commercial producers envy. Many have specially constructed buildings, more elaborate and more suited for play production than most Broadway theatres. And there is no profit-consuming rent to pay. Their equipment too is usually modern and complete. George Freedley, who has made a special study of the college and com-



Courtesy of Yale University. Photo by Commercial Photo Service

41. A scene from Children of the Ladybug, by Robert Thorn, as presented by the Yale University Department of Drama.

munity theatres, estimates that eighty per cent of university theatres have equipment which equals or surpasses that of Broadway.

Because the intention of the universities is to teach, the student actors, directors and designers receive no payment. Instead, they pay to learn. Here again the Broadway producer has reason for envy, for his constant complaint is that what profits the high theatre rents leave are eaten up by wages and salaries.

Do the college and university theatres make proper use of the advantages they have? Many of them do. They produce not only popular plays, but good plays that have for some reason or other missed popularity. Some of them welcome new plays that are not "commercial." Others experiment with new methods that Broadway is often reluctant to try.

A few universities operate more than one theatre. The University of Washington School of Drama, for instance, has not only a Playhouse, but a Showboat Theatre and a Penthouse Theatre. The latter was the first theatre in the world to be built purely for arena-style production, and its long years of experiment with production-in-the-round preceded the present popularity of this form of theatre.

The Baylor (University) Theatre in Waco, Texas has presented a wide variety of great plays, from Shakespeare to Oscar Wilde. It has devoted time to such classics as Carlo Goldoni's comedy *The Mistress of the Inn,* which it presented in the season of 1946-1947. Goldoni is played in Europe, and his comedies are full of life and humor even by our own tastes —but it is a long time since he has had a hit on Broadway.

University theatres are usually alike in not having to worry too much about the box office. But in other respects they differ greatly from one another and from the commercial theatres. Let us take a good look at one that has some rather atypical advantages and see how it operates.

The Columbia University Theatre, as we learned from Dr. Milton Smith, professor of dramatics, derives considerable advantage from being near Broadway. In putting on its plays, it sometimes has access to professional talent that the average university theatre cannot reach. A Broadway actress may take a difficult part, a graduate of the school who has become a professional designer may do the scenery. Many of the stu-

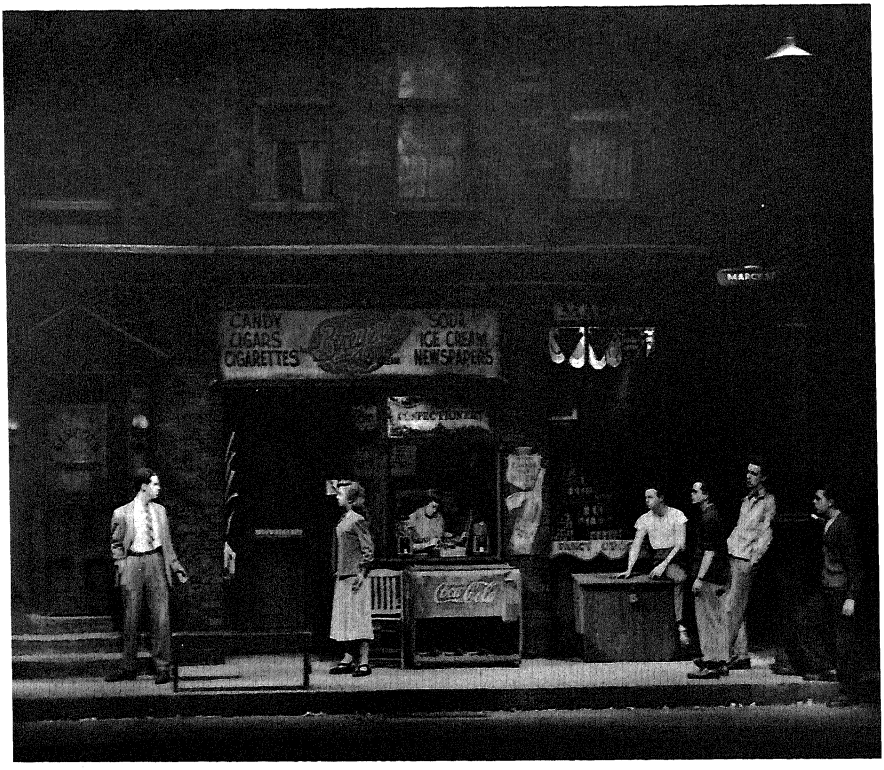
dents themselves have played on the professional stage, usually with road companies. Columbia is therefore in an especially favorable situation, and as a result it can occasionally put on a better production of a given play than Broadway itself.

The theatre does four or five major productions a year as a subscription season, and several laboratory productions. The major productions receive from five to ten performances each. Dr. Smith tries to choose scripts that pose interesting problems in acting, directing, and designing.

The major productions are done in as close to a professional manner as possible. Students who have never acted before have a chance to show what they can do in tryouts, which are much fairer than readings. Just as on Broadway, a

Courtesy of Catholic University

42. A rehearsal of Sing Out, Sweet Land, written and originally directed by Walter Kerr for Catholic University. The play was later successfully produced on Broadway.



Courtesy of Carnegie Institute of Technology. Photo by Daniel Franks

43. A scene from an original play by student playwright Louis Adelman, presented by the Drama School of Carnegie Institute of Technology.

player may turn out to be unsuited to the role for which he has been selected, and may have to be replaced. In casting, Columbia, like any other university, is at a disadvantage compared with the professional theatre. A commercial producer has hundreds and thousands of professional actors from whom to choose. The university production has only a few dozen students. It is sometimes difficult, therefore, to find the right actor for a given part.

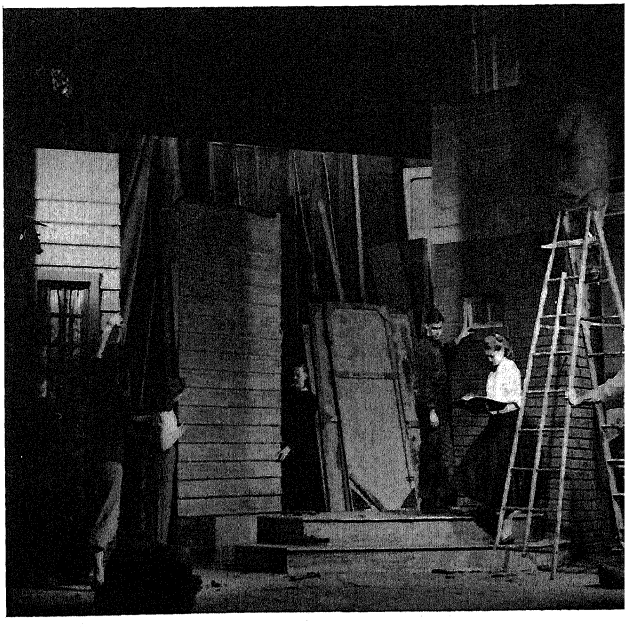
Supplementary productions are done exclusively by the students, and are intended to give new people a chance to learn. These are open by invitation only.

Because of casting difficulties and the limitation of rehearsal time, the acting tends to be the weak point of a university production. At Columbia the students paint and

build sets two nights a week and rehearse three nights. The total time spent on rehearsal is from a fourth to a third that spent on a Broadway play. In view of the relative inexperience of most of the actors, this is a serious handicap.

An actor who has spent years in the profession usually learns quickly how to deliver his lines with effect. A student actor must be told, and very often retold. A professional actor has learned to make his actions emphasize his words and vice versa. The student cannot as a rule do so, with the result that his movements tend to be stiff, his words to sound stilted. Where the professional actor seems to be the character he is playing, the student seems to be only an actor.

This is true chiefly of conventional situations, in which the professional is experienced. The presence of a few such actors in the cast makes the director's job much easier. He can trust many details to them and keep his eye on the main line of the play. But with novices he must teach while he directs. He must explain everything detail by detail. He must move the players carefully around the stage, making sure that they do not mask one another from the audience's view. The most apparently trivial oversight can lead to a loss of effectiveness in a scene.

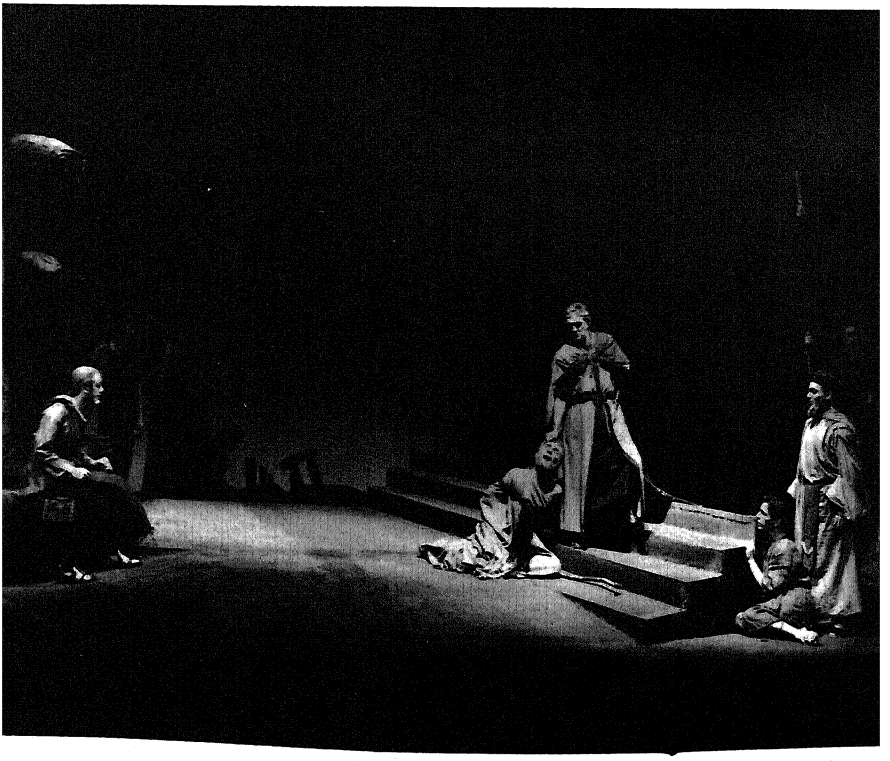


44. The performance over, student stagehands strike the set and take inventory.

Courtesy of Syracuse University. Photo by C. George Chapin

The student will sometimes have an advantage, however, in plays whose situations are not stereotyped, plays in which a professional actor may ruin a scene by calling upon his bag of tricks. The student has no bag, or else a very small one, and he realizes that the few tricks he knows are not yet very effective. He will therefore be readier to explore the meaning of the play, to admit that a character baffles him, and to listen to the director.

It is true that even if he does get the idea of the play, he cannot manage his voice and body with the perfect assurance that comes only from years of experience, and he may be unable to project this idea to the audience. But at least he will be less likely to act in a stereotyped manner. The plays of Ibsen baffled most of the commercially trained English actors of from half to three-quarters of a century ago. They could

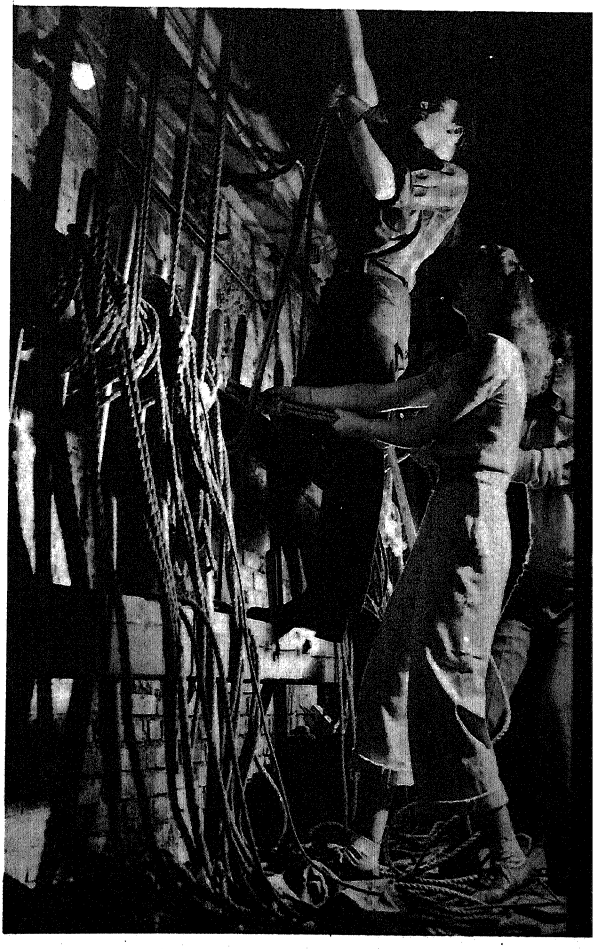


Courtesy of Catholic University. Photo by Harry D. Kalid

45. A scene from* Oedipus the King *as directed by Alan Schneider for Catholic University.

not change from the bombastic style to which they were accustomed to a quieter, more realistic manner. These plays still continue to baffle many of the actors who are lured into acting in them, simply because they are different from what most actors are used to. The student is not used to much of anything on the stage. He has a better chance of understanding Ibsen.

In the university theatre, as in the theatre as a whole, the choice of a play is the difficult thing. There are always classics, but few actors want to perform in classics alone. The hit plays of some years back are soon dated, and young university



46. Student stagehands at Syracuse University.

Courtesy of ANTA. Photo by William M. Rittase

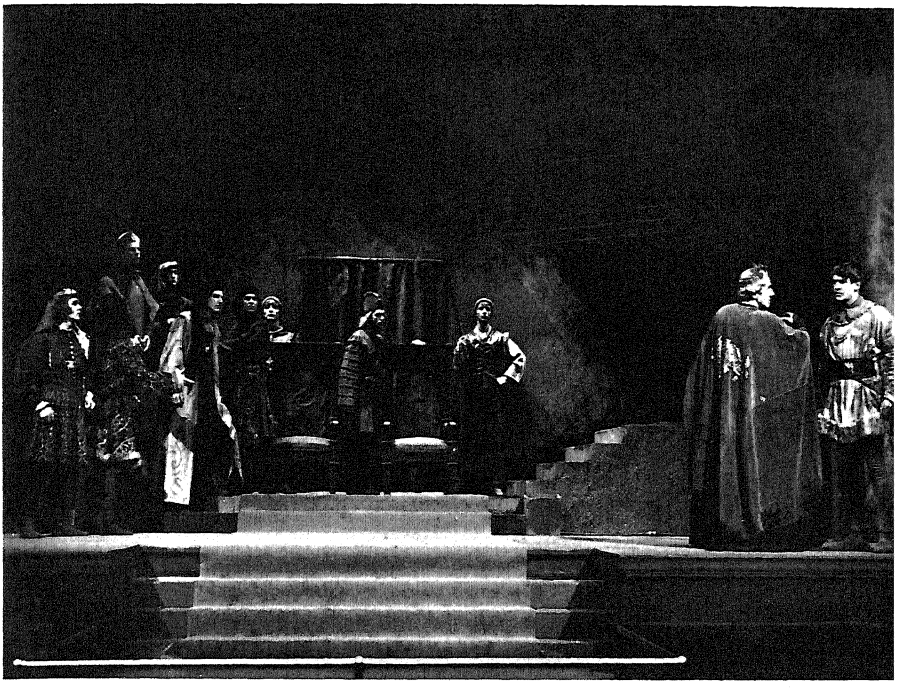
actors, more ambitious and more critical than they were in high school, are often contemptuous of the taste of the older generation. The hit plays of a current season, on the other hand, are unavailable. University theatres sometimes fall back on plays in which a potential producer is interested. A commercial tryout would cost tens of thousands of dollars whereas a university tryout costs practically nothing. In order to see his play on the stage, a canny producer will therefore offer it to the university royalty-free. To make his gift seem even more alluring, he may possibly throw in a few costumes or props, or subsidize it in some other way.

The students and director usually enjoy doing a new play which offers problems they have not solved before. They would enjoy it even more if they could put on plays that their audiences and producer-sponsors would consider good. Unfortunately, few university theatres have been able to locate plays which can be transferred successfully to the commercial stage.

Nor do the universities seem able to incubate their own playwrights. Some years ago, Professor Baker's famous course in dramatic writing at Harvard turned out prominent authors ranging from Eugene O'Neill and Rachel Crothers to Philip Barry. But when Professor Baker transferred to Yale he had less success, and since his time the crop of university playwrights has dwindled away.

In other phases of the theatre, the universities are more successful. Their courses on speech, pantomime, the study of roles and scenes, and so on, have helped many fledglings to become professional actors. And their classes in stagecraft and design, as well as in business practices, have been of benefit to apprentice designers and producers.

Unfortunately, no love is lost between the universities and many professionals. The close contacts between Columbia and Broadway are exceptional; in general, co-operation, although it is increasing, is still very limited. We have already noted, in some of our interviews, the harm this lack of relationship does. It sets a bar between the two kinds of theatre. And it intensifies the evils of inbreeding. Most professionals never think of teaching. And most teachers spend their entire careers at a few universities, without ever becoming part of the commercial theatre. There is a great deal missed by both sides.



Courtesy of Stanford University

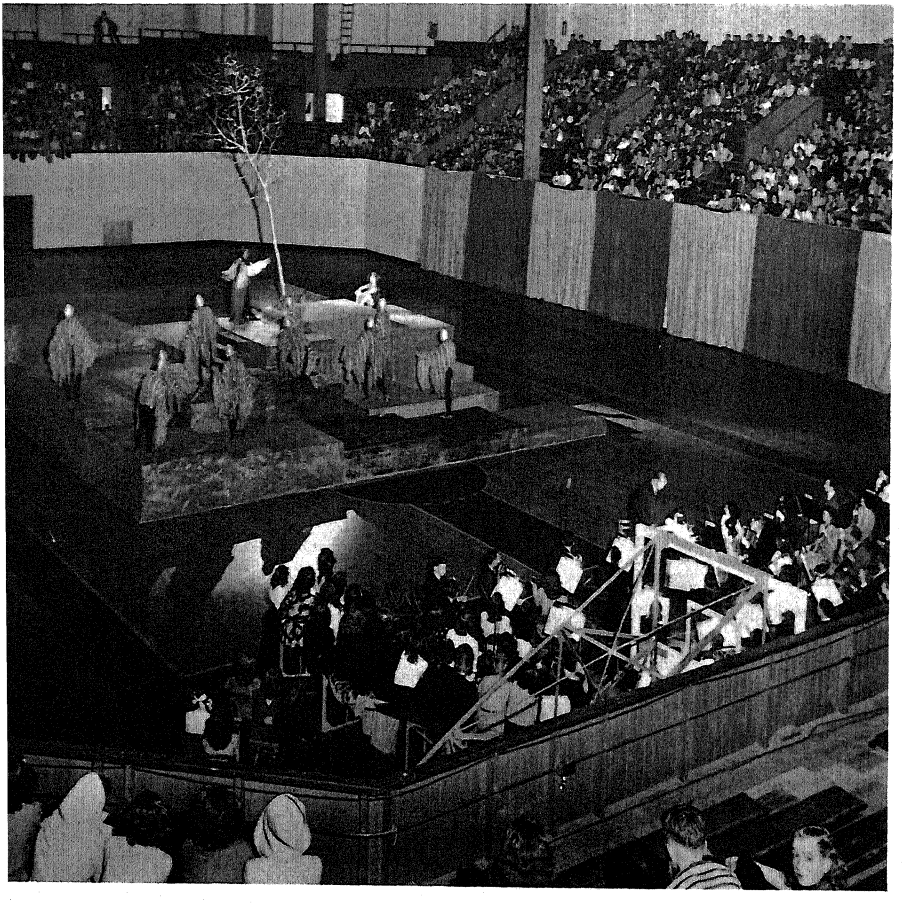
47. A student performance of Richard III designed and directed by Dr. A. Nicholas Vardac of Stanford University.

Perhaps another difficulty which the University theatre faces is the nature of its audiences. The success of a production, as we have noted, is not measured in money, and hence there is no worry about having the small auditorium filled. The students have enough friends and relatives to occupy a large proportion of the available seats, and people who live near the university take the others. The audiences are serious, sympathetic, and understanding—perhaps too understanding. It is good to have an audience that will make allowances for student deficiencies—but not too many.

As it is, the universities deserve credit for one important thing they do—it is they, along with a few community theatres, who keep the classics alive on the American stage. Most producers shy away from Shakespeare, Ibsen, Molière, and Aeschylus as if those unfortunate gentlemen were internationally famous pickpockets, lying in wait to rob them of tens of thou-

sands of dollars. The occasional exception who risks his shirt on *King Lear* or *Hedda Gabler* knows that he is almost sure to lose it, and is regarded by his fellow producers with the tender sympathy they reserve for a good man suddenly gone mad.

The university theatres, academic and cloistered as some of them may be, nevertheless have this virtue which cannot be too often stated: they do not have to choose their plays with the idea of making money. And when they look around for a script, they discover that many ancient works still seem a bit more alive than most of the material written for Broad-



Courtesy of ANTA

48. A Midsummer Night's Dream *as staged in the basketball pavilion in circus style by the University of Oregon's School of Drama.*

way during the first three or four decades of our own century. So they do Shakespeare, or Molière, or even Euripides.

And meanwhile, they do teach many students a great deal about the stage. Imperfect as they are, they can give excellent reasons for staying alive.

The Summer Theatre

IF YOU WANT TO begin your training for the stage in a summer theatre, one of the most useful props you can have is a hammer. This is not, as you might imagine, in order that you may practice knocking, and thus start on your way to becoming a critic. It is because, as an apprentice, you will be expected to do a little bit of everything and a great deal of one particular thing—putting up and tearing down sets. And as hammers are always getting lost, many summer theatre managers have decided to make you bring your own and take over the responsibility of keeping track of it.

Summer theatres are commercial theatres. Their number —and number, to some extent, means importance—far exceeds the number of active Broadway theatres. On the Atlantic Coast alone, from Maine to North Carolina, there are approximately a hundred and twenty-five Equity companies and from twenty to twenty-five non-Equity companies (and we are not counting all the hotel and camp groups which put on plays, without aspiring to the dignity of the name "theatre").

Through most of the 'twenties and 'thirties, the summer theatre was a stock theatre where a small resident company put on a series of plays throughout the season. The visiting star system is often supposed to have begun with the appearance of Basil Rathbone in 1925 in Dennis, Massachusetts. Actually, according to Lyman Brown, an authority on the subject, it had begun long before. By the 'thirties it was in full swing, and in the postwar period it flourished like the green bay tree, or like the rankest of weeds, and to a great extent displaced the older system. By now, visiting stars have become an almost indispensable part of the summer theatre.

Summer theatres vary greatly in so many details that it is difficult to paint a single picture that will serve as a portrait of all of them. Perhaps we can make clearer some of the features in which they all differ from their year-round com-

mercial brethren by centering our attention on one theatre and seeing how it works.

The one we chose is the Sea Cliff Summer Theatre at Sea Cliff, Long Island, operated by Thomas G. Ratcliffe, Jr., and Louis Macmillan. The theatre building itself is a converted Methodist tabernacle. Its auditorium seats 599 people, the maximum permitted for this type of building by the New York State building code. It has no balcony or gallery, and is small enough so that no member of the audience needs opera glasses to see what is going on upon the stage. The stage itself is smaller than that of a Broadway theatre, but still large enough even for summer-theatre versions of musical comedies.

The Wharf Theatre at Provincetown was started in a fish house, and other summer theatres have taken over large barns. The Sea Cliff Theatre has no odor of departed fish or cows to contend with. But as a penalty for being part of nature, it does have an occasional insect performer, such as a moth which seeks the spotlight in competition with the actors. There are not many, however. "Bug bulbs" light up the outside of the theatre without luring insects from all over the surrounding countryside. And, fortunately, Sea Cliff is not afflicted by the mosquitoes which have been known to attack other summer theatres.

The apprentices number fifteen. Selected from about three times that number of applicants, they receive no wages and pay for their own room and board. They are here to learn about theatre, and they do, although at Sea Cliff there are no formal classes, as there are at one or two other theatres.

Those theatres which offer classes charge a season tuition fee of from two to three hundred dollars, and do not have the apprentices as part of the regular company. The apprentices put on plays separately.

At Sea Cliff the auditorium is swept, after performances, by a paid employee. There are professional designers and professional box-office personnel. The ushering is done by Girl Scouts, who work for drama merit badges; a weekly donation for their services goes into a Girl Scout fund. Most of the other detailed work is done by the apprentices. They take phone orders for tickets, they construct sets, they take turns running the switchboard, handling props backstage, helping

the stage manager, assisting the publicity man with releases, and so on.

They also act, although not as often as they would like to. At the beginning of the season they are given a tryout which serves several purposes. It lets Mr. Ratcliffe see how well they can perform—and some, he says, have considerable talent. It is also meant to make them realize how much they still have to learn, to instill a proper humility, and to make them satisfied to wield their hammers. It does have this effect on many of them. Others remain convinced, however, that they can do better than the regular actors, and sooner or later they have the chance to prove their beliefs. Before the season is ended, every apprentice will do at least a walk-on, and most will be given speaking parts.

There are eight actors who have contracts for the season (the minimum prescribed by Equity is six). Almost all of them are hired on the basis of Mr. Ratcliffe's personal knowledge of their ability. From season to season he interviews a long procession of applicants. During the 1952 season, he saw three hundred. In these interviews there is time for the actor to give a brief résumé of his experience and to show how he speaks and carries himself. Allowing fifteen minutes per interview, the total time spent in interviews alone is forty-five hundred minutes—seventy-five hours. This cuts seriously into the manager's schedule, without giving the applicant a chance to show any real acting ability. Mr. Ratcliffe says that he feels it is his duty to give an actor a hearing, and no one who writes for an appointment is turned down. There are no auditions, however. Too many good actors give bad performances at auditions, and too many bad actors read well the first time, and then fail to improve.

The odds are against any actor's being hired unless the manager has a personal knowledge of how he has performed previously throughout an entire season. There are one or two fortunate exceptions each season, chosen usually on the basis of striking physical endowments, as well as of apparent acting talent. Apprentices, of course, have a better chance. More of them are hired, and the requirements are not so severe.

The actors hired must have considerable all-around ability. While performing in one play, they may have to get ready for the next one. And sometimes they may have only one or

two rehearsals in which to perfect the delivery of their lines and learn their stage business, and decide on how to work with an imported glamour girl and her leading man (or a male star and his leading lady).

These, and many other difficulties and complications, result from the visiting star system. Because the Broadway theatre is at so low an ebb, and because the movies are also cutting down on the number of pictures being produced, many stars whose names are box-office attractions find themselves at liberty during the summer. And because they want to act—or at least appear on a stage—almost as much as they want to breathe and sign autographs, they look around for a play to suit their talents. Most of the time this is an old hit which they would like to revive; occasionally it is a new play which a producer would like to see tried out at little cost.

Let us suppose that the manager of the Patamisquam Playhouse, situated near the imaginary (we hope) village of Patamisquam, Massachusetts is willing to revive the one-time hit *The Great Love,* with Janine Smith as star. *The Great Love* will then undergo a week of intensive rehearsal. Janine, who is paid for only that single week of learning her part, prefers not to let things drag. But if another week of rehearsal is absolutely necessary, then, in view of the fact that *all* rehearsals must be paid for, Janine will accept half her usual salary for each of the two weeks. As star salaries range from seven hundred and fifty to three thousand dollars a week, even a half-salary is far above the Equity minimum.

The dress rehearsal takes place on Sunday night, and is likely to be just as discouraging as a dress rehearsal of a Broadway production. There has been so great a rush in putting the play together that loose ends seem to turn up everywhere. These cannot all be tied together before the first performance on Monday night, and during the first day or two the Patamisquam audiences may be viewing a rather slipshod performance of *The Great Love.* But by Wednesday, many difficulties have been ironed out. The actors are sure of their lines and business, the backstage crew is working with greater calm and efficiency. The Thursday matinee serves as another run-through, and from then on the audience sees a good show.

In the meantime, next week's production of *The Great Hate* has begun rehearsal and is almost ready. But Janine Smith

does not wait around to see how the new play turns out. After her Saturday night performance, she packs her trunks and departs for another summer theatre, and the beginning of a tour in *The Great Love* that will last for several weeks.

The next theatre may be the Sea Cliff. Here the production of *The Great Love* will present fewer problems. Janine already knows her part, and she is likely to be touring with a leading man or two leading men who also know their parts. It is only the supporting roles that have to be cast from the actors of the Sea Cliff company.

These actors will do their rehearsing at Sea Cliff, perhaps while appearing in *Love and/or Hate,* without seeing Janine Smith in her play at all. On Sunday, however, Janine makes her appearance with her leading men, there are one or two quick run-throughs of those sections of the play in which the Sea Cliff actors appear, and then a dress rehearsal on Sunday night as usual. And on Monday night, the Sea Cliff theatre presents Janine Smith in *The Great Love.*

This system is a hectic one for all concerned. Janine may have to undertake a difficult role with insufficient preparation and master it as she goes along. The Sea Cliff actors must be quick and versatile. They must be able to learn new roles in *The Great Love* while playing eight shows during the week in *Love and/or Hate,* and they must be able to adapt their acting at the last moment to the requirements of the star. The managers of the theatre must continue producing *Love and/or Hate* while getting ready to produce *The Great Love,* and while making plans for the still more distant future, which will see the appearance of other stars in *Oh, Love!* and *Oh, Hate!* and still other revivals.

Scenery does not go on tour. The apprentices at Sea Cliff build and put up a new set each week, making full use of their fifteen hammers.

The summer theatres, like the all-year-round commercial theatres, continually work under the shadow of financial disaster. At Sea Cliff, the weekly expenses, excluding the salaries of the visiting star and her cohorts, amount to $5,000. Twenty years ago this would have been more than enough to keep a play running on Broadway. A highly paid star may raise the level of expenses to more than $8,000. In the face of such high costs, a heat wave or a rainy week end which keeps

the audience away from the box office will leave the theatre with a disastrous loss.

Nowadays, Broadway producers, in trying to keep their costs to a minimum, do the same thing with their casts, and are always on the lookout for two- or three-character plays. But the summer theatres, with all their actors and apprentices anxious to act, can offer less skimpy casts. And in case a play calls for additional performers—children, a minister, a chief of police, etc.—these can be picked up wherever convenient. The actors and the business staff can among them manage

Courtesy of Seacliff Summer Theatre, Long Island. Photo by J. Peter Happel

49. Kim Hunter, Art Smith, and Robert Emmett in a scene from* They Knew What They Wanted, *by Sidney Howard, as performed at the Seacliff Summer Theatre.

to supply a reasonable number of children of various ages. Other characters can be enlisted from the local residents. A work permit must be secured from Equity at a cost of five dollars (paid by the theatre). But the temporary actor does not usually demand a salary. He is sufficiently rewarded with the honor of being permitted to act before an audience.

In former years, an Equity rule required any apprentice who appeared in three parts during a single season to become a member if he wanted to go on acting. The chief result of this rule was to swell the number of unemployed actors with Equity cards, and it was therefore changed. Now an apprentice is permitted to act any number of times during his first season. If he acts in three parts during the second season, however, possibly at a different theatre, he must become a member of Equity. An Equity card, however, does not assure him of a job. This new rule makes things more difficult for the youngster who is merely stagestruck, but it is no great obstacle to the talented youngster who is determined to get ahead in the theatre.

When a musical is put on, the pool of talent among actors and apprentices, even with local help, no longer suffices. In a musical, practically every member of the cast must be able to sing or dance, and the original producers of *Love Me or Hate Me!* will usually send the complete summer company on tour, leaving possibly three or four acting roles to be filled by the Sea Cliff company. The slight difficulty that this drives expenses up even higher than usual bothers no one but the managers.

A few summer theatres, the "music circuses," put on nothing but musicals. Sea Cliff provides its accompaniment to the singers with two pianos. But the music circuses have small orchestras, and the members of their companies are chosen not only for acting talent but for appearance, and singing and dancing ability as well. Like other theatres-in-the-round, the music circuses are faced with special problems in staging, some of which we discuss in the chapter on "Music and Dancing in the Theatre." The expenses of putting on musicals on Broadway are terrifying, but the music circuses have solved this problem fairly well from their own point of view, and, although their number is still small, it seems to be increasing.

Until a few years ago, many producers packaged all

their plays, sending on tour not only the star and her satellites, but the other players as well. In view of the fact that the resident players had to be paid whether they worked or not, it became almost impossible for the theatres to end up their week with a profit, and managers protested. And most of them, as members of the Stock Managers' Association, have made an agreement not to accept such packaged casts in the future.

In general, the managers of summer theatres do not seem to lead placid lives. Their operating season is a short one—ten weeks, at Sea Cliff. Eleven- and twelve-week seasons have been tried without great success. But preparations are lengthy, and very often the managers must start as early as March to get the actors and line up the plays and stars they want. Even at that, they very often do not know from one week to the next what play they will produce. They may have signed a contract to bring Janine Smith to their theatre. But weeks may go by without Janine sending in *her* signature to the contract. Suppose that she claims she never agreed to appear at Sea Cliff or Patamisquam in the first place. What does the manager do then? Committing suicide or shooting Janine is not the answer, although very frequently he is tempted to do one of these things.

Even after the star has made a definite commitment, she may cancel the contract by giving notice at least three weeks before the date when she was supposed to appear. (The manager has no similar right to cancel.) If she does not give notice in time, neither hell (as exemplified by hot weather) nor high water (in the form of a summer flood) will prevent her from acting. If she reports that she has broken a leg, the manager will grudgingly admit that she has an excuse for not appearing, provided that the leg is really broken. If he suspects that it is in one piece, the case may go to arbitration, and the star may have to pay a penalty equal to the salary she was supposed to get. Mere illness, however, is no excuse. Janine may be running a temperature of a hundred and ten, and she may have a hectic flush that will shine through any make-up. No matter. It is the tradition of the summer theatre that she must go on.

The Sea Cliff theatre is located in a well-to-do residential section of Long Island, and most of the people who attend it are all-year-round residents. But most of the other summer

theatres rely mainly upon the patronage of visitors and vacationists, and it is this audience which to a large extent determines the nature of the theatre. Not knowing in advance whether a production will be good or bad, the audience seizes upon the name of the star as the most important factor, and makes it impossible to get rid of the star system. "Light summer reading" has its counterpart in the "light summer play." Many vacationists prefer comedies and farces to more serious plays, although an actress who really wants to test her skill and has a great box-office appeal will deliberately produce a serious play that has been a hit in past seasons.

The classics have had small place in the summer theatre, despite the fact that their authors usually demand no royalties. But some managers are determined to put them on, and you

Courtesy of ANTA

50. A scene from* The Trojan Women, *by Euripides, as performed at the Hillbarn Summer Theatre, San Mateo, California.

may run across an occasional production of Shakespeare or Molière. Shaw's *Candida* was revived in summer stock before being sent on tour in the fall.

To many an author, royalties from summer stock come as an unexpected windfall. Even an ancient farce which most theatre-goers think of as dated or dead may be resurrected as a "vehicle" for a star's beauty, personality, or skill, and its author may have the pleasant surprise of receiving an income from a work which Broadway has long forgotten.

For a play to which the original producer has lost his rights, that is, a play which has not been performed seventy-five times or more in a year, the royalty is $150 per week. For a recent Broadway hit which is released for summer stock, the royalty will be either a $300 guarantee or four per cent of the gross, whichever is higher (in some exceptional cases it may be $600 or $700). For a new play, the rate will be around $200, although this is subject to negotiation.

The production of revivals has several advantages for the summer theatre, which, we must not forget, is primarily a *commercial* theatre. In the first place, the play has been audience-tested and shown to be a superior piece of merchandise, at least while it was in fashion. The script is in finished form—very rarely does a director waste time rewriting much of an old comedy, although the lines could often stand being brought up to date. If there are any difficult production problems, they have been met before and solved.

With an untried play, the producer must begin from scratch. The summer theatre is not a good enough market for a new play, and the producer always has his eye on Broadway. The play is thus subject to all the usual troubles of a new work—continual rewriting, recasting, change of interpretation, and so on. Moreover, the producer is continually trying to assemble the best possible cast for a run on Broadway, so that he insists, even more strongly than the producer of a revival, upon sending out the play as a unit and thus raising the cost to the theatre visited. And because he is more interested in the money the play will make in a long run on Broadway than in what he will get for a single week at Patamisquam or Sea Cliff, he is always tinkering with his production, using the audience merely for tryout purposes.

All these considerations complicate the lives of the man-

agers. They are all of them highly skilled men or women—they must be in order to put on a new play each week under difficult circumstances. Many, even among those the general theatre public regards as having purely commercial interests, would like to put on only good plays. But the temptation to do so is an expensive one, almost as expensive as on Broadway.

The fact is that some summer theatre audiences will welcome bad plays about as cheerfully as they do good ones—more cheerfully if a bad play has a famous star and the good play has none.

Whatever success a play may have in the summer theatre, here at least, except for theatres very close to large cities, the critics do not usually determine its life. Occasional reviews appear in village or county papers, but they are not read by most of the visitors, and the local critics have no influence comparable to that of the critics of the Broadway stage. The summer theatre does not appear to be any better off for their absence or lack of influence, or for the fact that its success depends almost entirely on word-of-mouth reports by the audiences.

The position of the summer theatre, which depends so greatly on the star system, is an uncertain one, and may change suddenly from one year to the next. Most managers hope that the change will be in the direction of less emphasis on stars and more emphasis on the quality of the plays. Meanwhile, the summer theatre has very quietly been doing some excellent things. It may come as a shock to those who think of it as an unimportant appendage to Broadway to realize that it gives employment to many more actors than Broadway does. And for a single week, the gross take of all summer theatres will be far beyond that of all Broadway theatres during a week of *their* season. It has even been claimed that the total gross for a summer exceeds the total taken in on Broadway for a complete year, although that seems rather doubtful. What is beyond doubt is that the summer theatres are no longer small and financially insignificant. During the 1951 season, the Sea Cliff Theatre grossed approximately $92,000, and there were about a half-dozen other summer theatres that did about as well.

Perhaps the most important thing about the summer theatre is that it does put on excellent performances of many fine

plays (as well as of some bad ones), that it does give farmers and villagers and vacationists a chance to see worth-while living theatre. Performances may lack the complete polish that thorough rehearsal will bring to a Broadway production, but in general they are good, and some are first-rate. And in the quality of plays, nothing stands in the way of the summer theatre but the taste of its audiences. On Broadway, revivals, even of former smash hits, face many difficulties. In summer stock, the best plays of past seasons are readily available. The managers are eager to produce them. Let the audiences but show their desire to patronize good plays, and the good plays will appear before them.

The summer theatre is still growing. Let us hope that it is only in the springtime of its career.

Theatres Throughout the Country

DURING ANY GIVEN SEASON, there are some fifty or sixty producers who actually put on Broadway plays. But in the rest of the United States there are several hundred thousand, possibly half a million, groups who from time to time produce a play. Many produce only a single play and then disband. But even so, think of what this ratio means—one drama group for every three hundred people in the United States! If there were as high a ratio of physicians, our death rate would be much lower than it is. In the face of such a fact, it begins to seem a little absurd to ask solemnly whether our theatre is dying. The real question is: What sort of life is it leading?

A life as varied as that of the American people. Some groups dramatize Bible readings or sermons, as did the early mystery and morality players. Others devote their attention to classics, or to light comedies, or to plays that will teach spectators to know their children or their neighbors better. Some are stimulated into activity in summer and hibernate in winter Others disband in summer, and do not revive again until the school year begins.

Now the number of fairly good dramatic groups is large —but the *very* good ones are few indeed, and the number of producing groups that put on bad plays and do them badly is all too great.

Consider the hurriedly organized companies which flourish each summer, not the summer theatres, of which we have already spoken, but the fly-by-night troupes which whip up productions in the hotels and camps. It is their job to kill an evening's time, and usually, if the killing is effective, it matters little to them how the crime was committed, or whether the play itself has also been slaughtered in the process. Here and there we find honorable exceptions to this rule. We have seen, for example, summer hotel productions of such one-act plays as Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo,* and Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon,* well staged and well acted.

Courtesy of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré

***51.** A scene from* Street Scene, *by Elmer Rice, as performed at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, a community theatre in New Orleans.*

But for the most part these groups have few standards and fewer scruples.

What plays shall they put on? Those that have been successful on Broadway in the past are good, of course, for they are reasonably sure of an audience. Even better, however, are plays that are *currently* successful on Broadway. What if the owners will not give their consent to production? The best thing is not to ask the owners. A slight change in the name of the play, possibly of the leading characters, and the author's work is better disguised than a man would be with beard and mustache. Now the author need never even know that his play has been produced, and need not bother his little head about royalties.

What of the actors? They may not have acted before, but they are willing to try. They may be professional or amateur

Courtesy of ANTA

52. A group of well-known professional actors rehearsing Awake and Sing, *by Clifford Odets, at the Actors Lab Theatre in California. Among those on stage are Art Smith, Phoebe Brand, Alfred Ryder, Morris Carnovsky, John Garfield, and J. Edward Bromberg.*

entertainers, given to putting on comedy routines for friends and acquaintances, not to say relatives, and with some experience (between long hours of developing flat feet by waiting on tables) in acting before summer audiences. The director? Any man who has ever been backstage is capable of being a director. The scenery? That isn't too bad, because it is almost nonexistent. Time for rehearsal? That's hardly necessary with such geniuses at work.

Some scripts are almost foolproof, and the resulting production may, despite everything, entertain its audience fairly well. More likely it will accustom the spectators to incompetence, leave them dissatisfied, and do its best to set the theatre back a hundred years.

We have already discussed the high-school and college theatres. These usually have few worries about money. By contrast, community theatres, with a few exceptions, are always facing financial difficulties. They must therefore engage in continual efforts to enlist the help of their community. Naturally, the degree of success varies. In one case, that of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, in New Orleans, the theatre, which is operated in association with Tulane University, is able to help the University. Usually, however, the theatre does not attain such a degree of affluence and has the danger of a deficit to contend with.

Many community groups, like the Harrisburg Theatre, have only amateur actors; some, as in Dallas, are staffed entirely by professionals. Others combine amateurs with professionals. But all the more important community theatres have long had paid directors, and many also have paid designers, technicians, and business managers.

Those which secure widespread community backing are fortunate in many ways. It is not only that they possess assurance of financial support. The participation of a large number of people guarantees audience assistance at many stages of production, from the choice of plays to the securing of props. It insures the conversion of a small acting group into a genuine community endeavor.

Consider the Erie Playhouse, for instance. In a city which, by the last census, had fewer than 120,000 inhabitants, it has grown to have a paid membership of more than 7,000 (both from Erie and the neighboring area). If New York City with

its 8,000,000 were to show a comparable interest in things dramatic, the metropolitan area would have close to half a million members of community theatres, and community theatre would be a sensational success.

The Erie Playhouse puts on performances six evenings a week over a season of nine months. It produces new scripts as well as classics and recent hits. It has a Drawing Room Theatre in which plays are put on in-the-round, and a Student Theatre with classes for both children and adults. It teaches all the different aspects of theatre from acting to promotion. It has a playwright-in-residence.

Of great significance is the fact that, unlike the commercial theatre, it is *not* inbred. It helps train and organize amateur groups that give shows in clubs, churches, and other community theatres in and near Erie. It brings theatre to the community.

The Shreveport Little Theatre, in a city of even smaller population, is even better known nationally. Over a period of thirty years it has become a source of great local pride, and has won the respect of other community theatres and of commercial theatre people.

And as a member of the Southwest Theatre Conference, it has had great influence in stimulating the growth of the theatre over a wide area, including Texas and New Mexico.

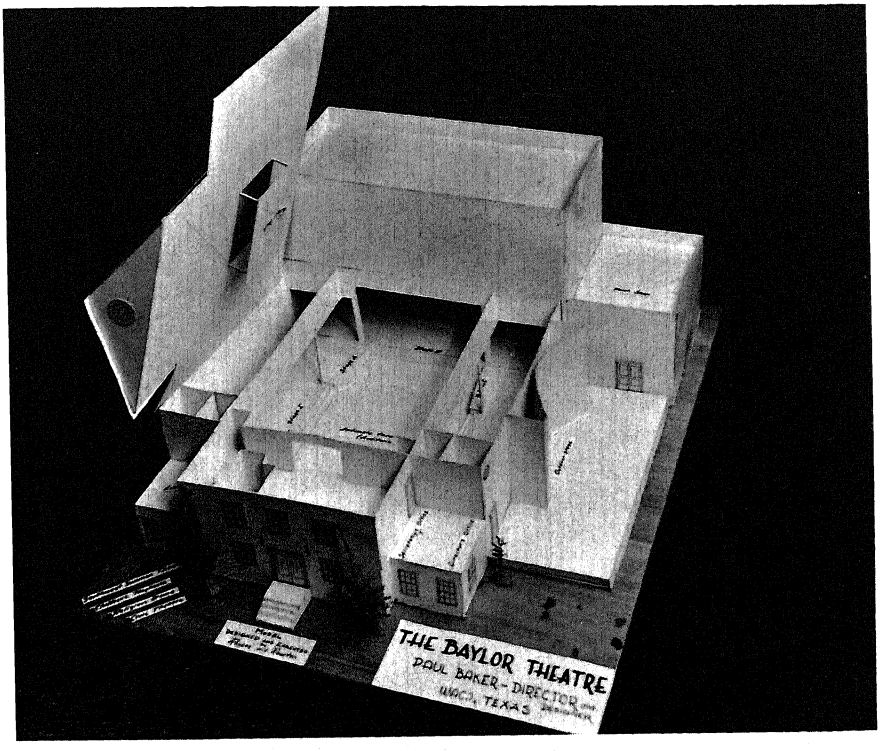
In London, Ontario, which is north of the border, there is a community theatre from whose example our own theatre could very well profit. London has a little more than 90,000 inhabitants. But the London Little Theatre operates a 1200-seat house and has 10,000 members. Despite the fact that its standards are on a high level, and that it has paid stage hands, it manages to offer six plays for five dollars. It has two rehearsal rooms and an excellent stage, and is equipped to do all kinds of plays, including the touring attractions it books.

A few thousand miles south of London, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, in New Orleans, has a larger community to draw upon for support. Also beginning as a small group, it has grown and expanded until now its membership is limited only by the size of the auditorium. It has long served to bring good plays to a region which the commercial theatre always neglected. Now it also has a Children's Theatre, and offers

the members of its community a chance not only to support it, but to become an active part of its organization.

Of special interest is the Karamu Theatre of Cleveland. Subject to discrimination in so many ways, Negro playwrights, directors, actors, etc., have always faced difficulties even greater than those of their white colleagues. In an effort to solve some of their problems, they have founded Negro community theatres in different parts of the country. Several have led a precarious existence in New York. But it is the Karamu Theatre which has had the longest life and has now attained the position of one of the leading community theatres in the country.

As we have already indicated, one of the types of theatre which has won wide popularity during the past few years is theatre-in-the-round. Its chief advantage is that it needs no



Courtesy of the Baylor Theatre. Photo by Jimmie Willis Studio

53. A model of the Baylor Theatre, a community theatre in Texas.

conventional theatre building with stage and auditorium. Any large room will do.

But the community group that depends on this type of theatre faces an entirely new series of problems. The actors must be highly skilled in order for their work to stand the close scrutiny of the audience, and they must learn new techniques, both of acting and of make-up (the latter is reduced to a minimum, and there are great difficulties with character make-up). Remember that the actor traditionally hates to turn his back to an audience—and in theatre-in-the-round he always has his back to half of it.

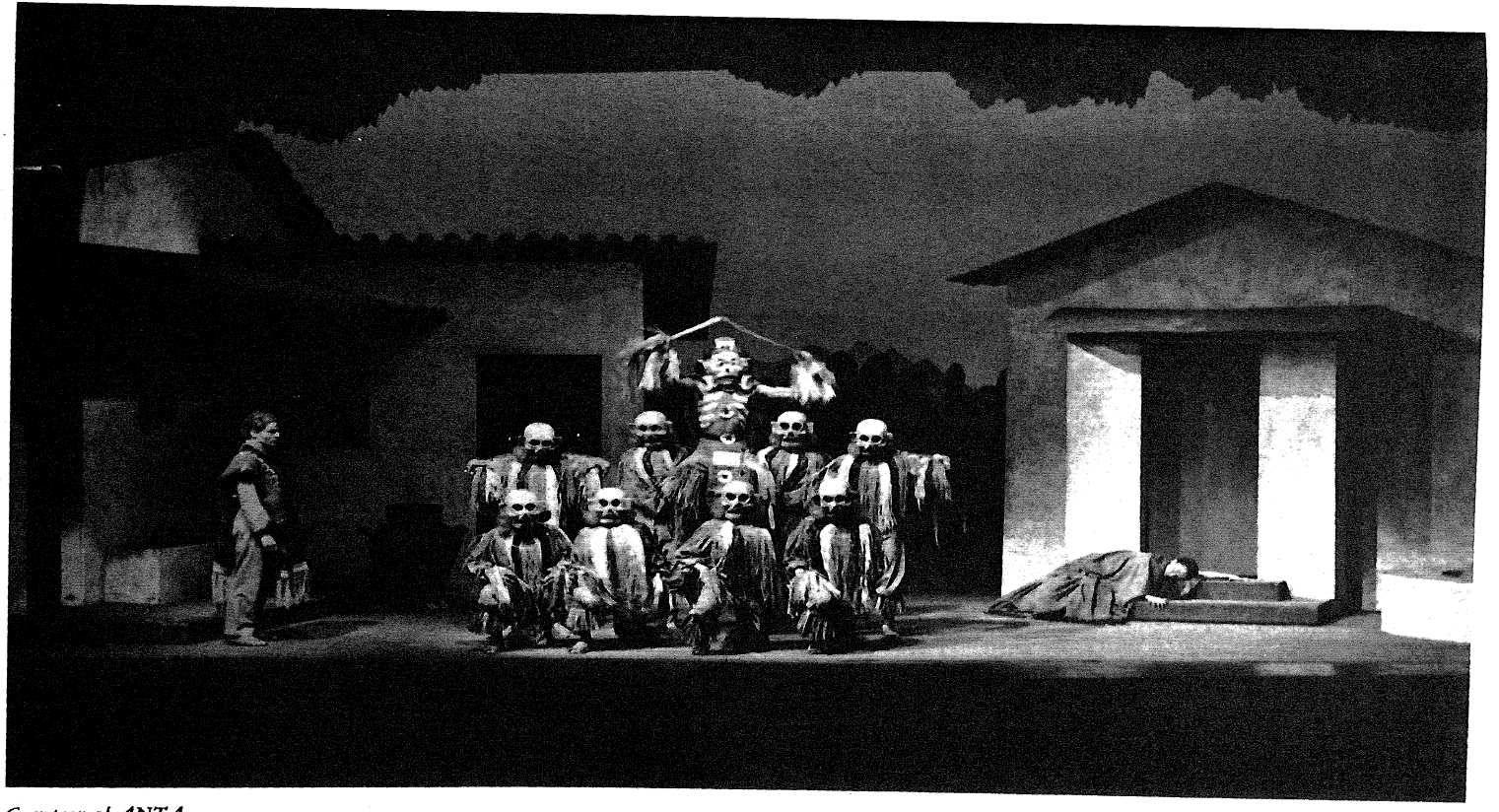
Producers and directors sometimes run into trouble in selecting and staging plays that are suited to an arena. They must learn how to get along with a minimum of scenery, as well as how to use lighting as a substitute for scenery. They must realize what kind of scenes to look for and what kind to avoid (the enforced intimacy of actors and audience in theatre-in-the-round detracts from illusion and glamour, and magnifies the unpleasant, the frightening, and the horrible).

Theatre-in-the-round is a useful solution for the problems of some community groups. But it cannot possibly be a cure-all.

With all the advantages some of them enjoy, there are certain respects in which the best university and community theatres operate under difficulties. Many of the people who take part in their productions, particularly the actors, are amateurs and/or novices. In the university theatres, for example, it is difficut to build a permanent organization where the more experienced personnel are graduated each year, just as they begin to gain competence, and are replaced by raw and untrained apprentices.

Broadway producers can call on the best professional talent the entire theatre possesses; community theatres are usually limited to the best of a small group. And if outstanding talents do make their appearance, they are often lured away by the high salaries of Broadway or Hollywood. Perhaps it has been the noncommercial theatre's good fortune that in recent years Broadway has been able to lure only a few talented individuals each year, and its loss has defenitely been the community theatre's gain.

Despite its increased attraction for talented individuals, the noncommercial theatre has still no reason for complacency,



Courtesy of ANTA

54. A scene from the Mexican drama* Return to Earth, *by Miguel N. Lira, first performed at the Goodman Memorial Theatre, Chicago.

and a hundred of the leading community and university theatres are united in the National Theatre Conference, which is engaged in a never-ending effort to improve the quality of productions. From time to time the Conference subsidizes playwrights and conducts surveys of the state of the theatre here and abroad.

A bridge between the community theatre and the commercial is provided by the Council of the Living Theatre. This works with the Theatre Guild and commercial producers in arranging tours and organizing audiences in the twenty-two cities where subscriptions are sold. The plays sent on tour are commercial productions, but the purpose of the Council is not primarily to help individual producers earn profits on their plays (although it does not object to that either). It is rather to build audiences for the living theatre, and with this in mind the Council seeks out active community leaders who are interested in theatre, arranges for publicity of all kinds, and conducts subscription drives. Commercial producers co-operate by sending on tour attractions that will help sell the entire series of subscriptions.

One organization of the American theatre that may yet become very important is ANTA, The American National Theatre and Academy. ANTA's charter was granted by Act of Congress in 1935 "to extend the living theatre beyond its present limitations by bringing the best in the theatre to every state in the Union." Unfortunately, Congress was more generous with good intentions than with cash. ANTA had no money for its noble purposes, and for more than ten years it remained dormant.

In 1946, however, ANTA awoke and acted. In that year it was reorganized for the purpose of actually founding a theatre "national in scope, professional in standing: a people's project organized and conducted in their interest." ANTA was thought of as "a place of meeting, a unity of all phases of the theatre."

How does it try to play its many roles? In the first place, ANTA's aim is to help the theatre achieve its proper place of honor as a cultural force. This is not only a matter of national pride, but of national mental health. In any country, a dying theatre is a symptom and a warning that the entire spiritual and intellectual life of a people has lost its strength. (Remember that the decay of the Greek theatre and the degeneration

of the Roman theatre were reflections of what was happening outside the theatre. The vigor of Shakespeare and his fellow-dramatists, on the other hand, mirrored the vigorous upsurge of life in Elizabethan England.) ANTA is helping, by supporting productions of the classics of the past and the best plays of the present, to keep the American spirit and intellect alive and vigorous.

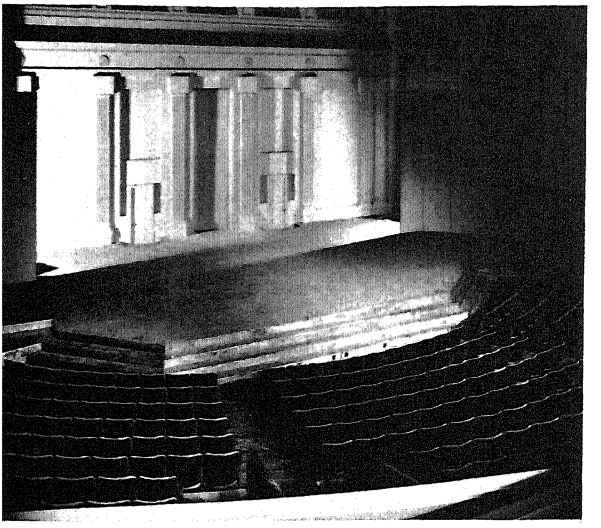
ANTA formerly operated its own playhouse. Now it plans, eventually, to arrange tours throughout the country in order to bring the best of the theatre to every state. And as a part of the International Theatre Institute, it co-operates with the theatre in other countries.

At the same time, ANTA works with the high-school groups that belong to the National Thespian Society, and with the university and community theatres of the American Educational Theatre Association and the National Theatre Conference. It also co-operates with commercial producers, and has gone to considerable trouble to help a play like *Death of a Salesman* carry out a successful tour.

Much of ANTA's work is on the individual level, and if you are at all interested in the theatre as a career, you should know something about what ANTA can do for you. If you are an actor and want, despite all the advice to the contrary, to try your luck on Broadway, it will advise you how to go about this. (The first requirement is that you be able to support yourself for a year.) It plans to conduct a Workshop which will be first a resident acting company, and eventually a national repertory company. It has a counseling service for young actors and a placement service that helps actors locate openings outside New York in community theatres and summer stock. Its main call, by the way, is for directors and technicians, so that actors who know how to direct, handle scenery, and so on, are in an especially favorable position.

If you are a young playwright who wants to get in touch with the commercial theatre, ANTA will send you a list of accredited agents.

If you want to start a small acting group, or a community theatre, or if you are already working with such a group and running into trouble, ANTA will show you how to solve some of your problems. It will advise you on how to obtain community support, on how to run the financial end of your busi-



55. The interior of The Cleveland Playhouse.

Courtesy of Cleveland Playhouse. Photo by Parade Studios, Inc.

ness, how to manage and produce, choose plays and directors, etc. If your group is willing to work seriously to put on good theatre and has substantial community backing, ANTA will not only aid you with publicity, it will send a field worker and help service the plans you make.

In fact, community theatres are one of ANTA's chief interests. Whether you want to establish an amateur or a professional group, ANTA feels that the more good theatres the merrier. Like Margo Jones and her theatre in Dallas, it does not consider other groups as competitors but as collaborators in the building of an audience.

Supported so largely by professional theatre workers (many of whom put in long hours of volunteer labor), ANTA is naturally interested in the health of the commercial theatre. But it emphasizes, as so many of the people we have interviewed have emphasized, that it is a mistake for a community theatre to depend on Broadway. A community theatre must have a character and vitality of its own or it will become second-rate. Those community theatres that do have a nationwide reputation are, as we have seen, the ones that put on interesting new plays or revive old ones in total disregard of what Broadway is doing.

How does ANTA get the money to support its many activities? Most of it comes from individual contributions and sub-

scriptions, and from its own fund-raising activities. It receives royalties from a Decca album which contains recordings of famous scenes of plays of the past. It has put on both a television program and live performances, the latter including the ANTA album, in which numerous stars do special numbers from plays or musicals.

The income ANTA thus obtains has already been used to bring improved theatre to many communities. But the amounts needed for the American theatre as a whole are far more than ANTA or its supporters can lay their hands on.

For economic problems confront not only Broadway, but theatres in cities other than New York as well. A first-rate theatre must have, to start with, a suitable building. And although rents and real-estate prices elsewhere are not as bad as those in New York, a reasonably well-equipped theatre building may cost tens of thousands of dollars (less if it is an old building altered for the purpose of staging plays, or converted into a theatre-in-the-round). Then there is the cost of management and production, and so on. No matter where put on, commercial plays are expensive when done properly. And with all the amateur help that community theatres may get, their productions also may involve investments of many thousands of dollars.

Indeed, the situation is so bad that most theatre people consider that high costs are among the chief stranglers of the theatre. And despite all that can be done by such organizations as ANTA and the Council of the Living Theatre, many individuals (from angels and producers to writers, scene designers, and actors) have arrived at the conclusion that the commercial theatre needs a subsidy from the government if it is to live at all, while the noncommercial theatre needs a subsidy if it is to grow.

Again and again, theatre people point with envy to the fact that abroad, wherever the theatre is flourishing, it does have government or municipal administration support. This is true of practically every country in Europe, no matter what its form of government.

Most Americans in the theatre do not favor a system which gives direct control to the government or any other political body. They do indorse a system such as that of the Arts

Council of Great Britain, which helps maintain not only the theatre, but music and ballet as well.

The Arts Council helps finance up to fifty per cent of the cost of production of any play which it believes will further cultural interest. Now, it is precisely such plays that usually have the greatest difficulty getting commercial support. With an Arts Council subsidy to back them, serious plays can be produced more frequently. At the same time, if a producer is so uncouth as to want to make money on a play that looks to him like a gold mine, and doesn't strike a note of culture, he can go right ahead without interference from the Arts Council.

The producer who has Arts Council Support forms a separate nonprofit corporation, which pays salaries to actors, directors, and other employees, and also pays the producer's office for its services in running the play. The producer may recover his share of the investment, but the profits, if any, go to the Arts Council, which uses them to finance still other plays. The producer will naturally not get rich this way, but if he puts on a good play he will gain prestige that will help make his next commercial production more successful. Meanwhile, the theatre remains alive, along with many deserving actors, authors, and other workers in it.

This system encourages revivals (like the Laurence Olivier-Vivien Leigh revivals of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*). It helps lend variety to a theatrical season which might otherwise be top-heavy with light comedy and mild melodrama. It plays a useful role in building up audiences who in the field of drama, without relying for their opinions upon others, know good from evil, and support the good.

Perhaps while waiting for the federal government to develop an interest in drama, there are better prospects for developing theatres sponsored by municipal governments. The New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD), subsidized by the city, puts on plays in high schools during week ends. Palo Alto, California and Richmond, Virginia subsidize community and children's theatres. Milwaukee, Wisconsin operates its municipal theatre on a play-a-month basis, its plays going outdoors in the summer.

Other cities could well learn from the examples these communities have set. They would probably find that with

proper organization and management their theatres would soon build a considerable body of patrons, and be able practically to support themselves, requiring little or no money from the city treasury itself. In France and Germany, municipal theatres have a dominating position, and there is no reason why they cannot become equally important here.

With a subsidy system of any kind, the American theatre would still have many problems to solve. There is, for instance, the need to break down still further the dividing line between amateur and professional theatre, between the commercial and the noncommercial. Many amateur groups have a smug belief in the superiority of their own tastes, their own feeling for art; at the same time, many people in the commercial theatre have contempt for anything that is not done with professional skill and smoothness, and regard amateur art as mere artiness. Professional theatre life remains narrow and inbred; on the other hand, even talented amateurs sometimes are remarkably ignorant of the way things can be done.

Courtesy of Dallas Theatre. Photo by Squire Haskins

56. Theatre in the Round at the Dallas Theatre, Texas. A performance of Southern Exposure, by Owen Crump, directed by Margo Jones.

Each has much to gain from the other. The professional has the "know-how"—but this too often means knowing how things were done in the past and wanting to keep on doing them in the same way. The amateur, on the other hand, often blunders—but he does sometimes discover fresh new ways of doing things. Remember that it was an amateur theatre that discovered O'Neill in the United States, and that it was combinations of amateurs and professionals who were the chief early supporters of Ibsen and Shaw.

The American theatre has far to go in solving its problems, but it has already taken some of the necessary steps. As an individual, you can help in various ways: by urging producers to send good plays to your city, by supporting them when they arrive, and by helping to organize and support all sorts of dramatic activity.

You can begin without making elaborate plans, and without raising any money at all. Your group may be a social club, a school class, or just a circle of friends interested in the theatre. You can take the first step, as Miss Helburn has suggested, by forming a play-reading group. From then on, as you become more ambitious, and as you have time and energy to devote, you can make more far-reaching plans, even to the organizing of a permanent community theatre.

A theatre and its audience must grow together. *Your* audience may not be quite ready, but it is probably growing. When there is an average of one dramatic group for every three hundred people, you can be sure that more and more individuals are becoming interested in the theatre. And as the work already started goes on, there is good reason to hope that both the number and the quality of theatre groups will improve as time goes on.

Many observers, watching the Broadway theatre stagger under one economic and artistic blow after another, have begun to think that the American theatre as a whole could be characterized by the title of one of Tolstoy's plays, *The Living Corpse*. Well, every living thing has parts that are dying. But let these gloomy observers lift their eyes from Broadway and observe the rest of the nation, and they will see that the theatre as a whole is by no means in its death throes. More probably, it is only experiencing the pangs of new birth.

THE NATURE OF OUR THEATRE

NOW THAT WE HAVE reached the conclusion that the American theatre is very much alive and will continue to live, the question remains: What kind of theatre is it? What is it approach to the things it deals with, what is its style?

"Style" is itself a word that has had many definitions and has been often analyzed. If for an individual we can say that "the style is the man," then for a theatre the style is the people and the age in which it lives. Perhaps the most helpful comment about it was made by Shaw. The alpha and omega of style, he said, is effectiveness of expression. The first requisite, he added, is therefore to have something which you passionately desire to express.

What does our own theatre desire to express? In the work of our serious playwrights, at least, it portrays the life around it. The plays of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Clifford Odets give you a picture of how various kinds of Americans live. It is not the sort of picture you would get from a camera and sound recorder keeping a record of what happens. It is an artist's picture, each author carefully selecting the people, the circumstances, the details of living that are important to him.

The result is a kind of stylized realism, a realism colored and sometimes weakened by the mood of the playwright. Whereas Miller's individuals are caught in difficult *situations* which their own lives and characters have created, Williams' heroes and heroines are usually trapped more by their own neurotic natures than by external circumstances. And an Odets cast is likely to be groping blindly, looking for a way out of the confusion that affects an entire society at cross purposes.

A performance, however, results not only from the author's script, but also from the activities of producer, director, and the rest of a company. And as Mr. Clurman has pointed out, both the script and the method of staging are limited by what is considered in good taste, profitable, comprehensible to an audience, etc. Both playwright and director, therefore,

Photo by Wes Werdland

57. A scene from Stairs to the Roof, by Tennessee Williams, as performed at the Pasadena Community Playhouse.

are continually affected by the pressure to conform to prevailing standards.

A few playwrights do not feel especially constrained by this pressure. They write, it seems to them, with perfect freedom. But many of their colleagues feel a censor peering over their shoulders. "The audience won't like this, it won't understand that . . . Lawyers are very touchy; better make the villain an accountant . . . Better choose a different heroine, someone the spectator can sympathize with." To some extent playwrights try to head off the censor by censoring their own work in advance. They try to write dialogue that is shrewd, analytical, keen, penetrating, and important—all this without offending anyone. That is a more difficult feat than riding over Niagara Falls in a barrel and coming out alive.

However, some people *have* survived the trip in a barrel, and each year some good plays do manage to be successful on Broadway without being trivial. And in one field, that of musical comedy, things are looking up. In the old days, musical comedy never did have much to say. Now that it says something beyond the fact that love is wonderful, critics and audiences welcome its improvement.

In all these productions, successful and not so successful, what is distinctively American—what is of the mid-twentieth century?

First, they are almost all realistic. But our realism, as Mr. Clurman has observed, has special features of its own. The theatre of Garrick was realistic as compared with the theatre that preceded it. But Garrick's realism was different from that of Shaw or Ibsen or Chekhov, just as there is a world of difference between the naturalistic detail of Gorky and of Belasco. Our own realism tends to be tough and hard-boiled, brutal and cynical. The pace is fast (often senselessly fast, as Mr. Clurman has said), and in the best examples there is a feeling of vitality which has startled, and sometimes pleased, European audiences. By comparison with the characters of *The Front Page,* the nobility and gentry of most English drawing-room comedy seem like walking corpses. Compared with the men and women of Gorky's *The Lower Depths,* however, the inhabitants of *The Front Page* seem little more than puppets being moved around in a frenzy by an expert manipulator.

Perhaps we can understand the style of our theatre better by looking back to see the changes that have taken place since the first decade of the century. In those days, a setting was usually intended to be a reproduction of what was considered a homely and familiar background, such as a farmhouse, or an interesting one, like a drawing room. The acting usually made it very clear that the characters were of two fairly standard types—the good people, with hearts of gold or at least of oak, and the villains, always plotting evil. And around the entire play there glowed an aura of sentimentality, in which the simple good triumphed over the simple evil. Every other nation has had its own brand of sentimentality in the theatre and in literature, but this particular variety was on the whole of a primitive and naïve sort.

58. A scene from Sophocles' Electra as presented at the Goodman Memorial Theatre in Chicago.

Courtesy of Goodman Memorial Theatre

Let us skip to the year 1938 and Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*, hailed by the critics of that season as a masterpiece of the theatre. The setting, far from being an attempt at naturalism, did not exist at all. Wilder had borrowed a convention from the Chinese theatre and used a bare stage which the imagination of the audience transformed into any setting that was wanted. Most of the props were as imaginary as the scenery. From the Hindu theatre Wilder had borrowed the idea of a stage manager who explained to the audience what was going on. In addition, his stage manager assumed various roles in the play, usually male but in one case, briefly, female. Both these conventions would have bewildered the average American audience of, say, 1905.

They might have been bewildered too by the absence of villains and of plot. There is no involved struggle to pay off a

mortgage, or to foil the villain's plan to ruin the heroine. There is simply an attempt to picture the life of a small New Hampshire town in the years from 1901 to 1913. No one tries to harm anyone else. True, there is a happy ending—but in an unconventional sense. At the end of the play, the heroine is dead, as are some of the other characters. But she and her friends assure us that it is much better to be dead than alive, and that only in death lies true happiness.

There is an almost total absence of passion and violent feeling. The New Englanders of *Our Town* live in a different world from the New Englanders of O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms,* who loved, murdered, and robbed with such fierceness. At times, it is true, the inhabitants of *Our Town* feel strongly. But the feelings are not of a kind to lead to conflict —and conflict, many critics have held, is basic to good drama.

You can see how strange *Our Town* would have seemed if it had been played before an audience of fifty years ago. But perhaps the strangest thing about it is that in many ways it would have seemed to this audience so familiar. If there were no real settings, at least the details of the *imagined* settings, those the stage manager describes, were not strange. Church steeples and hitching-posts, railroad tracks and horse-blocks, imaginary though these might be, would have been more welcome and understandable than the stylized and exaggerated backgrounds that are occasionally encountered by modern audiences.

And in spirit, *Our Town* would have seemed very much like the plays the American theatre had long been used to. All the characters have hearts of gold, in various stages of refinement. There is just as unreal a picture of the inhabitants of a small town as the early audiences were accustomed to see; there is the same glow of sentimentality, the same calculated tug at the heartstrings of those who want to be assured that the original of the picture is really as pretty as it has been painted. In the over-all sweetness, the morsel of philosophy at the end—that only the dead are truly happy—serves merely to add piquancy and spice, just as lemon peel or cinnamon or ginger enhance the flavor of a dessert, without subtracting from its content of sugar.

Consider, by contrast, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie.* Here too the author is looking back to a period—the

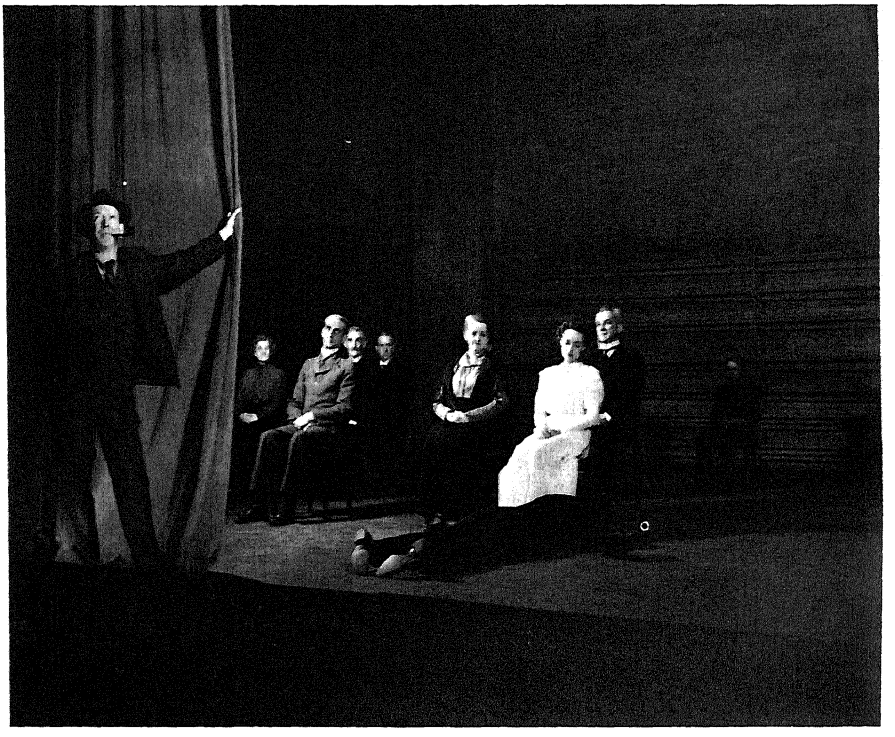


Photo by Vandamm

59. A scene from Our Town, by Thornton Wilder. Frank Craven, in front of the curtain, is the narrator.

depths of the Depression—before the actual time in which the play is produced. And here too there are innovations of staging which might have confused the old audiences. Instead of a stage manager, there is a narrator, who ties the scenes together for the audience in the manner of a Greek chorus or the narrator in a radio serial, and then steps into the play proper to act his own role. The lighting takes on a new importance. A semitransparent screen hides part of the stage until the lights go on behind it. Then the screen becomes fully transparent and the scene changes. The very name of the play is symbolic, for *The Glass Menagerie* refers not only to the glass animals that the heroine treasures but to the characters of the play itself.

The surface picture is much less true to life than that produced by the imaginary word-painted sets of *Our Town.*

But the characters are much more real, drawn with much more than surface likeness. And it is this, rather than the setting, which would have baffled the old audiences. There may be no plot in the old melodramatic sense, but simple things happen on which the characters pin their hopes and fears. There may be no villain; but there are no cardboard cutouts of "good" people, either. The characters are complex, and conflict arises from the clash of their desires and passions. The effect they produce is painfully realistic.

Or take Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman.* Recognition of the reality of the characters is so widespread that the play has been a success on the European continent as well as in the United States. But the sense of reality is not produced by purely naturalistic methods. It was originally intended, as Mr. Miller has pointed out, to be produced without a set. In its final form, the play has a single set (see picture page 90), which on different levels provides the locale for the most varied scenes. We see Willy Loman's house against a background of apartment houses, and we see into the house at the same time. The entire setting is wholly or partially transparent, so that the lighting is of tremendous importance in shifting the scene from kitchen to bedroom, or to the various places Willy Loman visits. The kitchen is "real" to the extent of three chairs and a refrigerator, but there are no other fixtures. The bedroom is also real in this skimpy sense, with the addition of a silver athletic trophy, which symbolizes the false values of Willy and his sons.

There is an apron stage borrowed from the days of Shakespeare. This serves as the scene of Willy's imaginings and of his city scenes, as well as of his grave. The author adopts a very strict convention to distinguish scenes of the past from those of the present. Whenever the action is in the present, the actors enter the house only through its door. But in scenes of the past, they enter or leave a room by stepping "through" a wall onto the forestage.

The emotional impact of the play is heightened by the use of music. This not only creates atmosphere, but in almost operatic fashion characterizes some of the actors and heightens and foreshadows the action. The dialogue too is not strictly realistic. In many places it is exalted and poetic. When Willy's wife says of him, "Attention, attention must be finally

paid to such a person," she is generalizing, talking not only of Willy, but of other men like him, and of their tragedies too.

It will be noted that the techniques involved in producing these plays have been borrowed from the most various sources —from China and Elizabethan England, as well as from the expressionist stages of Europe. But in each case, the resulting play is no mere jumble of stage devices. The technique used has become part of the essential nature of the play.

Note too that these are serious plays, and that whatever nonrealistic method the author uses, and whatever his success, his purpose is to heighten the feeling of real life. It is not to present a picture that is a complete departure from reality (as are some of the poetic plays of Yeats and Maeterlinck).

This attempt to show things as they are, sometimes profoundly and sometimes with less serious intent, is part of our theatrical tradition. It is to be found not only in the plays we have mentioned but in a melodrama like *Broadway* and a comedy like *Life With Father*. Both plays are American in theme and treatment. Playgoers abroad saw in them not the familiar picture of a life they knew, but a strange portrait of people and manners that were fascinating because they were so characteristically American.

In contrast to all these plays, even such high-caliber musical comedies as *Oklahoma!*, *Finian's Rainbow*, and *Pal Joey* had their origin in a quite different tradition—the tradition of theatre that was intended to amuse and to kill time pleasantly, without pretense of being real. For many decades, no one expected the characters in a musical comedy to behave like actual people. They were stock types, and the talents of the actors were largely thrown away. All that was asked of them was to look pretty, and, if they had leading parts, to sing and dance and mug. But during the past dozen years, musical comedy has also developed a trend toward realism. And in doing so, it has made use of a wide variety of methods. *Finian's Rainbow* was a fantasy, but a fantasy which genuinely reflected certain aspects of American life. *Oklahoma!* was a story of the frontier which gained much of its effectiveness from the integration into the story of ballet—and ballet is a form of dance developed originally for the entertainment of

European aristocrats. It was until the past two decades an alien form of amusement.

From the examples of these plays—and from the numerous others in similar genres which are produced each year—we see that by far the greater part of the time American dramatists prefer to write about Americans in American settings. Very few now put their characters in English drawing rooms or in never-never lands where fantastic events are normal occurrences. And in the staging, our designers, directors, and actors use both naturalistic and nonnaturalistic methods, most of them borrowed from other theatres, to create an effect of realism (although each individual has his own idea of exactly what realism is). In the better plays, the borrowings are integrated into a unified whole. In others they seem as out of place as an extra thumb on the human hand.

To sum up, then: Our theatre style is a kind of realism, presented with the help of a wide variety of techniques. It is usually characterized by speed, often by energy and vigor. Frequently, because of cynicism or sentimentality, it is shallow and distorted. Its subjects are drawn from American life. Our playwrights have so many different things to say—some of them true and important and some of them downright nonsense, some "safe" and some dangerous to mention—that no single theme can be said to be of supreme interest. It would be different if any one playwright or group of playwrights of similar views dominated the scene. As it is, our theatre reflects many of the emotional and intellectual cross-currents of our time.

ad lib — To improvise dialogue or business. The actor may ad lib when some one forgets lines or business and there is an awkward pause to be bridged. Or he may be directed to ad lib expressions in a crowd scene, etc., for the sake of getting a realistic effect.

acting area — That part of the stage used by the actors.

action — The progress of the play, depending on changes in the relationships of the characters. It is not mere physical activity such as running about the stage. There is no action in a race in which the different runners do not change relative positions. There is action when the last man forges ahead, the pace-setter drops back, and so on.

apron — The part of the stage in front of the curtain. Or a special stage stretching out from the regular stage into the audience.

batten — A length of pipe or timber used to suspend scenery, to support lights, or to stiffen a surface of canvas or board.

border — A curtain which hangs down from above behind the *teaser*. It is intended to mask the upper part of the stage.

borderlights — Individual lights hung on battens around the stage.

box set — A set whose sides are closed by wings arranged edge to edge, with no space between them. Overhead there may be either borders or a ceiling. Entrances are made through doors or windows.

business — Activity which helps interpret a character of the play. It goes beyond *gesture*, which refers merely to position of the arms, legs, etc. Raising a hand to the nose is a gesture; taking snuff, inhaling, sneezing, is *business*.

character make-up Make-up whose purpose is to change the essential nature of the actor's appearance. Make-up that turns a young actor into an old man, a person of different nationality, etc., is *character make-up.*

cue The last words or business of one actor, signaling that it is another actor's turn to speak, come on-stage, etc.

cyclorama A screen with a uniform surface, placed in back of outdoor scenery. Colored light is projected on it to produce a sky, etc.

dimmer Part of an electric circuit which increases or decreases the brightness of lights.

drop Part of a set hung from overhead.

drop and wing set An old type of set in which painted wings and borders, one behind the other, mask more and more of the stage. There is a full drop upstage. Actors make their entrances not through doors or windows, which are only painted, but between the wings.

flat A screenlike piece of scenery which rests upon the floor and is fastened to it.

flies The space near the top of the stage, where scenery is hung out of sight of the audience.

fly To raise or lower a piece of scenery, toward or away from the *flies.*

footlights Lights, usually arranged in a row, which throw light up from the front of the stage. They are traditionally associated with the modern stage, but they are not the most useful lights.

flood lights Strong lights, each of which floods a good part of the stage.

gelatine A sheet of transparent colored material placed in front of a stage light in order to color the light.

gesture Change of position of the hands, arms, legs, or the body as a whole for the purpose of expressing feeling or thought.

greenroom — A place where the actors wait between their appearances on stage. It isn't usually green, and it doesn't have to be a room. Not all theatres have one, and in that case the actors may wait in their dressing rooms, or wherever else is convenient.

grid or gridiron — A metal or wood framework above the stage. Equipped with pulleys and blocks, it serves to support drops and borders.

ground row — A low flat which represents in outline part of a landscape standing in front of a sky.

jog — A narrow flat.

movement — Change of an actor's position on the stage.

obligatory scene — A scene which the audience more or less consciously foresees and finds necessary.

prompt script — A complete record of the production. It includes all cuts, changes, directions for movement, business, use of props, etc., as made by the stage manager.

props — All objects essential to the action of the play except for costumes and scenery. Furniture is sometimes considered part of the props.

proscenium — The frame of the stage. Everything that surrounds the stage opening.

run-through — A rehearsal played from beginning to end without a break, to give the actors the feel of an act or play as a whole.

scene — This word is used in many ways. The place where the action of the play occurs. Also, a subdivision of a play. Modern authors use the word to mean a distinct part of an act, usually separated from the next part by the fall and rise of a curtain, with only a brief intermission. There may be two or three such scenes per act. The *classical* or *French scene* was part of an act between the entrances and exits of characters. Of such scenes, there might be twenty or thirty per act. *Scene* is also used to describe a bit of dialogue or pantomime that makes a definite point. According to this method of scene division, there may be dozens per act.

script The entire play, in written or typed form.

set piece A three-dimensional piece of scenery which supports itself on the floor.

sides The business, cues, and lines of a single actor, written or typed separately.

spotlight A lamp whose light is concentrated and thrown on a small part of the stage, usually around an actor.

stage directions Directions to the actors, the director, etc., all written from the point of view of the player and not the audience. *Right* is the actor's right, and so on.

straight make-up Make-up whose purpose is to make the performer as attractive as possible under the stage lighting.

striplights Rows of lights in short, portable sections.

stylize To exaggerate consciously some elements of the acting, design, and the rest of the production. This is accompanied by lack of emphasis or the complete absence of other elements. The purpose is to intensify the effect of a mood, idea, etc.

teaser A curtain which hangs down behind the proscenium opening.

tormentors High flats standing upright on each side of the opening in back of the proscenium. Each has two folds and is colored the same as the teaser, thus helping carry out the effect of a frame for the stage.

tormentor lights Lights placed between the proscenium and the tormentors.

trap An opening in the stage floor that can be used for entrances or exits, the removal of pieces of furniture, and so on.

transparency A piece of scenery which looks opaque when lighted from in front and becomes transparent when lighted from the back.

Bibliography

A large library will contain thousands of books and periodicals about the theatre. Below are listed a few of those that are most generally available and most useful to the beginner.

A word of warning with regard to classification: Some of the books do not fit perfectly into pigeonholes, either in these lists or in others. A book on production may have excellent advice on acting, and a book on the nature of the drama may contain much useful history. It is well to take all classifications, here and elsewhere, with several grains of salt.

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