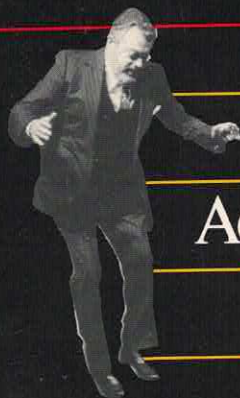


CHANGING SCENES

Theater in the South



People's Theater

Acting on the Issues

The Theaters

Playwrights

SE Contest Winners



Southern Exposure

Guest Editor: Rebecca Ranson

Editor: Lynn Haessly

Editorial Consultant: Liz Wheaton

Publisher: Institute for Southern Studies

Development Coordinator: Paul Pooley

Circulation: Sharon Ugochukwu

Production: Southern Types/Joe Pfister, Marcie Pachino, Nancy Webster

Design: Jacob Roquet

Special Projects — North Carolina: Bob Hall

Interns: Stephanie Greenblatt, Caroline Senter

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SOUTHERN NEWS ROUNDUP

A Moderate Proposal

The Southern regional primary is now a reality. Elections or party caucuses are now scheduled either on "Super Tuesday," March 8, 1988 or later that week in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Virginia.

Legislation has been introduced in the Louisiana legislature to join the March 8 primary, and similar bills will be considered either this year or next in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Texas. In South Carolina, the political parties, rather than the legislature, are responsible for primary rules. Democrats there have moved their presidential caucuses to the Saturday following March 8; Republicans will make a decision next year.

Three states adjacent to the South — Maryland, Missouri, and Oklahoma — have their primaries scheduled then, so if all of the remaining Southern states join in, as is expected, about one-third of the national convention delegates in each party will be chosen on March 8 or by the following Saturday.

The initial proponents of the new, improved Super Tuesday were moderate Southern Democrats who hope to influence the national Democratic party to nominate candidates and select a platform that will play better in the South than the Mondale-Ferraro ticket did in 1984.

The most immediate effect of the new primary is to put pressure on its proponents to deliver the moderate votes they have promised. After putting the idea across, they now have to make sure it works to accomplish their goal of improving the Democrats' presidential prospects in the South, possibly even putting a Southerner on the ticket. Democratic super primary advocates like Florida's Bob Graham, Georgia's Sam Nunn, Virginia's Chuck Robb, and Texan Mark White will face tremendous political embarrassment unless they find

and unite behind a candidate who will have broad appeal to Southern Democrats, and make sure he (the use of the gender-specific pronoun is intentional) comes in first on March 8, 1988.

Leaders of some influential voting blocs—such as organized labor and teachers as well as blacks—see the need for their party to move back toward the center from Mondale's liberalism so it can win more votes in the South. Others do not and will back Mario Cuomo, Gary Hart, or other liberal candidates who might run strongly in a Democratic caucus in the South, but in the general election are likely to fare about as weakly as Mondale and Ferraro did.

One such liberal candidate is the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a native of Greenville, South Carolina. Almost half of the nation's black voters are in the South, where they comprise roughly 20 percent of the electorate. Most people don't vote in primaries, and a carefully organized campaign could allow blacks and progressive whites to make up to 30 to 40 percent of the turnout. If these voters unite behind Jackson, and if the rest of the Democrats are divided, or not motivated to vote, he could win the primary. This scenario was hardly the intent of the proponents of the regional primary in the first place.

But it won't necessarily happen. If Robb or Nunn should run for president, either could unite the most influential white Democrats in the South behind his candidacy, stirring up the kind of Southern nationalism that benefitted Jimmy Carter in 1976 and again in the primaries in '80. If no Southern Democrat of national stature seeks the presidency next time, it is less clear whether the Southern Democratic establishment could put over a non-Southern moderate.

How will a Southwide primary affect the Republican party? Some Republicans believe the new primary could help the GOP by bringing both Republican and Democratic national leaders into the South, with the contrast making the GOP look good to the traditionally Democratic Southern electorate.

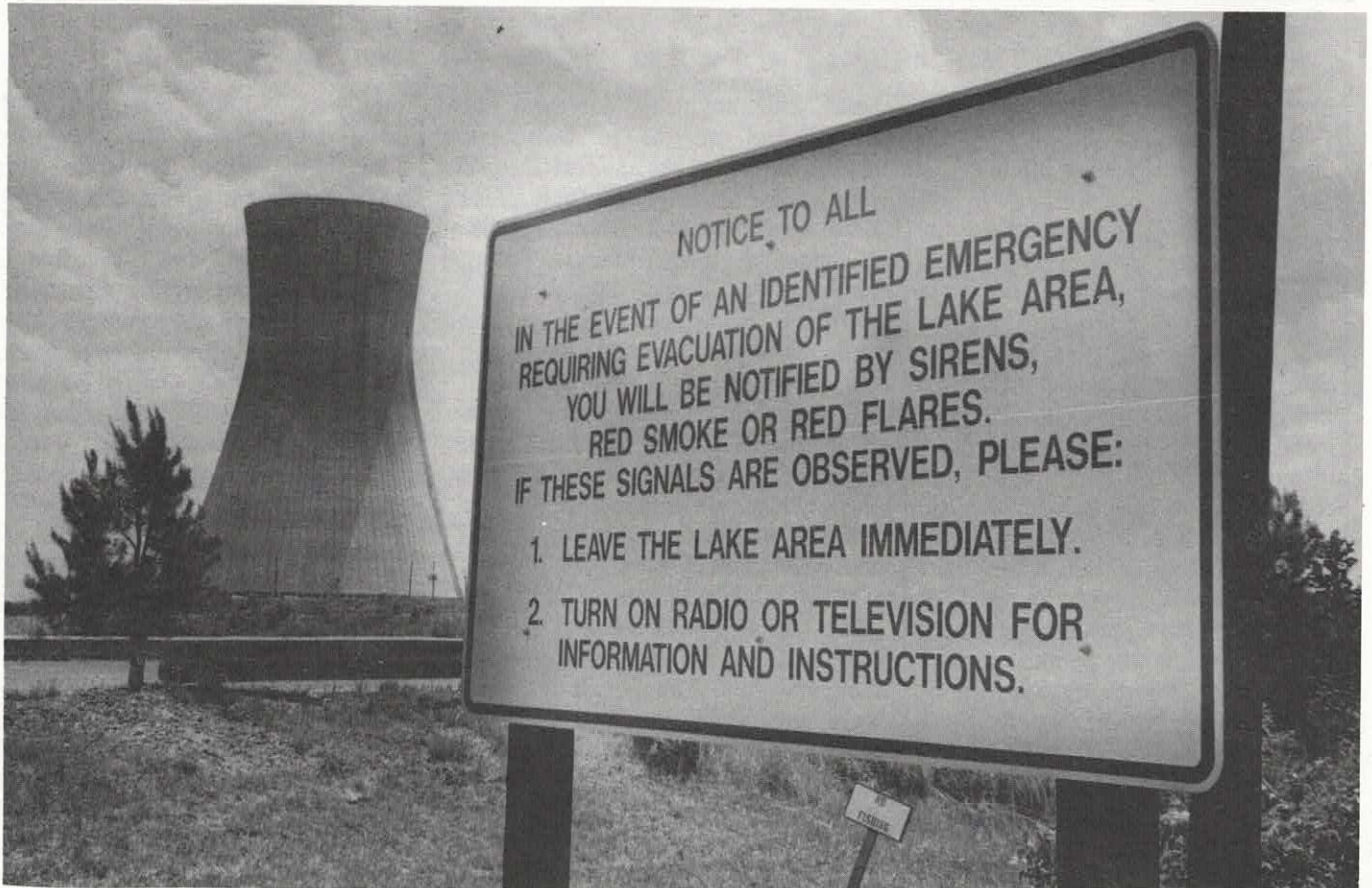
Other Southern Republicans are

aware that a hotly contested GOP presidential primary in '88 could siphon off a lot of the middle-class white voters in the South to whom Democratic moderates want to appeal. Since most Southern states don't require a registered voter to declare a party affiliation, voters are free to vote in either the Democratic or Republican primary, but not both. Thus if George Bush (of Texas), Jack Kemp, Pat Robertson (of Virginia), and Howard Baker (of Tennessee) are fighting it out on the Republican ballot, many of the electorate to whom moderate-to-conservative Democrats want to appeal won't be voting in the Democratic primary.

To the extent that conservative-leaning voters participate in the GOP presidential primary, it will magnify the role of the traditional, more liberal groups that the Democrats rely on but who cannot alone provide a majority of Southern voters. An election or two ago, this political shift would not have been much of a possibility, since even Southern voters who preferred Republican candidates weren't willing to vote in a Republican primary. But that reluctance is fading, as record turnouts attest in this year's Republican primaries in Texas and North Carolina.

The Southern regional primary will also very likely increase the influence of the Southern GOP in the Republican nominating process. Because Southern Republicans are a part of the already-dominant conservative wing of the national party, the South's greater influence isn't likely to be so noticeable as with the Democrats. Still, Southern Republican voters are likely to make some crucial decisions for their national party on March 8, 1988. Among them is the question whether Vice President George Bush will be coronated at the '88 GOP convention, or will he have a strong challenge to his nomination? In Bush's favor are that he's from Texas, which has the largest delegation in the South, and that he has strong support among much of the Republican establishment at both the state and local level.

Photo by Jenny Labalme/The Independent



Although the Shearon-Harris nuclear power plant in New Hill, North Carolina is nearly ready to go on line, a broad-based coalition of rural and urban citizens as well as progressive activists is working to prevent the opening.

If Bush doesn't win a clearcut victory on Super Tuesday, Southern Republicans are the group likely to decide which of Bush's challengers will have the momentum to give him a run for the nomination. At this point, it looks like Jack Kemp and Pat Robertson will have a shootout on March 8 from which only one of them will walk away. If Kemp can't make it in the South, where ideologically motivated conservative Republicans abound, where can he make it? And if evangelist Robertson (a faith healer who has proclaimed himself to be a "prophet of God") can't win in the Bible Belt, where can he win? To some extent, Kemp and Robertson will compete for the same constituency, with Kemp stronger among "movement" conservatives, Robertson potentially stronger among evangelicals.

Ex-Senate majority leader Howard Baker, from Tennessee, should pick up some support in the Southern primary. In addition to his home state, Baker may

run well among mountain Republicans in neighboring North Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky. But Baker's stance somewhat nearer to the center of the ideological spectrum isn't going to help him with most Southern Republicans.

For now, pundits and politicos are focusing attention on the effects of the Southern presidential primary on the Democrats. But the new regional primary will have an influence in the GOP. It might determine whether Bush has an easy ride, or a bumpy one, to the '88 nomination. And it will probably make or break the candidacies of Baker, Kemp, and Robertson. Perhaps most important, by enticing conservative voters out of the Democratic primary, the GOP could frustrate the efforts of the moderate Democrats to move their national party in a more conservative direction.

— thanks to *Southern Political Report*

Chernobyl Fallout Hits the South

The catastrophic accident at the Soviet Union's Chernobyl nuclear power plant has given new energy and a shift in focus to scores of environmental and anti-nuclear groups. With the decline of the nuclear power industry after Three Mile Island (no new plant orders since 1979), many non-nuclearists had targeted weapons programs, the arms buildup and the freeze, and nuclear war "strategy" for their organizing efforts.

But the disaster at Chernobyl has forced the public to think about the implications of such an incident for themselves and their communities. That is apparently what has happened in North Carolina's Piedmont where the Coalition for Alternatives to Shearon Harris (CASH) has mobilized thousands

SOUTHERN NEWS ROUNDUP

of people to attend and speak out at public forums and town council meetings to oppose licensing of Carolina Power and Light's almost-completed Shearon Harris nuclear power plant in New Hill. The coalition is exceptionally broad based, including conservative residents of rural Chatham County along with the usual anti-nuclear activists drawn from the progressive communities in the nearby university cities, Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill.

CASH has capitalized on the far-reaching effects of the radiation release at Chernobyl to demonstrate the inadequacy of evacuation plans for communities within a 10-mile radius of the plant in case of accident. The plans are similar to those designed for nuclear attack, plans which the Guilford County (North Carolina) Emergency Management Agency's Marilyn Braun called "either intentional or unintentional deception of the public." (See *Southern Exposure*, Vol. X, No. 6, November/December, 1982, "Duck and Cover.") Her agency has steadfastly refused to participate in the federally mandated war plan.

Both the war and power plant plans call for warning sirens, radio alerts, designated evacuation routes, and the designation of "host" communities for evacuees and medical facilities for the injured. The plans depend on the public's ability to, first, hear the warnings; second, to obey the evacuation order and not stay in the area to search for children or other family members; third, for the "hosts" to accept confused, panicky, and possibly radiation-contaminated people into their facilities; and finally — and most crucial in the nuclear power plan — is the willingness of plant managers to issue immediate warnings in the event of an accident.

The necessity of developing such plans presents serious concerns, but according to many nuclear experts, one of the gravest problems is that a 10-mile evacuation zone is hopelessly unrealistic for a major nuclear accident. With a steady prevailing southwest wind — which is normal for most of North Carolina — a highly radioactive plume



from Shearon Harris could extend more than 90 miles, through the heavily populated downwind Research Triangle area north into Virginia. The states of Tennessee and South Carolina are also in easy reach of a sizeable radiation release.

Governing bodies of several communities have passed resolutions against the start-up of Shearon Harris, scheduled for this July; and one, Chatham County, located within the official 10-mile evacuation area, has voted not to participate in the evacuation plans. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission must approve evacuation plans before a plant can be licensed, and by refusing to participate in the plan, Chatham County could effectively delay CP&L's plans to reach 100 percent power by the end of 1986. State or federal planners could step in and institute a plan despite public opposition, but a similar state and local refusal on Long Island in New York has blocked the operation of the otherwise completed Shoreham nuclear plant.

The lack of containment structures in nuclear weapons production facilities — four at Savannah River in South Carolina, and one at Hanford, Washington — is another area of concern for Southern anti-nukers, since the massive release of radiation at Cher-

nobyl was attributed to inadequate containment. Yet some nuclear experts say that containment structures actually provide very limited safety. A core meltdown, or a steam or hydrogen explosion would blow through even the strongest dome in use today. In fact, the Union of Concerned Scientists alleges that the NRC has on file evidence indicating, contrary to most reports, that Chernobyl did have a containment structure that was "strikingly similar" to many of those used here.

Voting Rights Update: N.C. Charges Dropped

Voter-registration fraud charges against the Rev. Cozelle Wilson, a black political activist in Kinston, North Carolina, were dropped by the prosecutor before trial in May, thanks in part to pressure from a public interest legal organization, the NAACP, and other groups.

Wilson, 60, had been the target of a "ballot security program" aimed at frightening black voters and instigated by the Republican Party in North Carolina and across the nation, according to the Christic Institute — South,



a legal group. Similar charges had been brought against voter activists in Alabama, some of whom were convicted last October (see *Southern Exposure*, November-December 1985).

The felony charge — which carried a possible 10-year sentence — against Wilson stemmed from her work registering 205 black voters in October 1984, during the state's controversial Hunt-Helms Senate campaign. At the time Wilson's leg was in a cast, and she used a walker to get around. Local college students helped her circulate registration forms.

After the registrations were submitted, a Republican election official complained that they were filled out in "many various handwritings." He complained to the state's Republican Party chair, David Flaherty, who set in motion an investigation that eventually included the FBI and local U.S. Attorney (and potential federal judge) Samuel T. Currin.

Both the county and state boards of elections had declined to prosecute Wilson, leading her to argue that the charges — later brought by a county grand jury — were racially motivated and that any errors were technical and not intentional. The county elections board had allowed all the voters with disputed registrations to vote in November 1984. After Republicans won a majority on the county elections board

in July 1985, members worked to initiate an indictment against Wilson.

Once Wilson was indicted, she turned to Christic, the NAACP, and other groups for help. These groups developed a multi-faceted campaign designed to call public attention to the abuses of the voter fraud charges and to pressure the officials who brought the charges.

The NAACP called monthly mass meetings, and black churches held support rallies. Christic sent a large mailing to Rainbow Coalition activists across the country asking them — as well as local Democrats — to write letters to the Democratic district attorney, Donald Jacobs, protesting the prosecution.

Wilson's lawyers, including Paul Jones of Kinston, filed motions outlining the partisan political maneuvering surrounding the Republican ballot security program, with its effect of intimidating black voters. With the details of the persecution buttressed by court documents, local and state newspapers began to follow the story.

By May the pressure had apparently convinced D.A. Jacobs to reconsider the case, and he dropped the charges at a preliminary hearing before trial.

Wilson called the dismissal a "victory for justice" and vowed to continue registering voters in Kinston.

— *Thanks to Christic Institute-South*

Death Row — It's The South

Of the 61 executions in the United States beginning when Gary Gilmore elected to face a Utah firing squad in 1977, only five took place outside the South. These five inmates voluntarily chose execution rather than to appeal their sentences.

In the first six months of 1986, 11 people have been executed in four states, all in the South. Texas has executed five; Florida, three; and Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina have executed one each.

JAN. 10: James Terry Roach in South Carolina.

MAR. 12: Charles William Bass in Texas.

MAR. 21: Arthur Lee Jones in Alabama.

APR. 15: Daniel Thomas in Florida.

APR. 16: Jeffrey Allan Barney in Texas.

APR. 21: David Funchess in Florida.

MAY 15: Jay Pinkerton in Texas.

MAY 20: Ronald Straight in Florida.

JUNE 9: Rudy Esquivel in Texas.

JUNE 18: Kenneth Brock in Texas.

JUNE 24: Jerome Bowden in Georgia.

Sessions Not in Court

On June 5, the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee rejected the nomination of Jefferson Sessions, a U.S. Attorney in Alabama, to be a federal district court judge, largely due to his inexperience and political extremism. This was only the second time in 48 years that the committee refused to send a judicial nominee to the full U.S. Senate for confirmation. Sessions subsequently asked for his name to be withdrawn from consideration.

As the clock winds down on the Reagan regime (30 months and counting), the administration and the Senate have increasingly clashed over federal

judicial appointments. Reagan is attempting to establish his conservative revolution through the courts in much the same way as FDR did with his liberal activist judicial appointments in the 1930s and '40s. Reagan has now made 262 appointments to the federal courts, over one-third of the entire federal judiciary. Because federal judges are appointed for life, they can have an impact long after Reagan leaves office.

Sessions, 38, is the sort of young, extremely conservative foot soldier that the Administration seeks but which the Senate is increasingly unwilling to accept on the federal bench. He is best known as the prosecutor who relentlessly pursued a group of voter rights activists in the black belt, including Selma march leader Albert Turner. His voter-fraud case proved embarrassingly weak: the jury acquitted the defendants of 36 counts in just four hours after the trial judge dismissed 50 counts before the case went to the jury. Despite the acquittal, the charges clearly chilled black voter participation in an area where blacks were making political inroads.

The most obvious beneficiary of that result is conservative U.S. Senator Jeremiah Denton, who is up for reelection in 1986 after winning just 50 percent of the state's vote in 1980. Sessions's nomination was proposed by Denton. Alabama's other senator, Democrat Howell Heflin, voted against the nomination.

Lest there be any doubt that Sessions passed the ideological litmus test required of Reagan judicial appointees, during his nomination hearing it was reported that he had once described the National Council of Churches, the NAACP, the ACLU, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as "un-American" organizations teaching "anti-American" values. He also stated that he thought Ku Klux Klan members were OK until he heard that they used drugs. In addition, he acknowledged a series of other overtly racist statements.

Perhaps the judiciary committee's rejection of Sessions will have a chilling effect on Reagan's attempts to saddle the country with conservative ideologues promoting the right-wing's political

agenda from the courts. The nomination of Samuel T. Currin of North Carolina to a newly created federal judgeship has been on hold as the White House waits for a more politically opportune moment to send up Currin's name. Currin, a U.S. attorney who has himself gone after black voter rights ac-

tivists, has been denounced as unqualified by much of the state's legal and political community. His support comes solely from the ideological extremists surrounding his principal backer, Senator Jesse Helms. □

— *Thanks to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights*

Mississippi Writers Reflections of Childhood and Youth Volume Two: Nonfiction

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Edited by SAMUEL J. WELLS and ROSEANNA TUBBY

An informative collection of essays examining the vestige of Choctaw who remained in Mississippi after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek had exiled most of the tribe from native lands. \$22.50

University Press of Mississippi
3825 Ridgewood Road / Jackson, MS 39211



The South Takes a Bow

It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to document the work of many theater artists who insistently and persistently utilize their art to strengthen, examine, and validate the lives of Southern people. Having always believed that art is a pathway to social change and having personally explored that belief with prisoners, the disabled, and other specialized groups increases my enthusiasm about the significance of this documentation. I have seen changes and empowerment occur through my own experience and through that of many of the other cultural workers examined here.

This issue celebrates the less known — a range of artists whose work is usually close to home, close to people they know best, and close to the heart in a very personal sense. Many of them are people who were deeply involved in the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the women's movement, people whose art is very connected to their hopes and dreams for their own lives and world. Many of them remained at home or returned home to practice their art.

Excluded from the issue are the many community theaters, university theaters, and mass culture centers. In general, their choices of plays and broad purposes are a reflection of "high culture" or "Broadway" entertainment and do not speak in particular to a region or to social change issues. While these productions are individually enriching and sometimes important for bonding community members, they are often vehicles to take people away from their own lives into a world that doesn't exist. Also excluded are the more famous playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and Carson McCullers, because they are familiar to most people and because their work, insightful and beautiful as it is, generally places their characters in deep psychological conflict with limited social/political context.

Some of the artists you will meet are entering a second or third decade of performing, scripting, producing, and touring with shows which illuminate problems and issues pertinent to their close community or ones which explore the broader social issues that perplex and torment society at large. Companies like Roadside Theater draw their material from the history of their communities, examining the rural Appalachian traditions, way of life, and struggles. John O'Neal of the lately-put-to-rest Free Southern Theater had created a character, Junebug Jabbo Jones, who tells stories based on the rural black experience.

Urban groups like Atlanta's Seven Stages and the Southern Theater Conspiracy examine issues like nuclear proliferation or gay rights or the effects of religious ritual on the form of theater.

The play excerpts in this issue reflect the diversity and range of style and subjects from Fred Gamel's Vietnam Marines on the day of Martin Luther King's assassination in *Wasted* to Barbara Lebow's concentration camp survivor in *A Shayna Maidel*. Some playwrights tell their own stories in their plays. Others like Jo Carson and Don Baker write about Theodore Dreiser and Stonewall Jackson, famous figures who affected the course of history in small Southern environments. Another performer-playwright, Tommy Thompson, developed his own character, John Proffitt, a white man who became a blackface minstrel in the 1840s despite his qualms about the morality of his act.

A play-writing contest designed especially for this issue drew scripts from over 50 Southern playwrights. The two winning plays feature singularly Southern characters, rooted in their communities: North Carolina potato factory workers from Christine Rusch and New Orleans drag queens from Jim Grimsley.

This special issue of *Southern Exposure* explores the roots of theatrical form as well as the lives and work of the predecessors of the current theatrical movement. There is a blend of first-person narrative and objective journalistic reporting. There are artists who come together through organizations like Alternate ROOTS or the North Carolina Playwrights' Fund. There is a small directory of grassroots theaters, along with profiles of organizations that fund and support theater, starting points for artists and audiences to make connections. There are also new artists, young artists, people struggling to find a voice that speaks of the present without the experiences of the '60s or '70s.

Cultural democracy is at the core of all the work represented here — a culture which speaks of and to the people of a region and about the forces in their lives. Their voices validate the struggle of the oppressed, the under-represented and the non-traditional. It is my hope that bringing the broad spectrum of cultural work together in this magazine will open new avenues for both the reader and the artists.

It would not have been possible to compile this issue without discussions, advice, and suggestions from Ruby Lerner and Dudley Cocke, who were my consultants. Special thanks also goes to the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, the J. Arc Foundation, Southern Arts Federation, Bland Simpson, Wanda Cody, and particularly to the staff of the Institute for Southern Studies and Southern Types. □

— Rebecca Ranson
Guest Editor

Rebecca Ranson is a playwright who is a native of North Carolina. The author of over 30 plays produced in many cities across the country, Ranson bases most of her work on voices of the oppressed.

BY RUBY LERNER

Reclaiming People's Theater

A H I S T O R Y

In January of 1919 Professor Frederick Koch gave a lecture entitled "Playmakers of the People" on the Chapel Hill campus of the University of North Carolina. He stated that the prime purpose of the newly formed Carolina Playmakers would be the production of original plays dealing with North Carolina life and people. The organization would also take responsibility for encouraging such playwriting in North Carolina.

Koch, the visionary director of the university's drama program, was a Kentucky native. He taught English at the University of North Dakota for several years, and then studied theater at Harvard with George Pierce Baker, one of the most influential theater teachers of the early 20th century. When he went back to North Dakota, he began to produce the Irish dramatists Lady Gregory, John Millington Synge, and William Butler Yeats. He found their plays "of the people" poetic and emotionally direct, and took the "folk plays" concept later when he moved on to North Carolina. The plays were well received — people saw their own experiences and history mirrored on the stage. Koch said of the

plays: "Such are the country folk-plays of Dakota — simple plays, sometimes crude, but always near to the good, strong, wind-swept soil. They are plays of the travail and the achievement of a pioneer people."

Koch had achieved a national reputation by the time he came to North Carolina in 1918. In 1925, when the folk drama movement was only seven years old, the Playmakers Theatre was dedicated on the university campus. It would continue with great vitality well into the 1940s, guided by the belief that the local and specific can serve as a window to the universal — and that, in fact, this is a hallmark of all great art.

The folk drama movement produced novelist Thomas Wolfe, and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paul Green, as well as dance critic Walter Terry, performers Sheppard Strudwick, Eugenia Rawls, and Louise Fletcher, bandleader Kay Kyser, *Dark of the Moon* playwright Howard Richardson, novelist Betty Smith (*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Joy in the Morning*), former *Wall Street Journal* editor Vermont Royster, and others. Many critics of the day felt that the Playmakers' influence had extended to the novel, to the short story, and to nonfiction. They were described as "a centralizing, crystallizing and vitalizing force unequalled in Southern literature to date." On the 25th anniversary of the Playmakers in 1943, a noted theater historian stated that "the best way to estimate the significance of the movement known as the Playmakers Theatre is to try to imagine what American play writing would have been for the last 25 years without them."

When I attended UNC in the early 1970s, only the ghosts of the glory of

former times floated through Chapel Hill hallways. As theater students we knew only that we were somewhere that had once been considered important and was no longer. A movement which had lasted more than 25 years was a distant memory — rarely discussed — and described in a standard theater text only by the adjective “influential.”

The UNC drama department in the 1970s seemed primarily interested in producing actors who could read soap opera copy well enough not to make fools of themselves in New York auditions. The concerns of the program had slowly shifted away from what was probably perceived as embarrassingly “regional” to what might be viewed as more cosmopolitan. That meant preparing students for the realities of the world of professional theater — which at that time meant New York and the handful of institutional resident theaters scattered around the country. Remaining in the region in order to create work that might be “valuable” in some way to the overall life of the region was not presented as an option to serious theater students.

The loss of the history of the Playmakers movement is dismaying, especially for those of us who followed along the same path. Because we followed unknowingly, at least at first, we were forced to learn a hard lesson: Without a history it is difficult to enjoy legitimacy in the present moment. So, a grassroots cultural movement like Alternate ROOTS (the Regional Organization of Theatres — South, see article on p.110), which asserts that you can create your own art where you are, out of who you are and what your community is, appears even to itself to have sprung out of nowhere, when in fact it is really just a further step on an already existing continuum.

As a new generation dedicated to folk drama, we now acknowledge the Playmakers as one of a number of historical forebears, which also includes the Chapel Hill-based regionalist movement of the '30s and '40s, and the civil rights and women's movements of the '60s and '70s. For us in ROOTS, Southern theater means a theater that is both about the South and for the South — its history and its current concerns (many of which are also national or global). For the most part,

we have chosen not to promote organizations that are merely located in the South, organizations whose bill of fare is mostly work written for another place and another time. Our primary interest has been in creating an indigenous body of work which will speak to an audience whose lives and concerns are not usually reflected in mainstream theater.

While fiercely regional, we are not interested in a regionalism that is either quaint or parochial, but one that is expansive in the way that Koch defined it in the early part of the century, and in the way that Kentucky poet, essayist, and farmer Wendell Berry described it in his contemporary essay, “The Regional Motive”:

“The regionalism that I adhere to could be defined simply as local life

aware of itself. It would tend to substitute for the myths and stereotypes of a region a particular knowledge of the life of the place one lives in and intends to continue to live in.

“Without a complex knowledge of one's place, and without the faithfulness to one's place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually, destroyed. I look upon the sort of regionalism that I am talking about not just as a recurrent literary phenomenon, but as a necessity of civilization and survival.”

But can a nomadic corporate culture afford to encourage this kind of attachment to place and to memory? Political philosopher Sheldon Wolin writes: “The major structures of



Taking theater to the people: Carolina Playmakers trouping through Georgia in the 1930s.

power in this society, whether business, education, finance, the military, government or communications require, as a condition of the effective exercise of power, the destruction or neutralization of the historical identities of persons or places. Persons and places are more likely to survive if they repress their local peculiarities, surrender old rhythms of life and the accompanying skills, and fashion themselves anew to accommodate to the abstract requirements of assembly lines, data processing and systems of impersonal communications."

The dramatic arts can fit quite neatly into this corporate vision. Devaluing the local, the large-scale "red carpet" institutions produce virtually interchangeable art from city to city and are the perfect cultural components of the corporate society. Priding themselves on an eclectic point of view, these institutions generally present a "well-balanced" season of work. This often includes a piece from the Western European classic literature, a 20th-century American classic, a special event for the holiday season such as *A Christmas Carol* or a large scale musical, and one or two plays that were recent successes on or off Broadway, plays like Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* or Marsha Norman's *Night Mother*. The contemporary work produced, whether serious or comic, often portrays neurotic individuals and families, and is referred to as "psychological drama." Rarely is the world beyond the kitchen table looked to as either a source of solace or blame.

There is nothing inherently wrong with these selections. However, the relationship of these theater institutions to the life and concerns of the community as a whole is so limited that even on the rare occasions when they do produce work dealing with important societal issues, they do not do so with the goal of community problem solving, since the liaisons of these institutions are rarely with the health care, social service, educational, or neighborhood sectors of the community.

These theaters do, however, perform a valuable function for the local business community, as they become part of a package of attractions used to

lure new business to an area. They provide a service to high-ranking corporate employees and to those who would woo their business. The unwritten law is that they must guarantee an art which will be proficient, and sometimes dazzling, in technical aspects of production, while socially and politically unthreatening in content. Citing their economic impact, these organizations tend to be well supported by municipalities and by local foundations and corporations. Considerable support, both public and private, is therefore going to subsidize the cultural tastes of the most affluent segment of the population. The (often further subsidized) effort of these institutions to diversify the composition of the audience through outreach programs is really only an example of cultural colonization. This attitude

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moment.*

assumes the supremacy of the kind of art that those organizations generally produce, in the well-meaning but misguided belief that the only problem to be solved is one of availability of high culture products to all segments of the community.

The "democratization of high culture" is not, however, the heart of the problem. The more critical task is how to promote and support true cultural democracy. Cultural democracy is the right of a community (geographic, ethnic, racial, or sexual) to its own cultural expressions and to equitable access to the society's material resources for the manifestation of those expressions. However, with the "red carpet" organizations inaccurately viewed as both the norm and the ideal for which to strive, current efforts to sustain an art which promotes a celebration of local culture or

a critical examination of local or societal issues have been quite difficult. The goal of this type of work is sometimes to affect a situation directly and sometimes to mirror the history, concerns, and experiences of those not generally included by a theater directed toward the white middle-class.

But the artists who have chosen this path are often denied access to the level of resources available to their colleagues working in mainstream venues. The few progressive funders and publications that do exist often support cultural work that appears at odds with their articulated policies in the social arena, or they fail to support cultural work at all.

If we have any interest, as a society, in building a culture that will reflect the history and diversity of our communities, we will have to understand that "culture" cannot be purchased from Europe or New York. Culture is something we will have to create for ourselves. The extravagant sums of money spent to build lavish new arts facilities have little to do with art and everything to do with real estate.

The living theater artists working throughout the South who are featured in these pages are engaged in a more difficult and more important task of cultural development. Collectively, their work embraces a vision of a South that values both place and past, while maintaining a critical stance toward both the past and present, in an effort to be part of building a future South that will be both humane and just. While it is unlikely that cultural work alone can bring about social change, it can enhance other community awareness and change efforts (See Carol Schafer and David DeWitt's article on p. 43 about how a play on rape enlightened their community.)

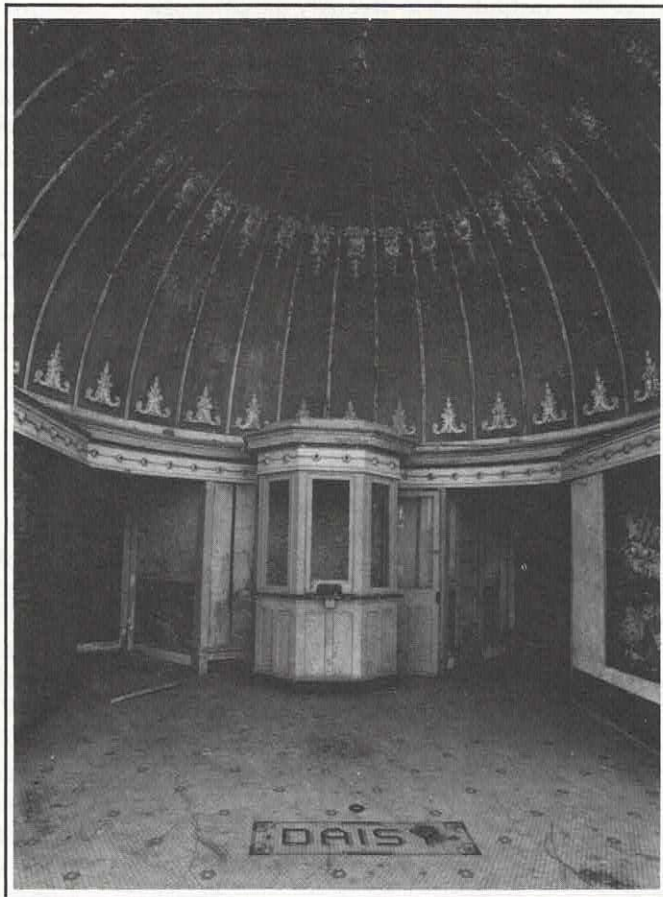
Through documenting the work now being done and by linking that work to its artistic past, we hold out the hope that future generations of Southern artists will see community-oriented work as a valid option. We hope that they will also see that the struggle for cultural democracy, which affirms the validity of art produced and created by a community for itself, is not separate from the effort to build political and economic democracy in the region. □

Ruby Lerner is director of Alternate ROOTS.

SOUTHERN THEATER

& THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS

SE file photo by Andrew Yale



Daisy Theater
Beale Street, Memphis

The weight of history lies heavy in the South. No one understood that better than William Faulkner, in his great saga of a doomed land suffering a burden of guilt for a history of wrongs and injustices. When I first came to the South I was, of course, aware of the startling transformations that had taken place over the past 20 years in the realm of social, economic, and political progress.

But as I drove towards my new home in Atlanta several years ago, I

BY JAMES FLANNERY

found it difficult to reconcile the familiar images of oppression, retribution, and redemption with the futuristic vista that lay before me, rising like a mirage out of mile upon mile of plangent rural landscape. Even now the contrasts between past and present faced on an almost daily basis in the South are a source of amazement and tension.

What I was to discover is that the contrasts that so startled me as a transplanted Northerner are equally perplexing to Southerners.

This was nowhere more evident than at a May 1985 conference on the future of professional theater in the South, sponsored by the Arts Management Institute of Virginia Polytechnic Institute under the co-direction of George Thorn and Paul Distler.

Attending were a group of leading artists and administrators representing

a wide range of interests. Most agreed that the problems of theater in the South are unique for a variety of historical reasons. But they sharply disagreed on how to overcome these problems. What is most interesting is that the disagreement focused on deeply felt philosophical differences concerning the role of culture in American, and particularly Southern society.

Perhaps the most radical viewpoint of any of the participants was that of Ruby Lerner, the executive director of Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theatres — South), who described herself as utterly pessimistic over the increasing gap between the haves and have-nots in Southern theater. Backing her case with an impressive range of statistics on the disparity between support available for a few large organizations and that available to a multitude of small grassroots and experimental companies, Lerner argued that this policy was both socially and artistically indefensible.

According to Lerner, the South is “caught in a hideous moment in time in which we seem to be trying to catch up with economic structures supportive of huge monolithic institutions that elsewhere are recognized as obsolete. What is needed is not imported cultural systems but a recognition of the value of our own indigenous institutions and their particular ways of functioning. In turn, this will require a drastic change in our understanding of culture as it relates to every aspect of life. That understanding is not likely to come from the so-called major institutions which bear a striking resemblance to dinosaurs in their inability to adapt to change.”

For Lerner and others — like Robert Hull, executive director of the Southern Council of Foundations—who share her views, the possibility of new funds for Southern alternative theater companies is extremely unlikely. Not only are there proportionately fewer foundations or wealthy individuals here than elsewhere in the country but, according to Hull, their predilections are conservative.

This is reinforced by a tendency to view the arts as merely a showcase to attract business. This “Chamber of

Commerce approach to funding,” says Hull, results in the idea that “a city such as Atlanta needs only one major gallery, one major theater, and one major orchestra in order to achieve cultural maturity and recognition.”

Vince Anthony, the executive director of Atlanta’s nationally recognized Center for Puppetry Arts, explains that a major reason for the success of his organization is precisely that it is seen as unique: “Given the fact that most corporations are attuned to business values, what they seem to think is that there can only be one best chicken packager, one best baseball team, and one best theater in a city. If the idea of a pluralistic culture means anything, we must teach them that so far as the arts are concerned there ought to be many versions of the best.”

Alternate ROOTS [see article on p. 110] closely reflects this pluralistic ideal, for it consists of a coalition of some 30 performing arts organizations and individuals located throughout the Southeast. Based in both rural and urban areas, ROOTS members range from individual musicians, dancers, mimes, jugglers, and storytellers to theater companies. Tracing its own roots back to the ideals of the Agrarian and Regional movements of the early ’30s, ROOTS is devoted to encouraging and supporting Southern performing artists committed to making their art out of who they are and what their communities are.

Another characteristic is that the ROOTS organizations are, by and large, owned and operated by artists themselves rather than boards of trustees, as in the corporate model of regional theaters. The result is that these artists feel they have direct control over their own destinies.

My first experience of the extraordinary diversity and richness of ROOTS occurred during its annual festival in the fall of 1982, shortly after my arrival in Atlanta. Because much of the material was new to me, almost all of the performances had a certain exotic charm. Two productions are particularly stamped in my memory because they combined provocative subject matter, an original performance style, and a strong social point of view so as to transcend mere exoticism and become major works of art.

The first was created by Roadside Theater, a group which began in 1974 as an effort by a group of young college-educated actors and musicians to speak through the medium of theater to their neighbors located in the back hollows, farms, and mining camps of one of the most beautiful but impoverished areas of the country, the remote Cumberland Mountains of central Appalachia. With the help of an Expansion Arts Grant from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Roadside company created several works based upon local folklore and actual occurrences in the mountain country.

The play I saw, *South of the Mountain*, examined the overwhelming changes in the life of a family in the ’50s as it moved from a small self-sufficient farm to dependency upon coal-mining. The drama of the piece focused on the shifting attitudes of the family toward one another and the outside world in the face of profound cultural alterations. Inspired by the storytelling tradition of the rural South, three performers relied primarily on their voices alone to create an imaginative world of stark and desolate beauty. Director Dudley Cocke had his performers share in the telling of the story and within that simple format achieved a startling variety of effects. Sometimes haunting phrases were repeated singly or in unison; characters completed one another’s thoughts as if they had become one mind over a long period of time; songs accompanied by a banjo or guitar flowed in and out of the dialogue with natural ease, and throughout the piece the performers worked out of a wonderful sense of ensemble rhythm. It was an experience distinguished by superbly refined craft in which craft was hidden.

My second equally memorable ROOTS performance occurred at midnight on the same evening. To a packed house in which the audience acted like participants in a wild exorcistic ritual, Atlanta’s Southern Theatre Conspiracy unfolded a devastating satire on the fundamentalist religiosity that exercises an increasing hold on our lives today. Called the *Illuminati: Some Things You Ought to Know Before the World Ends*, its setting was a strange

kind of revival meeting in which we became the congregation. This format was also used in *Tent Meeting*, the company's huge success at the recent Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theater of Louisville.

But unlike *Tent Meeting*, the *Illuminati* ultimately cast its net far beyond Southern fundamentalism to enfold and hold up to ridicule virtually every perverse creed — political, economic, and religious — that bends mankind into submission. The *Illuminati* was performed with brilliant comic exactitude by its authors, Levi Lee (as the Reverend Eddie, clad in tattered long red underwear that accentuated his Santa Claus-like white hair and beard) and Larry Larson (his sycophantic hunch-backed acolyte). At the curtain call Lee broke the applause by asking us to observe a minute's silence in hope that the Virgin Mary might appear to cure us of our ills. Obediently many of us bowed our heads, then jerked back up as if caught in a bad joke. Yet, as we continued to wait, chortling embarrassedly and knowing we'd been had by a master con man, we also were aware that our gullibility was fed by a facile desire for miraculous redemption. Bertolt Brecht, I'm sure, would have greatly enjoyed the cruel irony.

With experiences like these in mind, it is easy to understand the passion with which people like Ruby Lerner plead their cause and their belief that the interests of big business and art can never coincide. One Southerner who takes a strong exception to this view is H. Brandt ("Brandy") Ayers, editor and publisher of a distinguished small-town paper, *The Anniston* (Alabama) *Star*. Ayers describes the South as the equivalent of a nation that has just emerged from third-world status, and therefore has had no capital recently to support significant cultural institutions. "Outsiders don't understand this," he says, "and it's no wonder because for a long time Southerners themselves didn't want to accept their backward position."

Ayers takes particular pride in a July 1985 meeting of the Southern Legislative Conference that focused on the impact of the arts. "This group represents some of the leading political and business figures in the

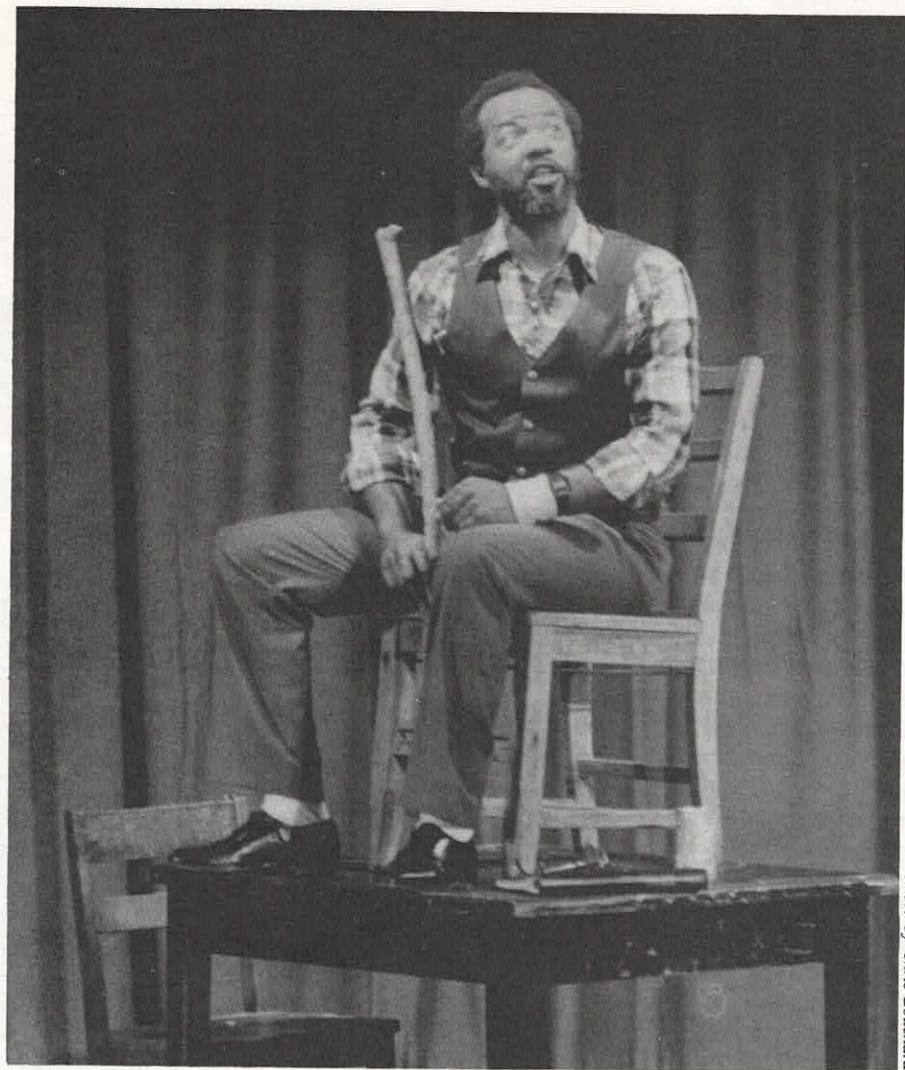


Photo by Chris Bouchard

John O'Neal in his solo show portraying Junebug Jabbo Jones.

South," he explains. "They recognize that the arts can serve business, labor, finance, and the academy. I have little patience with people who automatically distrust politicians and businessmen, thinking that it's all a power game in which artists are bound to lose. You can't go to the bank with distrust written on your face."

Ayers was himself one of the key people responsible for the development of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, which for the past 14 years was located in Anniston. This year the festival acquired a new \$20 million home in Montgomery, 100 miles away, thanks to the patronage of wealthy industrialist Winton ("Red") Blount. I asked Ayers how he felt about this and he replied, somewhat ruefully, that it was "like the loss of a child. Somehow our community didn't catch on fast enough to the importance of 'Mr. Culture.' We're having a summer festival to replace it—bluegrass, com-

munity theater, and the like—but it won't have the same impact."

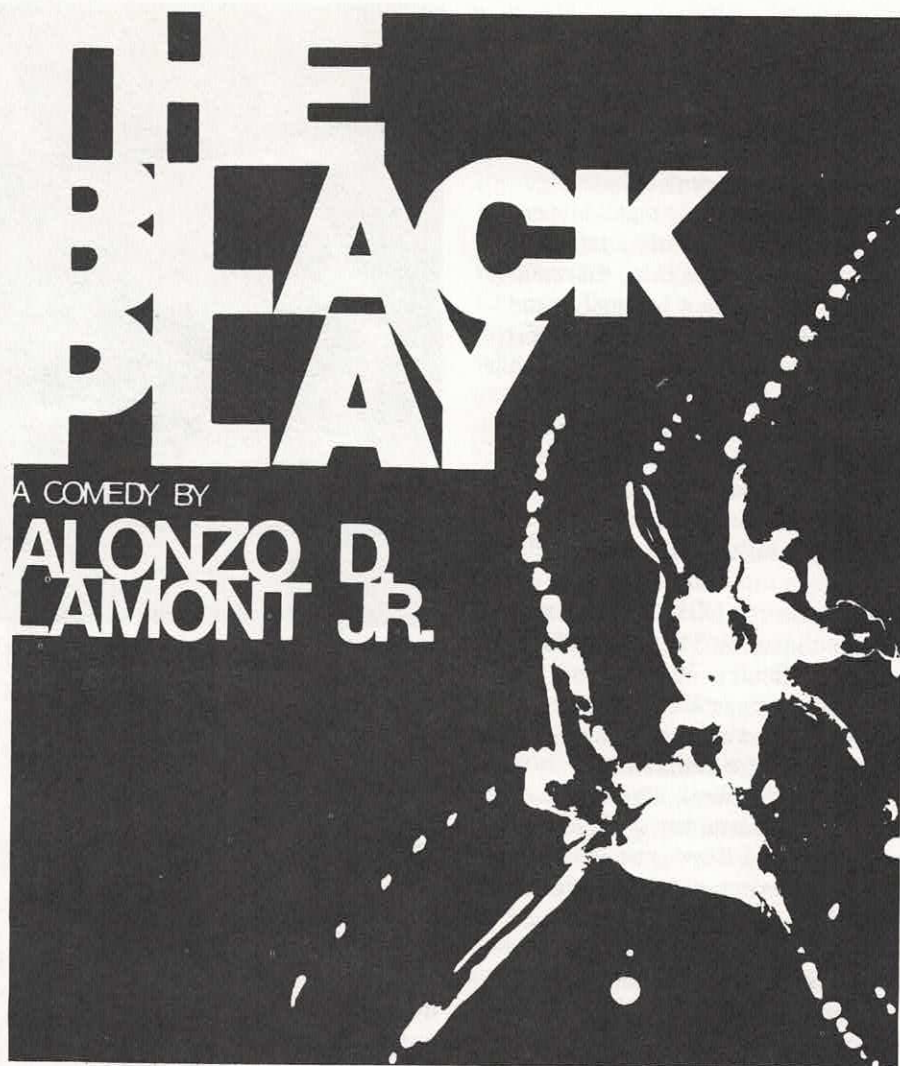
In contrast to Ayers, the artistic director of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Martin Platt, was perhaps the most conservative voice at the conference. He explained his views: "That's because I run one of the largest theaters in the South, have incredibly good support from the state and city (close to a million dollars), and am a Republican." Platt is unapologetic in his advocacy of "high culture," in the European sense of the term. "I simply don't believe that Roadside, much as I admire their work, speaks any more to a Southern audience than *Hamlet* does. Besides, I question the value of subsidizing folk art taken out of the hills for export." Despite his Republican leanings, Platt didn't mention another apparent contradiction with *ROOTS*, that of advocating an essentially conservative culture through activist politics.

But Platt did voice a common complaint: that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) — the major national theater funder — discriminates against Southern companies. “The NEA claims that quality is the bottom line, yet it’s clear that their practices favor a few ‘untouchable’ places with early track records of success. It’s impossible for us to break into that group because there are almost no Southerners on their panels or staff.”

Fred Chappell, for the past eight years artistic director of Atlanta’s Alliance Theater, echoes Platt’s criticism of the NEA, though on somewhat different grounds. Chappell tells a cautionary tale of what happened when the Alliance ventured into some mildly innovative productions, a practice NEA encourages. Through an aggressive marketing campaign instituted by managing director Bernard Havard, the subscription audience at the Alliance had grown from 6,500 in the 1977 season to 22,100 for 1983-84. What the audience typically had experienced was a “balanced” season that invariably consisted of a Christmas musical, a Shakespeare, a modern classic (more often than not a play by Tennessee Williams), a recent Broadway hit, and an occasional new work.

Yet when the Alliance tried a different formula two years ago, it suffered a loss of 3,500 subscribers for the 1984-85 season. The previous season had ended with two controversial productions, a meretricious black version of *The Three Penny Opera* and a visually stunning but poorly acted *Julius Caesar* under the direction of Robert Woodruff. Within a short time after these productions the Alliance’s new managing director, Andy Witt, was fired. Chappell resigned his own position in May 1985.

Chappell continues to head the League of Southern Theaters, an organization consisting of 30 Equity (the actors’ union) companies located from Virginia to Florida and as far west as Dallas. “LOST is our acronym, and it’s accurate,” he says. When pressed for reasons, Chappell complains that the NEA fails to understand that artistic conditions in the South are different from elsewhere. “You just can’t bring



Playbill from Academy Theatre, Atlanta

audiences along as fast as some people would like.” He remains extremely proud of the large subscription audience developed at the Alliance, but he nonetheless expressed a frustration with his former board of directors. “We could have done five Christmas musicals a year, and some of them wouldn’t have cared as long as the seats were filled.”

Chappell’s views are probably shared by most of the LOST colleagues, but not by Jon Jory, the producing director of the preeminent regional theater of the South, the Actors Theater of Louisville. After 15 years in an equally conservative but much smaller city than Atlanta, Jory has parlayed an instinct for popular theater and a touch of hucksterism into an enterprise that serves a subscription audience of 17,000 with what they want most of the year while leavening the repertoire with an annual festival of original plays that has won interna-

tional attention.

Having discovered Pulitzer Prize-winning Southern dramatists like Beth Henley and Marsha Norman, Jory now declares that he doesn’t care what the critics elsewhere think of his work. “What we’ve got to do in the South is build structures that we can respect ourselves. I don’t understand the tribal rituals of South America. Similarly, there are many plays that speak eloquently to local conditions but can’t survive away from home. Theatrically, the South must stop behaving as if it were recently defeated. Instead, we’ve got to behave like artists and say what we’ve got to say, and not because our subscribers or the *New York Times* may want it.”

Jory’s views are clearly much closer to those of *ROOTS* than to the beliefs of any of his mainstream colleagues. Significantly, the hit of last year’s Louisville festival of new plays was the Southern Theater Conspiracy’s

innovative *Tent Meeting*. Of equal significance, the 1985-86 NEA appropriation to the Actor's Theater was \$175,000 while the more cautious Alliance received only \$20,000.

It would be convenient but simplistic to conclude that while certain problems are peculiar to theater in the South, there is nothing that cannot be rectified with new leadership and increased financial support. In short, what this would say is that the South is the same as the rest of the country, only more so. This glib analysis would ignore two salient factors: the historical presence of Southern blacks, and their relationship to the still immensely influential Southern oligarchy.

Significantly, *LOST* includes no black companies. The reasons for this are not difficult to fathom. Until 20 years ago segregation forced blacks to sit in restricted areas of theaters, and those seats were available on only certain days of the week. Radio, television, and journalism ignored blacks or treated their lives as worry-free and rosy. In most communities the church fulfilled the major social as well as religious function. Traditional storytelling survived, but, as Alice Walker notes, this too was debased by the caricature of Uncle Remus, who was seen even by black children as "a kind of talking teddy bear." Thus black theater had great difficulty becoming established or achieving recognition even within its own community.

In 1963 a major step was taken towards developing an indigenous black theater with the establishment of the Free Southern Theatre as an offshoot of the civil rights movement. The founding members, Doris Derby and John O'Neal of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and Gilbert Moses of the movement-oriented Mississippi Free Press, were concerned with employing theater as a vehicle for providing ordinary black people with information and knowledge about their suppressed condition so as to institute social and political change. Originally a mixed company of blacks and whites, the Free Southern Theater invited Richard Schrechner, then a professor at Tulane University, to be its first director.

By 1968, however, the company had become all black and had developed its



Traditional Theater: Alabama Shakespeare Festival's 1984 production of *Macbeth: The Witches*

own performance style involving a mixture of poetry, dance, and music. As in traditional black church services or blues or gospel jams, audience members (who were mostly black) were encouraged to react in a free improvisational manner with the performers. Afterward discussions were held on the issues raised by the play. Aptly, poet and critic Larry Neal has described the Free Southern Theatre as less a theater than "a history of the thinking of black nationalists."

Yet the company outlived its time, and co-founder O'Neal decided last year that it was dead. In November a traditional New Orleans funeral service was held officially to bury the Free Southern Theater [see article on p. 72]. O'Neal declares that this was necessary in order to avoid confusion between his current work as a performer of one-man shows based on his experience in the civil rights movement and the past purposes and accomplishments of the company. "What the Free Southern Theater did — that is, to speak for the masses of black people in the South — cannot be done today," he explains. "We had no money then, but we did have a movement that enabled us to aggregate our resources. Now there is neither money nor a movement."

I asked O'Neal why he continued to write and perform for mainly white audiences. "What I am doing would not reach a black mass audience," he replied, "and what would speak to

them would intimidate a middle-class audience, black or white.

"One of the important things I learned from the failure of the Free Southern Theater," he continued, "is that you can't divorce art from an economic and social philosophy. What kept the movement going is that there were a great many people mad enough to act simultaneously. But we were dominated by philosophical chaos. So [eventually] the pragmatists won."

O'Neal now aims his performances where the power lies. "The reason I perform for white folks [now] is that I came to realize that you can't change the black condition without the support of the majority of the population which happens to be 80 percent white."

Among the pragmatists referred to by O'Neal is Atlanta's mayor Andrew Young. Like his predecessor Maynard Jackson, Young has a strong commitment to the arts as an instrument for advancing interracial understanding and cooperation. Atlanta's Bureau of Cultural Affairs, headed by Shirley Cooks (who happens to be the sister of Harry Belafonte) expends a total budget of \$530,000 on the arts, of which \$200,000 is raised from private sources.

Cooks explains that the highest priority of the bureau is audience development, particularly among blacks, who comprise 66 percent of Atlanta's population yet historically have not taken advantage of the city's

cultural resources. Working with local arts organizations chiefly supported by whites as well as with prominent leaders in the business community, Cooks has helped to bring to Atlanta touring units from major black ensembles like the Dance Theater of Harlem and the Negro Ensemble Company, also from New York.

While prestigious visiting productions are important in winning new audiences from the black community, 30 percent of which lives below the poverty level, many other problems remain, as indicated by the experience of Jomandi—one of the most adventurous theaters in Atlanta as well as one of the city's two black-run companies. Founded in 1979 by Tom Jones and Marsha Jackson, two native Southerners who met while studying theater at Amherst and Smith—Jomandi has staged no less than 25 original plays in its brief history. These range in style from *That Serious He-Man Ball*, a realistic play that within the context of a pick-up basketball game explores the sexual attitudes of black males [see excerpt on p. 91], to a series of "folk operas" that—like the work of the Free Southern Theater—draw much of their inspiration from the Southern gospel tradition. The latter are by far the most popular with Jomandi's audience of mostly blacks because of the religious flavor.

But when I asked whether the abuses of fundamentalist fanaticism were ever explored, as with the Southern Theater Conspiracy, Jones replied that that would not be a good idea. On further questioning I learned that homosexuality and an accurate picture of slavery were also taboo subjects.

Having had the experience in Atlanta of trying to cast a black actor for the role of Jean in Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, I told Jones how I was ultimately forced to bring in someone from the North. This was because I could find no native Southerner able to combine the qualities of sensuality and rage that I was looking for. "That does not surprise me," was his comment. "The tradition of the South is to gloss over its tremendous contradictions with manners. Blacks, like whites, do not wish to be reminded of where they really came from, what they did and what was done to them. Instead of

emulating the middle class they draw their role models from the white aristocracy. And even then they don't see the contradictions. The same is true of actors. Unless they've lived and studied in the North they seem to be content with one persona. In other words, they're not used to investigating themselves or society. I suppose that's what makes them so conservative."

It seemed to me that Tom Jones had hit upon a crucial factor that truly distinguished the South from the rest of the country. It was this factor—the unwillingness to face its internal contradictions—that led to right-to-work laws hindering the development of unions; that turned a blind eye to million-dollar religious crusades founded on doctrines of solipsism and hatred; and that fostered an aura of gentility while tolerating a public school system distinguished only for its abysmal failings.

What other cause could there be for eulogizing Robert W. Woodruff as a genius and benefactor to mankind—a businessman who became a multimillionaire by selling the idea that "Coke" is wholesome? No wonder he had the slogan, "There is no God but advertising, and Atlanta is his prophet." Or how else to explain the \$4.5 million annually raised in Atlanta for the four institutions (one of which is the Alliance Theater) housed in the city's Woodruff Arts Center when a similar local public drive for 22 smaller institutions netted only \$150,000? Above all, I tell myself, is this not the reason why there is no tradition of criticism that would be sympathetic towards the South's better traits while ruthlessly, bitterly and furiously attacking the worst?

I muse awhile in self-righteous anger until I realize that the South's conservatism sometimes, somehow, does serve the region, if at times in marginal, perverted ways. I recall something else said to me by Tom Jones, that blacks who "escaped to the North" did not find a better way of life but only "exchanged Jim Crow for Dr. James Crow." And then I remember John O'Neal commenting that racism is worse in the North than in the South because "in an industrial society men are instruments while in an agrarian one even slaves are treated like human

beings."

And I have to admit that—spurious though the source—the wealth of the late Coca-Cola magnate, Woodruff, benefitted Atlanta immeasurably through his gifts to the arts and education, including my own university and organizations like the Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change. Finally, I remind myself that just 20 years ago Southern blacks and whites were locked in combat with one another, and that the real miracle of our contemporary South is the re-emergence of the traditional civility that marks their cooperative efforts today.

If there is not a great critical tradition in the South, what does exist is perhaps finer yet, a literary heritage that measures the everyday ambitions and triumphs of man against the inexorable judgment of time. What I am referring to is a moral sensibility that provides Southern writing at its best with a reverence for individual personhood within a particularity of place. Unlike the greater part of modern literature, Southern writing does not explain evil away as a self-made appetite. Nor does the Southern writer easily become entrapped within what novelist Marion Montgomery describes as a postmodernist "cage of words." Instead, she emphasizes that Southern writing is mimetic, meaning that it is grounded in a reality beyond itself. What this does is provide the writer with an understanding that we are all bound in a mystery larger than art, the mystery of existence.

William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Flannery O'Connor were certainly no strangers to the tragic contradictions in Southern life. And neither are the artists associated with the Roadside Theater, the Southern Theater Conspiracy, and Jomandi, nor playwrights like John O'Neal, Marsha Norman, Pearl Cleage, and Frank Manley. Like their predecessors, they attempt to function as the conscience of their people. Whether they are heard has consequences not only for the future of the South but, perhaps, for that of many other worlds beyond. □

James Flannery chairs the Department of Theater Studies at Emory University.

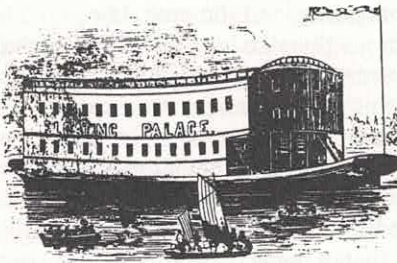
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STAGING A GOOD TIME

When we think of the word “theater,” the first image that comes to most people is probably that of a building; second, a stage; then of actors, costumes, scripts, lighting, on down the line to critics’ reviews. Yet in the South, in particular, because of the relative smallness and isolation of its communities, *theater* has been, and in many ways still is, a generic term that encompasses a multitude of performing arts.

In that sense, theater predates the British colonization of this region, this country. Most Native American tribes used pageantry in elaborate rituals to pay homage to nature and the change of seasons, to celebrate marriage and birth, to pass the spirits of the dead from this world to the next.

With the arrival of the colonists, the Native Americans brought their pageants to treaty negotiations, complete with costumes, music, and dance. They used pantomime to teach the colonists about the planting, harvesting, and preparation of native foods.



As in every culture since humans learned to communicate through words and images, storytelling — religious, tribal, or family-based — was a fundamental way for generations to pass on history and information as well as to entertain.

As the colonists moved west to the Appalachian region, storytelling was combined with traditional Scotch-Irish

music into folk songs. They were tales of love as in “Wagoner’s Lad,” of death as in “Railroad Boy,” or of the faithfulness of a dog as in “Old Blue.”

“Ye Bare and Ye Cub” — “bare” meaning bear — was the first documented scripted theatrical performance in the country, dating to 1665. Unfortunately, in that era “the theater” was considered immoral and actors degenerates. The two Virginia men who attempted to perform “Ye Bare” were arrested on the spot.

Charleston’s Dock Street Theater — the South’s oldest and still operating today — opened in 1736, but another generation would pass before theater, proper, would be accepted, and professional companies and houses were established in Northern cities in the 1770s and ’80s.

The South was not devoid of theatrical entertainment outside of Charleston before then, however. Medicine shows may have been the first advertising use of musical and theatrical performances — the hawking of patent medicines. And circuit-riding preachers often enthralled audiences with stories, songs and news from other towns they had visited.

On the old plantations, slaves served as a source of entertainment as well as labor. Their night-time songs and dances drew the attention of the slaveholders, their families and friends, who found the slaves’ energetic performances far superior to anything they could find in town. By the 1840s white entertainers adopted elements of the slave “shows,” painted their faces black, and took to the

Northern stages as minstrels. It was one of the first — but certainly not the last — example of white Americans exploiting black culture.

During the same period, circuses began to flourish in the South. The earliest recorded American circuses in the early 1700s offered the public little more than a glimpse at a few then-exotic animals — a camel, a lion, a bear. Over the next century, acrobats, equestrians, “wild” animal trainers, and of course minstrels were added to the shows, and the South — New Orleans, in particular — became a winter haven for the troupes.

“Floating circuses” on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers became the rage in the mid-1800s. Entire shows were housed and performed on huge boats. Although showboats were expensive to build, by using cheaper water routes they reduced the cost and effort of transporting the animals, performers, tents, and sets from city to city. One of the largest and most popular, the “Floating Palace,” seated 1,800 people in a gas-lit, heated, and



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Circuses, like most other forms of mass entertainment, came to a standstill during the Civil War. Decades passed before the South recovered economically and socially to the point that theater once again encompassed the “proper” as well as the folk performing arts.

Today, the variety of theater in the South is surely comparable to any other region of the country. Major theatrical production companies stretch from Atlanta to New Orleans and from Louisville to Richmond, and almost every mid-sized town has its own community theater. Scattered throughout the region are mimes, jugglers, puppeteers, and of course drawling storytellers who delight audiences from the smallest hamlets to the urban arts centers. And, as reflected throughout this issue, the South has an enthusiastic, talented and growing corps of performing artists and theater companies that are tapping the region’s distinct culture, history, and politics for unique and innovative productions.

Most of these artists are struggling, as artists always have. But at least they don’t have to worry about getting arrested for practicing their craft like the the two Virginia performers were in 1665. □

Southern Exposure thanks intern Caroline Senter and UNC-Greensboro’s theater historian Betty Jones for research assistance in the preparation of this introduction.

A Worthy Successor to "O-U-CIRCUS DAY"

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Storytelling: The Revival

BY JOSEPH SOBOL

The roots of theater, like the roots of literature, history, and even law and religion are in the ancient art of storytelling.

Storytelling is an inner theater. It takes place on the stage of the group imagination, cued by the consciousness of listeners and tellers. It is emergent theater, not yet sprung from the matrix of the community to announce itself as a separable event.

The traditional storyteller blends verbal skill and personal presence to create moments of absorption and release. But, in the South, storytelling is less likely to be recognized as a performance skill like singing, dancing, or playing an instrument than as a personality trait, like cheerfulness, or wit, and as grease for the social wheel. "Old so-and-so can really tell you some tales," I'll be told when asking after local tellers. "He's got a memory like you wouldn't believe." Or, "She's had such an interesting life."

Some societies, African or Celtic, for example, give the art of storytelling a dignity next to that of statesmanship. Not so in mainstream America; yet the skill is in demand and brings a certain measure of esteem to those it graces.

The rewards of fine talk in a simpler, more rural society were analogous to those of a professional performer in the city: recognition, and social prestige. In turn, the storyteller provided a quickening of the community wit and a celebration of shared experience.

Rapid industrialization and the breakup of traditional communities upset much of the basis for traditional storytelling. Extended oral fictions — the "Jack" tales and animal tales of our root cultures — were the first to go, except in rare isolated families. Thus, the proliferation of technological entertainment threatened to

unravel the whole fabric of traditional oral communication, a tradition woven of legendary local history and the leisurely sense of the present.

In the 1970s, storytelling began to spring up again in a revival movement which had its greatest impetus, fittingly enough, in the South. The National Storytelling Festival, founded in Jonesboro, Tennessee as a light-hearted civic promotion in 1973, grew into an international movement. Its organizational arm, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS), now claims over 2,000 members world-wide.

As with other recent cultural revivals, the goals and drives of the storytelling movement are a volatile mixture of the romantic, the antiquarian, the crusading, the pragmatic, the spiritual, and the down-to-earth. NAPPS counts among its members amateurs, professionals, teachers, librarians, folklorists, psychologists, actors, musicians, writers, politicians, preachers, and after-dinner speakers.

Is there an authentic "return to the oral tradition" going on, or even possible here? The answer is as complex as the make-up of the revival itself.

The art of many contemporary storytellers is not in any real sense part of the oral tradition. It is not learned by listening and observing life and lore in a living community, nor is it responsively retold. It is scripted, memorized and "done." These are performing artists who have turned to the products of oral tradition, to folktales collected in print. They may do this for various reasons, not the least of which is that the material adapts itself supremely well to solo performance.

Others who take part in the storytelling revival — particularly those in the

South — are deeply rooted, both in their sources and their styles, in local traditions. Donald Davis of NAPPS says that there was never, ever, a "storytelling time" at his grandmother's house. Storytelling was simply what was said in the fields, in the woods, at suppertime and after to pass the time and to brighten and enrich the family's life.

But the moment the storytelling experience moves from the natural community setting into the auditorium or the festival tent, its dynamics are radically changed. Professional storytelling immediately takes on elements of theater. It is an Event; it starts at 8 o'clock and ends at 10.

One breed of storytelling is not intrinsically "better" than another; both are contributing to the creation of new, cultivated varieties of storytelling. Most of us today have never experienced the ancient tales in their natural, fireside way. But through contemporary performers we can still appreciate the brilliance of their imagery, the simplicity of their forms, and the wisdom woven into their designs.

We love the old tales, too, for the relationships they implied among the tellers, their listeners, and the world. In the constant mutation of oral tales, in the individuality of each performance, in the way the stories' bones drew flesh and clothing from the countryside around them, the community could help to weave itself whole. This everyday magic is what many modern storytellers have taken into their hearts to perform, and that is why, through the disarray of the contemporary community, some deep study of the workings of tradition is essential. □

Joseph Sobol is a storyteller and visiting artist at Cleveland Technical College in Shelby, North Carolina.

The Soil of Faith

BY MICHAEL WILLIAMS

My earliest recollection of religious instruction is not set in a sanctuary or classroom. Rather I remember listening, sitting in a porch swing, looking down a long hill and across Crockett's Creek in rural Stewart County, Tennessee. My teacher was neither ordained by a church nor trained to teach Bible or theology. She was my mother's aunt, Minerva Cherry, a woman in her 70s whom I called "Aintie." She told me stories and sang me songs she had never read in a book but which had been passed down to her just as she was passing them down to me.

"Aintie's" stories formed my inner world of imagination — the soil of faith. She peopled that world with characters who told me who I was and what I valued. She told of a native of our region who was turned away from a settler's home in a blizzard. Each time she would quote the settler's words with the same inflection in her voice: "Be gone, you Indian dog!" But in the end, the cruel man was saved from another storm by that same "Indian dog" he had sent from his door.

She sang a song that told — in a series of questions and answers — of a son who killed his brother and fled the country, leaving a mother grieving for two lost sons. Many years later I discovered the relationship between this song and the story of another mother who lost two sons under similar circumstances: Eve in the book of Genesis.

"Aintie" told her stories directly to me, and usually just the two of us were there. But there were other stories told by my mother and her sister, Maebell, that after a certain age I was allowed to overhear. These were usually family stories: of a brother and sister-in-law murdered while they slept; of Aunt

Lou who had the power to stop bleeding; and of the young man whose life she saved after he fell from a pole when electricity finally came to our part of the country. These were stories of death and resurrection. They never came woven into whole cloth, but piece by piece and strand by strand I put them together in my own young imagination.

Given this oral tradition, I became fascinated by the stories of Jewish and Christian tradition. I listened intently to the preachers who told them at churches named Crockett's Creek and Sailor's Rest. At four I came home from church telling my parents the

story of the death of a preacher named Jesus, a story they had not told me for fear of scaring a little boy.

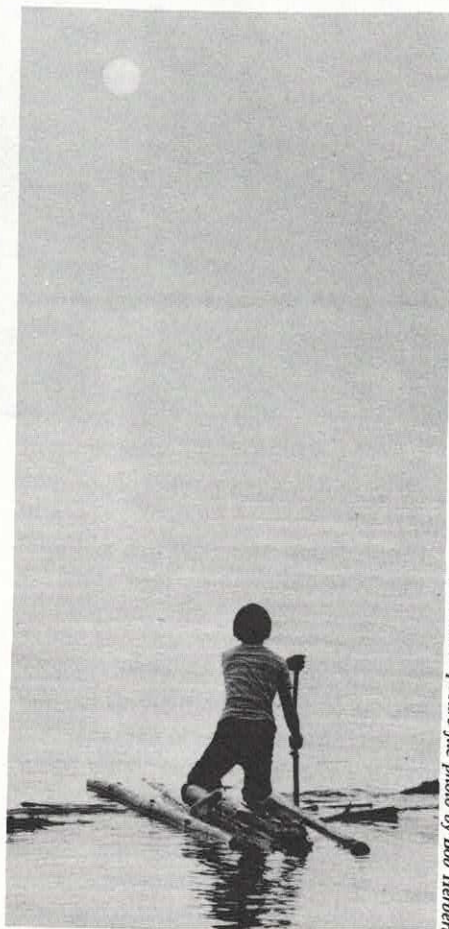
Storytelling has been a long and honored tradition among Southern preachers, both black and white. In the past, many of these preachers could neither read nor write, but they communicated through the power of the spoken word that preceded the writing of the scriptures.

Even in this century of books, films and television, the storyteller/preacher has been a powerful figure: Clarence Jordan and his "Cottonpatch" retellings of Bible stories set in the area surrounding his home at Koinonia Farms in Georgia; Tex Evans telling of his experiences in ways that formed the imaginations of those who heard him.

Today, Fred Craddock — who grew up hearing and telling stories in West Tennessee — combines the scholarship of the seminary and the language of the front-porch teller as a preacher and teacher of preachers. Tar Heel Donald Davis tells stories to audiences across the country who might never guess that he preaches every Sunday to a congregation in High Point, North Carolina. West Virginia-born Heather Murray Elkins dances, tells her stories, and preaches, creating the worlds of the poets and prophets of ancient days for those who have ears to hear.

I mention these names to honor the tradition they bear which had its origin when all stories were of the spirit, carried on the *ruah*, the *pneuma*, the breath. We continue to tell our tales believing that, long after our names are forgotten, the stories will be remembered. □

Michael Williams is a storyteller and United Methodist minister in Nashville.



Southern Exposure file photo by Bob Herbert

The Healing Art

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUISE ANDERSON

BY CAROLINE SENTER

Louise Anderson admits to being "almost 65" years old, and those who have heard her say she can "weave a tale that will drop your jaw." Born in Georgia, she has lived most of her life in North Carolina where she learned the stories of the people and of her family. She is currently visiting artist at Wilson County Technical Institute in Wilson, North Carolina.

Storytelling is the joy of my life. I tell true stories, I tell ghost stories. I meet people and they tell me stories, the things of their lives.

I remember stories from my childhood. Now, all of these are old, old stories. The animal stories were from the islands, the Anansi stories. Anansi was a spiderman — sometimes a spider, sometimes a man. We brought these stories over, and used some things native to this country, adapted them.

The Br'er Rabbit stories show you that you don't have to be strong to win out, all you have to do is use your wits. The Uncle Remus stories too. But I hate Uncle Remus. Joel Chandler Harris just took those stories and made them "racial." And all these people say, "Oh, Joel Chandler Harris was such a wonderful writer." Well what did he write other than he took our stories and made them "racial." Joel Chandler Harris was a bigot.

Because why couldn't Uncle Remus have told those stories to his own grandchildren?

There are people around Wilson who remember the last time Halley's Comet was here, and they tell stories about that. My mother was born in 1900 and she saw it. See, if you have stories from your parents you can take in whole generations because they'll tell you about *their* parents and grandparents. But if you don't know some-



Photo courtesy of Louise Anderson

Storyteller Louise Anderson

one's story you don't feel close to them.

People today don't have this feeling of family or community. That's how you keep families together, you tell the family stories.

Families used to live together and share the chores. Grandparents would tell the children stories to pass the time. It was entertainment, but it was a healing time, also. People would sit out and talk about the things that hurt them, things that concerned them. At that time people knew how to heal each other by talking to each other.

This is what the psychiatrist does today.

I knew a girl who told me about her grandmother. It was a terrible story about how her grandmother had been treated as a slave. The girl said she hated to think about it, but I told her that is her story, that she needed to take it, bring it back and hold on to it. □

Caroline Senter is a recent graduate of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio who was an intern at Southern Exposure during the spring of 1986.

Gathering Tales

BY RACHEL STEIN



Photo by Rob Amberg

Connie Regan-Blake and her cousin Barbara Freeman tell stories in the North Carolina mountains.

When Barbara Freeman and Connie Regan-Blake took to the highway as "The Folktellers" in 1975, storytelling was not a widely known career. The Tennessee cousins had been working in the Chattanooga library system, Freeman as a children's librarian and Regan-Blake as a roving children's storyteller, so both knew the power of stories. Still, touring full-time — performing tales for adults as well as children — was then a novel idea.

In the early years, finding tellable tales was often like searching for buried treasure. Freeman and Regan-Blake knew where to look but spent much time digging. They found many contemporary gems shelved in the children's sections of libraries. But perhaps more important, they listened to traditional storytellers whose families had handed down stories from generation to generation.

Once they discovered a story that "spoke" to them, they began the pro-

cess of making it their own. "A story comes in through the eyes and ears and goes down through the heart so that we are a part of that story as we speak it," noted Regan-Blake. "They become like family stories."

Often a storytelling performance will inspire listeners to share their own family stories, and the Folktellers listen eagerly. The Folktellers are committed to preserving the "bones" of a tale. "We have a real respect for the stories," Freeman explained, "so if we alter, we do so with a gentle hand." One of Regan-Blake's favorites, "Two White Horses," was a somber old oral story about a premature burial which was put in writing by Elizabeth Seeman, who lived "off Tumbling Creek, off the paved road, off the dirt road, off the rock road" in the Tennessee hills. The story reached Regan-Blake, who "knew instantly it was my story. It's one of those stories that I don't tell differently every time — the

words are so beautiful, real poetry." When she told the story at a festival she didn't know that Seeman was in the audience. "She was thrilled," recalled Regan-Blake, "that her story was going to start traveling with me." □

Rachel Stein is a writer who lives in Asheville, North Carolina. The Folktellers have produced three storytelling records.

The Last Song of John Proffit

EXCERPTS FROM A SOLO SHOW BY TOMMY THOMPSON

Here, more or less, is how *The Last Song of John Proffit* came about:

In the 1840s, when Daniel Decatur Emmitt first paired the banjo with the fiddle on a New York stage, he assisted in the birth of a new form of native American music. He simultaneously helped to initiate the commercial exploitation of black music.

Emmitt was a white man from Ohio, a singer, dancer, fiddler, and the founder of the first blackface minstrel troupe. He wrote hundreds of songs, including "Dixie," and was, for a long time, America's most popular entertainer.

A few years ago, fellow writer/musician Bland Simpson and I were considering writing a play, in the form of a minstrel show, using music and comedy to tell a story about Emmitt's life and times. Alas, the idea had obvious problems. How do you deal with the blackface? How do you make entertainment out of the premier exploiter of black culture?

We needed a foil — someone who knew him, worked with him, but had a better understanding of what was happening. I began to cogitate on this other character, what his story might be, his attitudes, and to whom he might talk. He could be an old guy, I thought, sitting around with his musical cronies from the old days, playing tunes and gabbing about Emmitt. Or he could be alone, talking with visitors who've come to ask about his famous friend. He could have been a banjo player who worked with Emmitt and quit before he got famous. Finally, I thought maybe I could play the part, and, in a way, say thanks to the old-timers who have shared their lives and music with me over the last 20 years.

As the foil for our fascinating if dubious hero, I swiped the main character from a novel I was planning, introduced him to Emmitt, and let him talk. By the time John Proffit was done, he'd become a rather long-winded banjo player, and I had a one-

man show.

This scene begins in North Carolina in 1900 as an 85-year-old Proffit admits visitors (the audience) into his small kitchen. They are "amateur thespians" who, preceded by a letter of inquiry, have come to ask Proffit about Emmitt's life. Proffit is drinking whiskey and cutting vegetables to make a pot of soup. Occasionally he picks up his banjo and sings.

Tommy Thompson is a Chapel Hill-based writer, actor, and musician who plays banjo with the Red Clay Ramblers. Thompson and the Ramblers performed in the world premiere of Sam Shepard's drama A Lie of the Mind at the Promenade Theater in New York City from December 1985 through June 1986. The University of North Carolina Center for Public Television produced an hour special of the The Last Song of John Proffit which aired in August 1985.

For more information, contact William Craver, c/o Helen Merrill Ltd., 361 W. 17th St., New York, New York 10011.

Excerpt

THE LAST SONG OF JOHN PROFFIT

(Proffit takes a drink, cuts up some potatoes.)

JOHN PROFFIT:

Dan Emmitt and I were born in the same year and the same town: 1815, Mount Vernon, Knox County, Ohio. That was the frontier in those days. Or the backwoods. Depends on which way you're facing. Grandpa Simp-

kins was one of the early settlers. Said he'd gone up there from the Piedmont of North Carolina. He was a famous musician. Supplied the music for every muster of the old Knox County Militia. That was going some, I reckon, since his talent was entirely confined to the art of whistling.

Dan stuck to him like a shadow. I can remember the



two of them lounging through town on Grandpa's old white-face bull. An ordinary man would ride a horse, but not Seeley Simpkins. He'd ride along whistling hoedowns, and Dan would ride in front, catching the tunes on his fiddle.

They used to go to the Snowdens' all the time. The Snowdens were the only colored family in town. There was always dancing and music going on at their house. I wasn't supposed to go there, but I did once. That's where I saw my first banjo being played, and I didn't even know what it was.

When we were about 17 or 18 years old, Dan lied about his age and joined the Army. So I went to work for Seeley. He was a master joiner by profession, a house-carpenter. Just a rough old rounder, but he could build a house in a week to last a hundred years. I got to know him then, and got over being afraid of him. And I understood why Dan had loved him so much. He'd whistle and tell jokes all day, and fill my head with music and stories about olden times in the Piedmont.

Then he died. I don't know how old he was, but he was pretty old. He froze to death one night on a roadside not far from his house. Maybe he fell on the way home from a tavern and hurt himself so he couldn't move. Maybe he was just too drunk.

I left Mount Vernon for good. I told my father what I thought of him, too — just as soon as I was out of ear-shot. I told him he could sit there on his Holy Rectitude till Doomsday, I was going to North Carolina. The happy land of the whistling reprobates on bullback.

I found a friend down there name of Baldwin, Jake Baldwin. He was just a colored man, but he ran the biggest business in town. Built furniture for the most prominent and wealthy families in the South. I used to work for him before I joined up with Dan. He was a free Negro, black as coffee, and I was the only white employee. I didn't know any better, I was from Ohio.

He was a compact little gentleman, about 60 years

old, I guess, gentle-natured and strong as Samson. He was a good man too.

I remember sitting in the shop one night after the other boys had left, bungling around on Jake's old gourd banjo. Before I knew it, he was right behind me, talking real soft in my ear. "Don't go at it so hard, Johnny, you're trying to cut the whetstone with the razor." Then he reached his arms around me, and kindly showed my fingers how to operate the strings in a more poetic manner. It was a miracle. There was music coming out of that banjo, and I was the cause of it.

I worked for him for almost five years, but I really didn't know a thing about him until after he died and I found these journals. There were two Jake Baldwins. One was the Presbyterian we all knew. The other was locked away in a half a dozen old ledger books. An interesting piece of literature. Listen.

(Reading from a journal)

"June 28, 1835. Hired John Proffit this noon. White boy helped frame up St. John's Church. Maybe I can learn him the mysteries of the furniture trade, but don't know. The difference between a joiner and a cabinet-maker is the same as between a dog and a man."

Well, here's the outcome of that.

"April 19, 1840. I suppose I have failed in the case of John Proffit. He is leaving the shop in May to sell medicine for Hadley Stroud. He seems to think he is bettering himself. This shows how little I have taught him. I let him take the old banjo on loan. I expect he'll bring it back pretty quick. Hadley Stroud has nothing but giblets where his heart ought to be."

One Sunday morning I'd been up to Stroud's looking for whiskey. The yard rose up in a groundswell of dogs, and Had brought out this bottle of something he wanted me to taste. It smelled like the devil. He said, "Taste it anyway, it's good for you." I did, and I told him it was just plain sulfur water. He said it wasn't plain sulfur water, it was water from the great White Sulphur

Photos courtesy of Tommy Thompson



Tommy Thompson as John Proffit, a fictitious early minstrel, reminisces about life on the road.

Springs. He told me he'd been up there many times and seen those wealthy Yankees pay hundreds of dollars to bathe in it and drink it. It made his heart heavy to think of the thousands of poor folks who could never hope to enjoy its benefits. He said, "Boy, you and me can take the miracle of the springs to our people, and get rich at the same time. Do you know what we're going to do? Bottle it."

That's how I got into show business. Had bottled up a few hundred gallons of stinking water with herbs thrown in — just weeds, probably — and we took it all over Georgia and the Carolinas. We had a little one-horse wagon with a canvas cover all painted up to say "DR. STROUD'S MIRACULOUS SULPHUR COMPOUND."

My job was to play the banjo and draw a crowd. Then I'd tell the folks what they were really there for.

(Plays a short banjo instrumental)

Well, old Jake was right. It wasn't long before I got tired of being Had Stroud's boy banjo picker. I wanted to get square with the world again. I said to myself, "I'll set my life to rights. I'll take that banjo back to Jake, and I'll learn cabinetmaking if it takes the rest of my life, and Jake will bless the day he first hired me."

Well, now. That's just about the time Dan Emmitt arrived with his fresh supply of ignorance. You know what happened: we went off to Cincinnati and joined a circus, and I forgot all about setting my life to rights.

Dan liked the way I played the banjo. Hell, we'd learned the same old-time tunes from the same old whistler. But that was something new on the banjo. Dan said it gave him an idea. If a banjo could be made to play real fiddle tunes, it could be made to play with a real fiddle. He figured people would pay good money to hear that done.

But just *having* a fine new way of making music wasn't sufficient. It had to be bottled and sold like anything else. You had to get yourself all up and cut the fool. Dan was an artist at that. We'd be playing along, and then he'd hold his fiddle out, and his brogans would start up a little conflict with the floorboards, and he'd get to shouting and singing till his arms and legs were flying around like juggler's clubs, and all the time he'd hold his head so still it looked like he was hung by the neck from the rafters. That black empty face was a breach in creation spouting nonsense.

Dan never told me about blacking. We got to Cincinnati and I saw my picture on the playbills. I had become an "Expert Delineator of that Sable Race of

the South." And I'd thought peddling medicine was the Devil's work. By now I was beginning to grow little bumps on my head.

Dan was always out chasing around for anything fresh we could use. He'd go out of his way to see the Snowdens in Mount Vernon. He'd show me snatches and pieces of things he'd picked up. We'd change them around and put them together, and then play them on the stage as if they were ours. It was bad medicine, but I was having the time of my life, and I swallowed it all.

Most everybody loved us. Dan was a Prince of Foolishness. But the medicine wouldn't stay down. I had this feeling about Jake. Maybe he was in some kind of trouble; maybe I could help him. Soon as the show was over, I collected my share of the proceeds, got Jake's banjo, and cleared out.

But it was too late. When I got back to North Carolina, Jake had been dead for three months. Found on his own property with his heart shot out. Blame entered my heart like a worm.

Reading his journals late at night, it was almost like Jake was there in the flesh. Just the two of us alone in those fragrant old rooms where wood had been worked and polished. But he wasn't the placid old Presbyterian I used to know. Listen.

"August 22nd, 1832. One year ago today was Nat Turner's massacre of whites in Virginia. I hear talk about 'nigger armies' in the swamps making ready to rise again. Worse things were done to our people in Africa. What will I do if there is a raid on the Piedmont? I am a Presbyterian elder, but I am a Negro."

Well, I'd never given him credit for that. He always seemed like a happy dark-skinned white man. I kept on reading till I got to the part about Had Stroud's giblets, and I realized I'd hit on something.

I jumped straight to the end, and sure enough the very last book was full of a feud with Hadley Horton Stroud. Here's the last entry:

"January 8th, 1842. HHS sent word to meet him in the low ground tomorrow morning. He'd better be bringing money, or else I'm ruined. And how will I tell Alberta I've let the shop be foreclosed and we are obliged to move? I'll not go to meet Stroud unarmed. This county can get along without him as easy as me."

Now that tells you who to look for, don't it? I wish I could tell you what transpired that day Jake died in the low ground, but I don't know that. And that's not all that's hanging fire, which brings me to your letter.

(Picks up letter and reads)



As an older man, Proffit dons blackface to show youngsters how minstrels performed.

"We're chiefly interested in the celebrated entertainer and composer of the immortal 'Dixie,' Daniel Decatur Emmitt. We'd be pleased to hear anything you could tell us about the circumstances surrounding the composition of 'Dixie!'"

(Puts away letter, gets gourd banjo and marches with it on his shoulder as a comic soldier as he sings "Dixie")

*Massy's big and Missy's bigger
White folks just as good as nigger
Look away, look away, look away
Dixie Land*

That's one hell of a song, ain't it? Perfect for the Rebel Army. They say Dan was always apologizing for it. That way he could take the blame and get the credit to boot.

Well, the hell with Dan Emmitt. You go up to Mount Vernon, and you go find the Snowdens. The colored family I told you about. You ask them what they know about the circumstances surrounding the composition of the immortal "Dixie." I'll tell you this much. In 1861, when the rebel soldiers come marching through here a'singing it, I knew I'd heard it before. Or something mighty like it. Just about 20 years before. You go ask the Snowdens about it.

Of course, I don't suppose the Snowdens wrote an ugly verse like that. We can hang that one on Dan, or some other white man. There's plenty others claim they wrote "Dixie," you know. Dan was the only one smart enough to apologize for it. Said if he'd known it would advance the Southern cause in the war, he never would have written it. Well, he never did quit singing it. Not till he couldn't sing anything at all. And that wasn't the end of it either. Do you know about that tour five years ago? Al Field put him in blackface, and took him all over the South.

Now what was a fossil like that supposed to do in one of those disgraceful modern minstrel shows? I'll tell you what he did do.

Night after night, it was exactly the same. Field would introduce him as the celebrated composer of "Dixie," and he'd get up there with tears in his eyes and saw on his old fiddle. Those old veterans and their old wives and widows and slack-jawed grandchildren would get to crooning about their great land of cotton and those old times not, by God! forgot, and have themselves a good old plantation cry. Except Al Field wasn't crying. Dan was a moneymaker. P.T. Barnum couldn't have done better with a certified dragon bone.

(Reads the end of letter, and puts it away)

"And we'd be ever so grateful if you could give us any information about Emmitt's early life and work. What was the nature of the nigger shows you did with him?"

"Nigger shows." Now we could just lounge around here and vaporize all night, but I know what you want. You want to see the Devil himself. So just keep your seats. You did the right thing coming here. He's on the premises. Anybody smell sulfur?

(Seats himself facing upstage, and sings one stanza of "Sweet Sunny South" while putting on blackface, then turns to the audience and performs "Bottled and Sold")

*You got your pride
Got God on your side
...it ain't worth a lot
If it can't be bottled and sold.*

I knew the minute we were on the stage that night I'd have to go. I never said a word to Dan. I just cleared out in the night like Had Stroud. There were colored people in that theater. Black people. Whole families. Who was I supposed to delineate for them? Jake Baldwin?

When I got to the Piedmont and found Jake was dead, it was a relief. It shames me to say it, but I was relieved. Maybe Jake had never heard I'd been a "renowned Ethiopian minstrel." Either way, I didn't have to face him.

(Wipes off a little of the blacking. Looks at the cloth)

I'd forgotten how hard this stuff is to get off. I'll worry about it tomorrow.

You go up to Mount Vernon and see Dan. He'll be glad for the company. And maybe you could do me a favor. Tell him you saw me, and tell him I said he was the best there ever was in the business. I've no call to hang him. I left him with a show the next night and a whole tour ahead of him. I've no idea what he did about it. I ain't talked to him in 58 years. I hope he's not holding a grudge.

(Picks up banjo and sings "The Last Song")

*Green as grass that is not grass
White as snow that is not snow
Red as blood that is not blood
Black as coal that is not coal*

*Go dig my grave in the meadow by the
blackberry vine*

*Where the rain will fall and the sun will shine
And say "John Proffit was a friend of mine"
When you lay me down in a box of pine.*

Good night.

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Piedmont Voices

The Dramatic Power of Oral History

By Amy Glass



Photo by Allen Tullios

Ethel and George Faucette, retired millhands from Glencoe, North Carolina who told their stories to the Southern Oral History Program (1979)

Since scholars began gathering oral histories in the 1930s, these tape-recorded autobiographies of everyday folks have traditionally served as primary documents for social historians. Recently, however, these life histories are finding their way out of the archives and into the public's reach. Not only through popularizers like Studs Terkel but also through public radio and television programs, film, theater, and various public history events, the voices of ordinary men and women now speak to a broad audience.

The distinctive voices some of the South's Piedmont workers — over 300 men and women from industrial communities in North and South Carolina — have been captured on tape by the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and are on deposit in the Southern Historical Collection. Since industrial development occurred in this region within living memory, the SOHP was able to explore the important transition from “farm to factory.” Program director

Jacquelyn Hall explains, "We thus had the opportunity to pose questions about that transition to people whose roots lay in a preindustrial past and whose destinies were shaped by the emergence of industrial capitalism in the region."

From the outset the SOHP sought to reach beyond academia for its audience as well as its sources. Program staff are especially eager to return the fruits of their labor to the people who shared their personal histories and to solicit their responses to the program's interpretation. To that end, the SOHP has commissioned a play based on the interviews, and plans a series of history workshops designed to bring audiences into a dialogue about the human consequences of industrial development.

The impetus for this project grew directly out of *Echoes in America*, an ambitious collaboration which had as its centerpiece the touring of an oral history play called *Echoes From The Valley*. This play painted a picture of life in the textile towns along England's Aire River during the first half of this century, as "told" by some 40 former textile workers whose tape-recorded interviews were woven together for the drama by British playwright Garry Lyons.

Lyons found the process intriguing: "From a writer's point of view it's obviously always difficult to imagine the way other people live or lived and... to characterize them in their own language. [By using oral history] there's an authenticity that would be difficult to write or recreate imaginatively."

In collaborating, Lyons said, "Oral historians and playwrights are rediscovering lost experiences and then presenting them before the public."

Julia Swoyer, whose Iron-Clad Agreement Company specializes in the production of plays focusing on workers' lives, saw *Echoes From The Valley* in Yorkshire, England in 1983. She then came up with the idea of "tracing the textile industry (from England) to New England and then down South." Swoyer thought that "people in those regions — both textile workers and former textile workers — might feel a kinship with the English people and their stories. The

stories would be in a different dialect, but there would be a humanity that would be similar and interesting." She felt that post-performance discussions and history workshops would give audiences of diverse backgrounds an opportunity to share and compare their own histories.

Echoes in America toured Rhode Island, Connecticut, North Carolina, and South Carolina in the spring of 1984. After one performance in Concord, North Carolina, a resident who had worked in a Concord textile plant for 49-and-a-half years before retiring in 1978 shared her thoughts with those assembled. She remembered narrowly escaping injury once when her father pulled her from the grasp of a machine belt which caught her skirt. But, like the workers from the Yorkshire mills, she recalled those work days fondly: "I loved it... a lot of people say the noise is too much, but it never bothered me at all — it's just like music to me." She remembered becoming eligible for a paycheck on her 14th birthday and recalled that the first day's check for \$1.60 "seemed like a fortune."

The audience in a Bynum, North Carolina Methodist Church was impressed and "tickled" with the stories they saw reenacted in their church-turned-theater. Many commented on how their working lives in the Bynum mill had been like the British experiences.

The reactions were not uniformly positive, however. "New Englanders had a closer link with Yorkshire workers, as many were children and grandchildren of immigrants from the British Isles," said Lyons. "They felt they were hearing stories of back home. This wasn't so true in the South where families had settled generations before. Although stories of work were similar, there was not such a close identification with the working people of Yorkshire.

"In the South, I detected something I hadn't elsewhere. There was a defensiveness on the part of some people who thought we were showing the textile industry in a bad and unfair light and that the content of the play focused on poor working conditions. I think that, if anything, that defensiveness is a reflection of the differences between the industry in Britain and the South."

Still, the SOHP was inspired by the similarities in its interview collection with those in *Echoes*. The program decided that the time was ripe for a play using the voices of Piedmont workers, and, with funding from the North Carolina Humanities Committee, commissioned Garry Lyons to create the play script.

In August 1984, Lyons came to Chapel Hill to read the oral histories and explore the region about which he would be writing. He attended a Durham tobacco auction, and consulted with area string band musicians for tunes many workers would have listened to during the 1930s and '40s. He visited a small, essentially unchanged mill village just outside Burlington, now a major textile city. There he talked with retired mill hands.

Armed with a wealth of materials, Lyons returned to his home in Leeds, England and set to work stringing together interviews with other source materials to form a play. The result, entitled *Plant Me A Garden: An Oral History Play of the Carolinas*, weaves oral history vignettes into a cohesive and compelling drama.

Four main characters provide the core of the play: Annie, a black tobacco stemmer from Durham; Mack, a white Greenville, South Carolina textile worker; Ethel, a white weaver from Burlington; and Chick, a politically active black tobacco worker from Winston-Salem. These four characters assume the identities of people introduced in one another's reminiscences, thus suggesting a larger context. This kind of character development allowed Lyons to explore the range of issues reflected in the Piedmont interviews.

"I had to cope with a greater diversity of experience," said Lyons, "particularly the black experience and the tobacco industry. Experiences were not quite so homogeneous (as in Britain) and this affected the way I structured the play. Instead of using *Echoes'* model structure — that of a typical day — I tried to go for a historical sweep across several decades."

Industrialization and change were greatly condensed for Southerners from the turn of the century to World War II, which Lyons said, made "life

change more rapidly in the South than it did in Yorkshire.”

Plant Me A Garden was more complex than Lyons' original play for other reasons as well: "As I wrote, I tried to select material that was interesting from an outsider's point of view. Racial differences, or indeed, racial similarities, provided some of the most interesting materials. Gender is a microcosm of a larger truth. Rich ver-

sus poor is a global issue. These materials add 'color' to the play and help the region's distinctiveness get through."

Yet, according to Lyons, there were similarities between the Carolina and Yorkshire interviews: "The lot of the working man and woman is very similar worldwide, after all, and this is what makes the (oral history) material play to diverse audiences — allowing

for differences, of course, in race and gender."

The SOHP is now seeking ways to produce *Plant Me a Garden*. After an opening run, the play will tour the Carolinas' textile and tobacco communities.

Amy Glass is the Administrative Assistant for the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Excerpt

PLANT ME A GARDEN

By Garry Lyons

This excerpt from Garry Lyons' *Plant Me A Garden: An Oral History of the Carolinas* takes place during the 1934 general textile strike when 400,000 Carolina cotton mill hands walked off the job. They joined hundreds of thousands of other textile workers across the nation. Lasting three weeks, this general strike was the largest in the nation's history up to that point. The strikers had pinned their hopes on the New Deal's promises to protect industrial workers from wage cuts but the government failed to intervene on their side. Seven workers were killed in Honea Path, South Carolina and 3,000 were herded into detention camps in Georgia. The defeat of the strike crushed textile unions in the South so profoundly that they have never regained their former strength.

CHARACTERS: ETHEL — a white weaver from Burlington, North Carolina.

ANNIE — a black tobacco stemmer from Durham, North Carolina.

MACK — a 17-year-old white textile worker from Greenville, South Carolina.

CHICK — a politically active black tobacco worker from Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

SETTING: The stage should suggest the porch of a typical old Southern house. Within that structure there should be two distinct halves. On one side, strings stretched across a frame represent cotton looms. On the other sit hogsheads and racks of tobacco leaves. Scenes with whites and textiles tend to be played against the looms. Scenes with blacks and tobacco tend to be played against the leaves. There are a table and several chairs.

ANNIE: The General Strike...

MACK: They called a general strike over the Southeast in the textile industry. The companies were making money and the people weren't being paid enough. So they began picketing the mill. And as we'd go to work they'd try to stop us... *(The others, with their backs to the audience, in a line.)*

PICKETS: Don't go in!
Stay out with us!
Scab!

MACK: Well the town police was always around. And they'd make them open up and let us in... *(Ethel turns to the front, donning a cop's cap.)*

ETHEL: *(Policeman)* You can't block the sidewalks! *(She removes the cap and rejoins the line.)*

MACK: My daddy was a non-union man. They tried to get him to join the union and he talked against it...

PICKETS: Know who we're gonna get?
Gonna get your daddy!
Gonna kill your daddy!

MACK: Well we worked three days like that. Then we went in on a Thursday morning. We couldn't even get to the plant. They'd called in some flying squadrons. They had the mill surrounded — five or six thick from front and back...

PICKETS: Know what we're gonna do?
We're gonna stop the mill!
You're a scab!

MACK: And a lot of the strikers had sticks and clubs in their hands... *(The others pass sticks along their line. They hold them up in an aggressive tableau.)* So the town authorized just about anybody that could carry a gun to be deputized. And they deputized some...to me they were boys. And they would let them through, and they would go up in the mill windows. And you could see the guns sticking out the mill windows... *(The others spin around and freeze, sticks held up to their eyes like aimed rifles.)* The weave room was low to the ground, and you could get the windows open. And some of the workers were just standing around...

ANNIE: *(non-striker)* They can't get through the strikers!

ETHEL: *(non-striker)* They don't have no way of defending themselves!

MACK: And they began passing out picket sticks...big old wooden sticks about half the size of a ball bat... *(The others pass out the sticks to the end of the line. The one at the end runs round the back of the line and passes the sticks down again. Furious activity should be suggested.)* Some of them would bring a bundle. And they began passing the bundles out the window... *(The bundle of sticks reaches the end of the line again, and is passed to Mack.)* I was in the mill office helping another fellow. We didn't have enough picket sticks to go round. So we were in there cutting off broom handles to give people to use as clubs *(Runs round the back of the line, passes the sticks along again.)* I would have left if my dad hadn't been there. They'd deputized him. He had a gun... *(The others each end up with a stick each again.)* The strikers didn't like that when they saw those bundles coming out. So they converged on that window... *(The others turn. Backs to the audience. Aggressive tableau.)* And they began fighting with their clubs in through the window... *(The others lunge aggressively upstage. Tableau.)* Well there was a Mr. Marcel Shaw. We called him Buck Shaw. He was a striker. He ran up to the window... *(Chick runs aggressively to the back of the stage. Freeze.)* and there was a Mr. Cummings who was a non-union man... *(Chick turns. Freeze.)* He was taking the picket sticks out the window. Getting them and taking them out... *(Chick runs downstage, waving his stick, as far as the line. Freeze.)*

CHICK: *(Cummings)* Here!

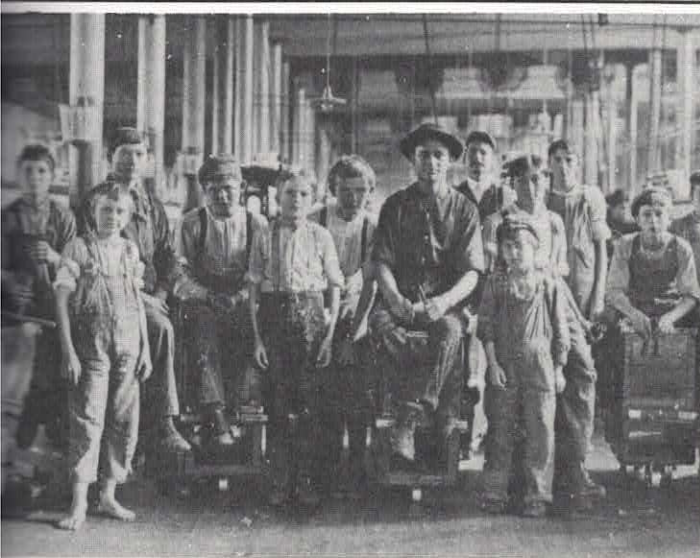
MACK: So Mr. Shaw hit him on the head... *(Chick spins round and strikes down with his stick. Freeze.)* Well somebody else hit Mr. Shaw... *(Chick throws himself back, clutching his head.)* And they busted his head. Then all of a sudden you heard shooting... *(Chick, Ethel, and Annie spin round to face the audience, pointing their sticks rifle fashion and firing. Gun-shot sounds are suggested vocally or acoustically.)*

For about five minutes it was just a din. But the people that had the guns were non-union people. Nobody ever saw a striker with a gun. It was a regular riot, was what it was. And some of the people in the windows shot out. And some of the people were shot down through their bodies... *(Firing stops. Freeze.)*

A fellow Cox, he'd been an operator of the elevator in the mill. And he'd had a little run-in with a cloth doffer. The operator was a non-union man, and he had an ice-pick... *(Chick spins to the back, throwing down his stick and holding up an ice-pick in one hand. Freeze.)* But the cloth doffer was non-union, and he had a gun. *(Chick spins to the front, the ice-pick hand hidden, the other with a revolver which he points directly at the audience. Freeze. Pause. Then Chick fires the revolver once...twice...)* And he shot the union man two... *(...Three times. Freeze.)* ...or three times... *(Mack walks over to Chick, removes the revolver slowly from his outstretched hand, and walks away. In one movement, Chick spins round to face upstage and falls to the ground, head nearest the audience, ice-pick clearly visible where it has dropped from his hand.)*

I got sick myself from seeing so much blood. And I almost fainted it was such a sight I was seeing. But I saw him. I went to him... *(Squats beside Chick, lifts Chick's head onto his knees.)* He got shot in the head. He was lying in a puddle of his own blood. I didn't see how anybody could bleed that much. And his eyes to me looked like they had set back in his head like he was dying. I didn't think I'd ever see him alive again... *(Annie and Ethel drop their sticks and slowly turn to face upstage, heads bowed, clutching their arms or sides.)*

And when it was over there was a lot of people hurt lying on the ground. They'd been shot and beat. And seven people were killed. And some of the others were crippled for life. They tried the men that were accused of killing...some of the policemen. They tried all of the regular policemen. But the mill village became a divided place. The people that belonged to the union didn't have anything to do with the people that were non-union and vice-versa. And some of the people that had been real good neighbors never spoke to each other. Some of them even left the community. Pulled up and left. I went along with what my dad had to say. And he was loyal to the company. But after the incident happened I was in school and I read. And I personally believe the union is what's put America where it is today. From what I read and what I get...people sticking together. Because industry never done anything until the union took over. They've got to keep good relations with the people now. My feeling then was anti-union because my dad was. But if I'd been an adult and thinking for myself, I would have joined the union... *(He helps Chick up. They exit.)* *(End of Act One)* □



Young boys who worked as doffers and sweepers of Mollahon Mills, Newberry, South Carolina (1908).

Photo by Lewis Hine (University of Maryland-Baltimore)

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WHEN
THE
GOVERNMENT
SAID:
“LET’S
PUT
ON A
PLAY”

by Beth Howard

It is President's Day, June 10, 1936, and 40,000 Arkansans have gathered to welcome Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt to Little Rock. In the city's giant amphitheater, the Roosevelts view the work of the local Federal Theatre unit, *America Sings!*, a moving historical pageant, a life and times of the state of Arkansas. Through song and story the sweeping spectacle takes its audience through time from the retreat of Indians before the land-lusting pioneer, the development of the plantation system and slave culture, the devastation of Civil War and Reconstruction, the clash of agriculture and industry, the call to the first World War and, finally, the crash of 1929.

That pageant typifies, in many respects, the Southern response to the controversial Federal Theatre Project (1936-39), one of the more creative expressions of Roosevelt's far-reaching New Deal. During its brief

tenure, the project put thousands of theater professionals back to work, giving them new hope and the dignity of working for their dole. Significantly, it was America's first substantial if ill-fated experiment in subsidizing the arts.

Such pageants — along with children's theater, folk plays, rural drama, marionette productions, and the vaudeville — most visibly characterized the Federal Theatre's involvement in the South. The project's Southern legacy can be seen in developments as diverse as the prolific pen of playwright Paul Green, Tampa's unique Spanish Theatre, and the lively community theaters of North Carolina.

Theater in the South “developed slowly” compared to other regions, recounted the project's national director Hallie Flanagan in her memoirs. It barely got on its feet before cutbacks in appropriations from the project's parent agency, the Works Progress Administration, shut down all but the most productive theater units. By 1937 many of the South's units had been slashed altogether, hurt by the lack of local WPA support or by the units' failure to attract community interest.

In 1936 relatively few theater professionals had signed up for relief in the South, a prerequisite for employment in the project. From Washington's perspective, this should have nixed most Southern involvement in the project from the onset. The Federal Theatre Project and the WPA, which coordinated the nation's vast relief effort, generally were designed to serve strictly as relief and employment enterprises. At the project's closing in 1939 Senator Josiah W. Bailey declared, “The object of the WPA is to relieve distress and prevent suffering by providing work. The purpose is not the culture of the population.”

But Flanagan had other visions — visions that often conflicted with official WPA policy but whose outcomes were almost always positive. She intended to make the Federal Theatre a critical success, to put the project at the forefront of theatrical

achievement and experimentation. She also dreamed of exploring and developing the dramatic material of all of America's indigenous regions. To some extent, Flanagan's dreams foreshadowed the regional theater movement which dominates the American stage today.

Flanagan, with her boss and former Grinnell College classmate WPA Administrator Harry Hopkins, envisioned the blossoming of what he called "free, adult, uncensored theater." As other New Deal programs and social activists aimed to bring about political and economic democracy, some artistic intellectuals hoped that this theater project would nurture a new cultural democracy, introducing the stage and working people to one another. Flanagan had directed Vassar College's Experimental Theatre and had been the first woman awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study European and Russian theater, and she encouraged plays with a "vital connection" to the immediate problems of people in the audience. At its high point the Federal Theatre Project entertained a weekly audience of 350,000, often bringing free entertainment to recreation centers, settlement houses, and hospitals, among other places.

As Flanagan saw it, the Federal Theatre would be less a national theater than a network of autonomous regional theaters; these groups would not only bring art to traditionally underserved communities but would also interpret and record the culture and fabric of the American landscape itself, enriching the lives of its people.

In the South Flanagan saw "rich dramatic material in the variety of peoples, the historical development, the contrasts between a rural civilization and a growing industrialization, such material practically untouched dramatically."

With a few notable exceptions, however, that material would remain untouched. Southern participation in the Federal Theatre Project was, on the whole, a limited undertaking relative to that in other regions. Indeed



Altars of Steel opened in Atlanta in 1937 with a stark set consisting of a giant steel cog, illustrating the way the steel industry dominated lives.

the South's experience with the Federal Theatre experiment is significant as much as for what it did not produce as for its achievement.

Ironically, the plays which did treat Southern issues and which might have enlightened its people were rarely produced in the region. Detroit factory workers evidently gained more from Paul Green's *Let Freedom Ring*, when it was produced in that city, than the Carolina mill workers it dramatized, for the play was never produced in the South. *Turpentine*, by J.A. Smith and Peter Morell, a play about the tyrannical conditions of the Southern labor camp system, was not staged in the region. Nevertheless it produced no small ire below the Mason-Dixon Line. In the play, produced by the Harlem Negro Unit, black workers in a Florida turpentine camp rise up against the white bosses who have practiced economic and sexual exploitation against them and their

families. Savannah's weekly *Naval Stores Review and Journal of Trade* called the play a "malicious libel on the naval stores of the South" when it played New York in 1936.

Nationally, the often controversial "Living Newspapers," would emerge as the Federal Theatre's hallmark. This dramatic medium, reminiscent of the agitational-propaganda ("agit-prop") theater of Russia and Germany in the 1920s, took the form of a newspaper, exploring all sides of the day's important social and economic issues. A script would introduce a social problem and then call for its solution. The project spawned a dozen or so Living Newspaper scripts which were produced and reproduced in theaters throughout the country, each unit incorporating local geography and circumstances into the production.

Such Living Newspaper productions as *Power*, which called for public ownership of utilities; *Triple-A Plowed*

Under, a play about the crisis in agriculture; and *Spirochete*, a look at the threat of syphilis, raised the eyebrows of those who interpreted the medium's inherent questioning of the status quo as communistic.

Despite their national popularity, Federal Theatre records show that only one Living Newspaper, *One Third of a Nation*, was produced in the South, by the progressive New Orleans unit. The play — inspired by Roosevelt's famous statement, "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished" — exposed the deplorable housing conditions of cities. In New Orleans the play was adapted to explore housing conditions there.

Nationally, the Federal Theatre Project spearheaded the growth of black participation in the theater. While blacks and whites primarily participated in separate Federal Theatre units, the project introduced a few mixed-cast productions amidst some controversy. And for the first time, blacks in the pioneering Negro units outside the South were given the chance to develop their skills at directing and playwriting. Despite its temporary nature, the position of blacks in the theater improved under

federal auspices. These units also resisted traditional "bandanna and burnt-cork casting" (which relegated blacks to stereotyped roles), choosing instead to adapt classics reinterpreted through black culture with all-black casts (*Voodoo Macbeth* in New York, *Swing Mikado* in Chicago).

Black theater units thrived in urban centers outside the South such as Chicago, Seattle, New York, and Boston, producing material which took a first, cautionary glance at the experience of blacks in America's history. But in spite of the significance of such "problem plays" as *Walk Together Chillun*, *Turpentine*, and *Sweet Land* — plays that began to explore seriously the Southern black experience — they were not viewed on Southern soil. Clearly the South of the late 1930s was unready or unwilling to take such a critical look at itself. Instead, the few black theater personnel in the region concentrated on the traditional black media — minstrel shows and musical reviews.

But this is not to diminish the significance of the Federal Theatre Project in the South. In rural areas where many had never seen a performance of any kind, the value of the project was immeasurable. What

Flanagan reported of the project's national reception in *Federal Theatre Magazine* in 1936 was especially true for the South: "The great majority of our performances are given to audiences which rarely have an opportunity to see theatrical entertainment with living actors. These include CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps and state institutions, and audiences in small cities and rural communities, granges, etc. many of which have no regular entertainment except what they devise for themselves, and most had not, until Federal Theatre came, seen a play with living actors for five or ten years."

In the South's cities, the projects played in existing theaters, charging a nominal admission to the mostly middle-class audiences that attended. Sometimes the productions revived theaters that had been closed, and they often gave new vitality to community theater groups.

The shape that Federal Theatre projects took in the South, as in other regions, depended on the availability of out-of-work theater veterans and the kinds of skills they brought to the project; the attitudes of local WPA administrators, the vast bureaucracy that oversaw the theater and other arts



projects with wildly varying degrees of sensitivity and aptitude; and the quality of resources that already existed within communities.

The Atlanta unit came closest to hitting the South where it lived. It did so with *Altars of Steel*, a play by Alabamian Thomas Hall-Rodgers that explored the rise of the steel industry and the South's new political economy. The play depicted the giant "steel" absorbing the independent mill owner of the South, and raised the sensitive issue of absentee ownership.

Striking so close to home, *Altars of Steel* drew both darts and laurels. Flanagan herself assessed it as the Federal Theatre Project's "most successful play" in the South because it was "the one written for and about the South.... Audiences crowded the theater for *Altars of Steel*. They praised the play. They blamed the play. They fought over the play. They wrote to the papers: 'Dangerous propaganda!' or 'Dangerous! Bah! If this is propaganda it is anti-communistic! Those who like their plays limited to lilacs, lavender, and old lace, moonlight and roses, pale perfumes or circus lemonade — stay away!'"

The *Atlanta Constitution* understood the significance of a local production of a play grappling with pertinent regional issues. It bragged that *Altars* was "as great a play as was ever written. It is as daring as anything the stage has seen. It is superbly produced, perfectly acted and it is not in New York, London or Leningrad. It is here in Atlanta at the Atlanta Theatre."

Such controversy was inevitable. In the play, the forces of communism, capitalism, and liberalism are pitted against one another, but none of the political philosophies clearly triumphs. For example, the capitalist mill owner relaxes safety standards in his mill, causing an explosion which kills 19 men. Although the workers riot, a Communist union organizer, generally depicted as irrational and frenetic, fails to gain their support and eventually is shot by a National Guardsman.

The play also treaded on a regional soft spot: the industrialization of the traditionally agricultural South. It galvanized the community to take note of the project's activity and generated important, if sometimes negative

public comment. According to Gilbert Maxwell, an actor on the project, "The main trouble with Atlanta was it did not support the theater. [With *Altars*] we turned them away night after night. We expected controversy, but we also thought it would draw enormous crowds... we did draw enormous crowds."

Besides taking on political and economic issues, the play was significant for breaking new artistic ground as well as demonstrating that striking but low-cost productions could be created. The stipulation that 80 percent of Federal Theatre money be used for salaries mandated low production costs. Josef Lentz's ingenious stage design — the entire play takes place atop a giant cog, literally representing steel shafts as well as the giant threat of steel — attracted national attention.

In some rural Southern areas, the Federal Theatre created programs of community drama. According to Flanagan, "The object was not to put on plays but to get plays out of the people themselves." The residents responded, wrote Flanagan, with their own folk art: storytelling, folk songs, and dance. Children were encouraged to make puppets and create dramas for them. Older people told tales from their own youth.

In bringing together theater professionals and audiences who had never seen theater, the Federal Theatre Project fostered a remarkable cultural interchange. Herbert Price, who directed rural community drama in the Southern region, was dismayed by rural poverty but was galvanized to act. He wrote of Federal Theatre audiences in what he called the "black ankle belt" because "their feet are still in mud." "They live in indescribable want, want of food, want of houses, want of any kind of life.... Their only entertainment is an occasional revival meeting, so when I get excited, tear around and gesticulate, they think it's the Holy Ghost descending upon me. It isn't. It's a combination of rage that such conditions should exist in our country, and chiggers [pesky, skin-burrowing insects], which I share with my audience."

For their part, audiences opened up under the new experience of participating in theater. When Price later brought theatrical entertainment to

flood victims in Tennessee, he reported, "The refugees were completely carried away. The children loved our show. The mothers and fathers showed their appreciation by joining in a community sing when our program closed. One picture that remains is that of a mother nursing a baby at her breast, entirely lost to everything but the performance."

In addition to bringing theater to new audiences, the federal project strengthened and amplified existing theater. In North Carolina the Federal Theatre took up residence at the University of North Carolina under the direction of Frederick Koch, who as director of the innovative Carolina Playmakers there had developed a system of strong community theaters throughout the state. By plugging into this ready-made structure and working with 18 of these groups, the project was able to improve production standards and to build a base of community support in a state with few professional theaters.

In July 1937 the North Carolina project also spawned the historical outdoor drama, *The Lost Colony*, performed in coastal Manteo in a new theater built by the Works Progress Administration. Paul Green's now well-known drama was performed 75 times during the project's tenure and continues to this day to tell the story of the first English settlement on Roanoke Island. [see article, p. 37]

Through the Federal Theatre, Paul Green took his stories of the South to communities all over the country.

Louisiana's New Orleans unit, like the one in North Carolina, benefitted initially from the existence of an established theater structure, the Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre. This troupe was recognized as one of the more serious and daring of the Southern dramatic units. In 1938 this unit produced the single Southern production of a *Living Newspaper*.

The Federal Theatre's obligations extended to helping the fading vaudevillian, minstrel, and marionette workers in New Orleans and throughout the South. These stage veterans had suffered a dual blow. Besides finding themselves out of work, they also found themselves artistically out of step as the long-

established vaudeville circuit disappeared. But under federal guidance, these performers briefly toured once again, visiting schools and other institutions in Louisiana and providing welcome entertainment and a needed community service. In New Orleans Flanagan encountered Hermann the Magician, "an elderly gentleman whose formal morning coat was covered with medals." He told her, "I have played before audiences all over the world and have received decorations from royalty, but I have never enjoyed audiences as much as these...crowds."

In Florida the Federal Theatre Project established a dynamic Spanish-Cuban unit in Tampa, accommodating the city's large Hispanic population. It was the only Spanish-speaking federal troupe and produced Spanish operettas, musicals, and dance. The unit also restored the luxurious Rialto Theater, built in the 1920s to showcase Spanish stars.

Here and in other major Southern cities, revenues from in-town productions allowed companies to take road shows — classics and musicals — to outlying high schools and into remote areas to the rural poor.

Audiences' unfamiliarity with live performances was evident. Flanagan — who often visited productions — reported from a little community called Watchula, "We played musical comedy and no one laughed. The director went out and said 'What's the matter? Why don't you like it? Why don't you laugh? Why don't you clap?' An old lady said, 'We'd like to laugh but we're afraid to interrupt the living actors. It don't seem polite. We'd like to clap, but we don't know when. We don't at the pictures.'" In another Florida hamlet Flanagan saw "an old man barefoot, helping children from an oxcart, [who] said, 'They may be pretty young to understand it, but I want they should all be able to say they've seen Shakespeare — I did once, when I was a kid.'"

In Texas the Federal Theatre established the successful Dallas Tent Show Theater, which made use of the state's large contingent of out-of-work tent-show and circus performers. Its "playhouse on wheels" traveled to playgrounds, parks, and CCC camps, offering variety and marionette shows.

FEDERAL  THEATRE

Similarly, units in Dallas and Fort Worth took one-act plays and marionette productions to schools and parks. But by mid-1937 lack of local support and tightening federal funds had closed the unit.

In time, the entire Federal Theatre suffered the same fate. Federal Theatre veteran and now well-known actor John Houseman later wrote, "As the Great Depression lifted and the economy began to pick up under the stimulus of an approaching war, the Federal Arts projects became superfluous and politically embarrassing. The Federal Theatre was liquidated, buried, and largely forgotten in the new excitement of World War II."

Politics played no small part in the project's demise. The Texas units, for example, had suffered from a conservative state WPA administration which resisted all but the most innocuous plays. Flanagan recounted the words of one administrator: "Do old plays. We don't want to get into the papers. Do the old plays that people will take for granted and not notice."

Between 1938 and 1939 the Federal Theatre became the subject of congressional investigations on un-American activity. The anti-red attack was taken up by politicians who opposed New Deal programs in general, and who saw the arts in particular as an inappropriate arena for

the American government. The controversial Living Newspapers and the project's association with radical theater unions made it a convenient scapegoat for the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, led by Texan Martin Dies, who claimed the project was infiltrated by Communists. The little evidence the committee uncovered was flimsy and largely erroneous, but extremely damaging anyway. Fearing that its Congressional appropriations were at risk, the WPA sat quietly while the Federal Theatre came under fire from Congress. The agency failed to defend the project's record and hoped that a single sacrifice would satisfy opponents of the overall relief effort. The fight against the project in Congress was led by Clifton A. Woodrum, chair of the House Committee on Appropriations, whose declared aim was to "get Uncle Sam out of show business." Despite a valiant last-minute effort by Flanagan, with support from leading stage personalities and theater critics, the project was voted out of existence on June 30, 1939, by an act of Congress.

The Federal Theatre's impact, however, cannot be denied. True, in the rural South, with its few professional theaters or actors, the project was clearly less experimental than in other regions, and its few serious dramatists were more isolated and rarely received the acclaim afforded those in the nation's major arts centers.

But if they lacked critical success, the Southern theater units were certainly a human success, bringing art to people who had never before experienced it, revitalizing spiritually depressed communities and restoring the dignity of hard-working theater professionals. While it failed to probe seriously the cultural forces that drove and perhaps hindered the South, the Federal Theater took on a form in the region that surely reflected existing Southern culture and conservatism and took an important step toward realizing Hallie Flanagan's grand vision. □

Beth Howard, a native of North Carolina, is a writer and editor now living in Washington, D.C.

Paul Green

By Larry Vellani

and His Legacy

In the 1910s

moving from the farming community of Lillington, North Carolina to the state university in Chapel Hill meant much more than traveling the 50 odd miles of dirt roads and railways. Only the most privileged or the most determined could make their way from a life of labor and commerce to a life of letters and ideas. And even the determined ones needed a little luck.

Paul Green, a determined 23-year-old farm boy from Harnett County, scraped together his first year's tuition from his meager salary as the principal of a small country school and from his earnings as an ambidextrous pitcher for Lillington's semi-pro baseball team. Still, he wouldn't have been able to complete his first year if the University of North Carolina had not hired him to teach a freshman English class.

This freshman teacher-of-freshmen had never seen a play performed, but he entered a campus play-writing competition that year and won the cash prize of \$5 — about the price of a new suit. Green's first play — like many of his later works — hit close to home in a Chapel Hill only two generations removed from the humiliating defeat in the Civil War. *Surrender to the Enemy* told the true story of the controversial love affair between Brigadier-General Smith B. Atkins of the Union occupation forces billeted at the university in 1865, and Ellie Swain, the daughter of the university's president. The play premiered in an open-air theater on the campus on May 3, 1917, as part of the annual Community Spring Festival.

Green later recalled his first first-night jitters: "I sat on the bare hillside and sweat streamed under my clothes." The author reviewed his first theater piece with his feet, as he "stumbled and fled... frightened by the life and blood of the thing."

Green's attack of nerves was probably unwarranted. The audience, gathered on scattered rugs and pillows in a sloping campus glade, had witnessed the first faltering steps of a most remarkable career. The next six decades would lead this embarrassed

novice to Broadway and Hollywood and back to North Carolina while he matured as the South's first modern playwright. Before his death in 1981 at the age of 87, Paul Green would be recognized alongside Tennessee Williams and Lillian Hellman as one of the South's most important playwrights. And unlike Hellman or another North Carolina writer of his generation, Thomas Wolfe, Green spent most of his life developing his craft in his native state.

Since his childhood, Paul Eliot Green was fascinated by words, books, and storytelling. As the oldest son on a small Southern cotton farm in the years before World War I, he could steal away to write in the woods only on "wide and soundless Sunday afternoon(s)." His formal education began in one-room log buildings with classes conducted a few months out of the year. Eventually he graduated from the local Buies Creek Academy (which later grew into Campbell University), and at the age of 19 became principal of the school in Kipling, North Carolina. From there he had worked his way to UNC and his first play-writing award.

Two months after his first opening night in 1917, Green enlisted in the army, on the strength of Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric and on the weakness of Green's own prospects for raising the next year's tuition. While "in the muddy and death-rotted trenches of Flanders, sitting in the oozy dripping earth," Green began to consider writing novels and perhaps even plays as vehicles to express his personal vision.

Following two years of military

service in Belgium and France he returned to the university in 1919. While overseas he had not tried his hand at play writing again. But in Chapel Hill he was lucky enough to meet a great new teacher of play writing, Dr. Frederick H. Koch.

In 1918, while Green slogged through the Flanders mud, UNC hired the Harvard-educated Koch to teach play writing in the English Department. "Proff" Koch, as he came to be known to a generation and a half of students and theater enthusiasts throughout the Southeast, had studied under the pioneer theater educator and literary critic George Pierce Baker. Between 1905 and 1935, Baker's "47 Workshop" at Radcliffe, Harvard, and later Yale was the North American outpost for a rebellion in acting and play writing which had already swept Russia, Scandinavia, and Ireland. Baker and the Europeans before him wanted to free stagecraft from the 19th-century conventions of wooden, declamatory melodrama and museum-piece reproductions of the classics. An activist generation led by Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, and Stanislavsky struggled to introduce realism and naturalism into the modern theater where the characters related to each other on stage as living, breathing humans, not as two-dimensional, posturing caricatures. Baker was instrumental in spreading the revolution among his students who — besides Koch — included such illustrious and innovative artists as playwright Philip Barry, critic and play editor Theresa Helburn, director Elia Kazan, educator Kenneth MacGowan, playwright Eugene O'Neill, and novelist Thomas Wolfe.

After a stint teaching English at the University of North Dakota, Koch had arrived in Chapel Hill as an apostle of naturalism and a proponent of the theories of Baker and the Irish poet-playwright William Butler Yeats. Yeats and his celebrated Dublin-based Abbey Theater sought material for drama in the folk life of the common ordinary people of a region or country. Koch encouraged his students to forego melodramatic fantasies about exotic "captains and kings" and to write about the things they knew firsthand. He urged them to turn to their own experience, including the

history and vernacular of their home communities. Koch called it folk-drama. As much an impresario as an educator, Koch founded the Carolina Playmakers during his first year on the UNC campus. One of the oldest university theater companies in the South, the Playmakers then performed not only at the university but took their shows on the road, carrying props, playbills, and Koch's theater gospel into communities in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

Once Green returned to Chapel Hill, he began turning out plays for



Photo courtesy of the Paul Green Foundation

Paul Green as an army corporal during World War I.

Koch's student company in his spare time. Under Koch's influence, Green mined the material he knew best, the speech and characters of rural North Carolina.

Green finished his undergraduate work in philosophy in 1921 and the following year married a fellow campus poet-playwright, the Playmakers' field organizer, Elizabeth Lay. Lay had made history herself on campus as the first woman to act in a theatrical performance, raising eyebrows and overturning tradition at the predominantly male institution.

Green moved on to graduate study at UNC and Cornell in philosophy. He accepted a post as an instructor and later assistant professor in the philosophy department at UNC, a position he held until 1939.

Black Folk Drama

From the time of his return to the university until the mid-1930s, Green's

plays, short stories, and novels primarily chronicled the lives of tenant farmers and rural tradesmen — black, white, and Indian — in his imaginary "Little Bethel" community. Green had grown up working and playing side by side with some of the South's most economically hard-pressed people. Although Green's father had always owned enough land to hire tenant labor, their farm was of modest size. In the parlance of the day, they "lived at home" — meaning that, in addition to the cotton cash crop, the family raised all its own food.

By literally reading while he plowed, Paul Green had been able to escape a life of farming, but the lessons and the rhythm of that life never left him. In the grinding physical routine of farm labor; the rugged, uncaring hostilities of weather, pestilence, and disease; the changeless cycles of hope, frustration, generosity, and violence that move through an isolated rural community, Green found ample material to produce an impressive body of literature. In this early work — written during time squeezed from his research and teaching responsibilities — Green examined not only timeless themes in the human experience but the particular realities of life in the rural South during the first four decades of the 20th century.

Green described himself in those days as "having a chip on my shoulder" and thought of himself as an avid disciple of cynics H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, while claiming Jefferson, and Wilson as his political models. From his early experiences in Harnett County, Green felt he had "developed some fellow feeling for the people who have to bear the brunt of things." But he moved beyond mere social realism or muckraking. In those early years, he achieved what no white North American author had before him. He wrote about black men and women, not as the grinning stereotypes or scraping caricatures, but as fully developed human beings. His works followed the actions of complex individuals involved in dynamic dramatic struggles, in settings that were true to Southern black experience. When actor Paul Robeson turned down Green's request to play the title role in his 1927 Pulitzer Prize-

winning Broadway play, *In Abraham's Bosom*, Robeson paid Green perhaps the highest compliment that a black actor could pay a white playwright. Having read the play before meeting Green, Robeson told him, "You know, I rather thought you were a Negro."

It was no surprise that when Cheryl Crawford, a co-founder of the avant-garde Broadway company the Group Theater, approached Richard Wright in 1940 to adapt his controversial bestselling novel *Native Son* for the stage, Wright asked Green to collaborate with him. The son of Mississippi tenant farmers, Wright greatly respected Green's work, having performed in the Chicago production of Green's scathing attack on prison chain gangs, *Hymn to the Rising Sun*.

The Search for People's Theater

Several of Green's one-act and full-length plays were produced on Broadway. But Green found the New York theater industry unsatisfying. He quickly grew tired of Broadway and wrote that "my theater for the present is the published play." He later blamed himself for being ignorant of the realities of the industry, of "expecting too much." During that period he discovered that "the New York stage is an industry, not an art as I had dreamed." It was "dog eat dog and look to your suspenders."

The New York theater, Green felt, was too far removed from the lives and experience of ordinary people. He sometimes spoke of the need to "whittle" Broadway down. In all fairness, Green could never entirely shake the country person's intuitive distrust of noisy, crowded cities and sophisticated ways of life.

Green's limited formal training in theater also contributed in part to an anti-elitist element in his world view. His mentor Koch was less interested in developing Tar Heel Shakespeares and Molières than in awakening his students and the local community to the drama in their own lives. As a professor of philosophy and later of dramatic arts, Green continued Koch's tradition when he told his own students, "You have seen a great deal. You will see more. Tell us about it."

Green didn't characterize his direct, no-nonsense approach as a theory of

aesthetics, but he fervently believed that all the arts "fill human needs and feed human hungerings." He argued that "the arts are just as necessary to the full man or the nation as bread and meat and sweat and work. And so they are a part or should be a part of the human regimen." In this sense, he said, "every man is an artist just as every man is a worker."

At the same time, Green distrusted art that became "a special thing with its own vocabulary from its own ritual and mystique, too far away from the checks and balances of life." The tradi-

*New York
was "dog
eat dog and
look to your
suspenders."*

tional centers of art, like New York, claimed to have a monopoly on theatrical talent, goods, and services. Green wanted to find a way to decentralize, democratize, and redistribute. He described his vision as People's Theater.

Soured on Broadway, Green went looking for new ideas, methods, and approaches, first off Broadway and then abroad. In 1928, on a Guggenheim Fellowship, Paul and Elizabeth Green went with their two children to Berlin for a year and a half to study contemporary European theater. Green's spirits reached perhaps their lowest artistic ebb that year, and he discussed with his wife abandoning the theater entirely. She reminded him of the exciting impression a recent piece had made on him. In *Three Penny Opera* Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill had made great use of music in advancing the themes of the play. She suggested that her husband

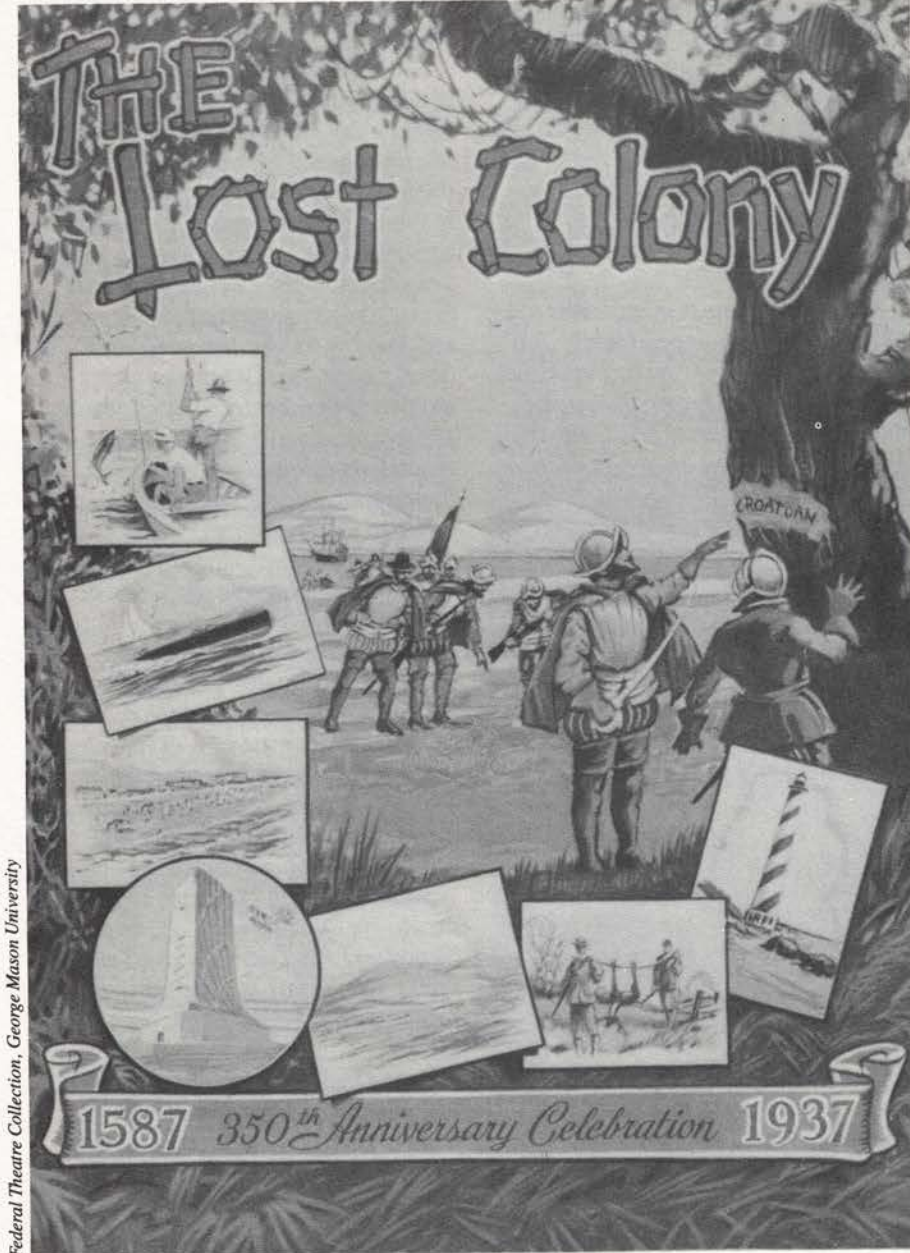
consider making more use of music, as well.

While Green was in Berlin, he met another visiting folk-dramatist, Alexis Granowsky, the artistic director of the Moscow-based State Jewish Theater, the foremost Yiddish language troupe in the world. Granowsky had spent the previous 10 years experimenting with "musical theater," a combination of music, dance, pantomime, costumes, and lighting to give the words of a play deeper meaning. Green was swept away by the company's performances, and he discussed with Granowsky on several occasions his theories and their application to folk material.

When Green returned to the U.S. the running battles with the Broadway establishment continued. When he visited New York, the city was still intrigued by the rustic philosopher-playwright from down South who could quote both the Bible and Aristotle at cocktail parties. In 1931 Green's *House of Connelly* launched the career of the Group Theater, Broadway's most innovative performance and training ensemble in the years before World War II. And later his *Hymn to the Rising Sun* played in Chicago and New York. But Green felt restless on the East Coast, and he again turned elsewhere for inspiration and ideas.

Green had been "moviestruck" from the time he first saw Charlie Chaplin in 1919 in a French cantonment for American soldiers. He claimed to have seen Chaplin's *Gold Rush* at least 14 times. Faced with supporting four children and a wife on a Depression-era assistant professor's salary, Green quickly realized that he could make more money in three weeks in Hollywood than he could during an entire academic year in Chapel Hill. In 1932, Green arranged the first of several short leaves of absence from faculty responsibilities. Like so many other creative writers of his generation—including Fitzgerald and Faulkner—Green boarded the train to California.

He was excited about the creative possibilities of films, particularly their power to alter time and space and to combine images and sounds for a total effect on the viewer, much as the Russian State Jewish Theater had affected its Berlin audiences. Film technology



Federal Theatre Collection, George Mason University

now allowed an artist to reach a wider audience in the most remote corners of the world than any previous medium.

But Hollywood was no more able to fulfill Green's artistic expectations than Broadway. While he produced over 40 scripts during his screenwriting career for stars such as Will Rogers (*State Fair*), Bette Davis (*Cabin in the Cotton*), George Arliss (*Voltaire*) and Gary Cooper (*Broken Soil*), Green was continually frustrated by studio-controlled formula of cheap

endings, unrealistic characters, team-written films, and a prudish moral code.

Despite his frustration, Green earned good money working for the major studios, which enabled him to achieve an important degree of financial independence. In 1942 he moved his family to Santa Monica, California. Two years later, at the age of 50, he left the university faculty permanently. Not until 1963 did he write his last film script, the film version of

John Howard Griffin's book, *Black Like Me*, the true account of an ingenious attempt at participant observation of race relations in the South. But neither films nor California could keep a permanent hold on Green. By the end of the 1940s he had returned to Chapel Hill, devoting himself almost exclusively to his work with his new dramatic form, symphonic drama.

Symphonic Drama

Throughout the 1930s Green had sought to adapt the experiments of Brecht and Granowsky to his own dramas. He coined the term "symphonic drama" to describe his attempts to integrate music, dance, dialogue, poetry, plot, scenery, costumes, lighting, and special effects into an organic, artistic whole. He drew the term from the root meaning of symphony in Greek, "a sounding together." In pursuing these efforts, Green thought of himself as a composer or conductor who makes use of the different voices of the orchestra, "driving forward a composition.... The entire body of the piece must be kept moving along, by means of the individual instrumentations that [come] forward to personal fulfillment, turn, retire, and give place to others and they in succession likewise. Character and story motifs must be developed, thematic statements made and exploited, and an upboiling and stewing of symphonic creativity kept going toward a dynamic finale."

Green experimented with his ideas in four early musical dramas produced on Broadway and college campuses between 1932 and 1936. In 1934 *Roll, Sweet Chariot* featured a cast of over a hundred black actors and singers. A highly symbolic meditation on contemporary black life, it was based on previously written sketches and plays about Carrboro, a mill town near Chapel Hill. The fourth play in this initial series of symphonic dramas was a highly acclaimed collaboration with a refugee from Nazi Germany, Kurt Weill, who had scored Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*. Premiered in 1936 by the Group Theater, *Johnny Johnson* was a hard-hitting satire on war and modern organizational society, drawn in part from Green's experiences during World War I. This play gave Broadway its first experience with

Weill's haunting melodies. In this last musical piece for Broadway, Green introduced to modern theater audiences the now-classic scenes of the left-handed soldier training in a right-handed army and the simple enlisted man who confronts and makes a fool out of the government psychiatrist.

Green felt symphonic drama reached maturity in his most widely produced play, *The Lost Colony*. He had long considered doing a play on England's first attempt to establish a permanent colony in North America between 1584 and 1587 along the present-day North Carolina coast. When a newspaper editor from Elizabeth City, North Carolina approached Green about writing a play commemorating the 350th anniversary of the birth of the colony's first baby, Virginia Dare, Green was extremely wary. He feared the business community's desire for a sideshow play for tourists was diametrically opposed to his own concept of People's Theater.

Green managed to win a guarantee of complete artistic control and a role in the larger management of the project. He also convinced the Federal Theater Project to sponsor the production, which opened in July 1937 in a specially built open-air theater on the presumed site of the colony outside Manteo, North Carolina. Green and others arranged for FDR to attend a special production on August 18, 1937, Virginia Dare's 350th birthday.

The play was an immediate hit. Originally intended to run only for the summer of 1937, *The Lost Colony* has continued in performance every summer since then, except during the war years of 1942-45. It is estimated that over a million people have seen the play.

Green's 20 other open-air history plays follow a formula first worked out in *The Lost Colony*, with a few variations. Each is based on a significant local historical event, often performed at or near the site of the actual event. The plot focuses on the activities of one or two historic or invented figures who, in resolving an important personal crisis, shape the later history of the region, state, or nation. Green personally researched each story and documented or created a cast of supporting characters, most of whom were drawn from the ranks of common

Daring to share "the brunt of things"

Although Paul Green achieved fame and acceptance by the political and cultural establishment, in his personal life he exemplified his feisty convictions that life, like literature, "must stand for something." He made difficult choices for the values he believed in.

Green's concern for those "who bear the brunt of things" led to a career of run-ins with not only the cultural czars in New York and Hollywood but also the guardians of political and moral order in North Carolina. Green believed that the oppression of blacks in the South was a tragic moral and political blight and the single greatest impediment to the



UNC-CH General Alumni Association

Richard Wright and Paul Green collaborate to transform Wright's novel *Native Son* into a Broadway play.

economic and cultural development of the region.

At every opportunity in his public life Green called for desegregation. Often his was the only white voice raised in protest in his community. Green opposed the segregation of public facilities and lobbied for the admission of blacks to the University of North Carolina at all levels of study. He regularly upbraided university officials: "You have black laborers laying these brick walls, and you will not let them into the building to get a book. Why are they good enough to build it, but not good enough to use it?"

Green's recognition of the centrality of racism in Southern economic and cultural life made him a lifelong advocate of reform in the criminal justice system, which so often treated black people unfairly. He particularly urged the abolition of capital punishment and of prison chain gangs, who toiled on state highways under guards' shotguns. Some of his best fiction is built upon incisive criticism of these institutions. He visited inmates on death row and joined defense committees to work for commutations and new trials. During the 1930s, Green sometimes maintained solitary vigils outside the state prison in Raleigh on the eve of executions. For 10 years, beginning at the age of 73, he chaired a North Carolina citizen organization which lobbied for the abolition of the death penalty. □

working people who made vital, often little-recognized contributions to history. All the productions included pageantry and lots of music.

These plays and dozens by imitators have proved immensely popular over the years with local audiences and seasonal tourists. Six of his plays are still in annual production in five states, selling over 300,000 tickets in the 1985 season.

Green's dramatic experiments fortuitously coincided with the development of the South's modern tourist industry. His symphonic dramas and their imitations became the basis for a new profitable product in that industry. Today the Chapel Hill-based Institute of Outdoor Drama provides services to over 55 ongoing productions in 23 states. The realities of weather and dependence on tourism

dictate that the majority of these productions are in the South. During the 1985 season, outdoor dramas sold over 1.4 million tickets and grossed over \$8.8 million.

In the course of his work on symphonic dramas, Green's own strongly held political views came into sharper focus. Since the early 1920s, Green's work had stressed the importance of the individual and the choices he or she makes in moments of personal or community crisis. Before *The Lost Colony*, Green generally found it less important whether the person succeeded or failed, than that the person struggled. In fact, from the "Little Bethel" stories through his first experiments with symphonic drama, the works often ended with the central characters falling victim to social, economic, or psychological forces outside their control. In his later dramas, however, Green unabashedly chose to write about heroes. These plays enshrine the individual and his or her actions within a setting of basic paradigms from the American dream—hard work, honesty, commitment to goals, belief in progress, and the ultimate triumph of good. The central characters in works from this period rarely fall victim to events but rather shape history.

Green's later, more upbeat world view appealed not only to outdoor drama audiences but to foundations and government agencies outside the Broadway and Hollywood establishments. In the years after World War II, Green received three Freedom Foundation awards and a Rockefeller Foundation grant to lecture on theater around the world and to act as a consultant to set up regional drama centers in the U.S. He also served on the Executive Commission of the U.S. National Committee for UNESCO and was installed as a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Green ended up disturbed by the financial and popular success of his People's Theater movement. He was convinced that it had fallen prey to the "materialistic philosophy afflicting the whole Western world." Production standards in some of the dramas had dropped. The movement had gone "commercial" and become increasingly a social organization controlled

by educators, and college and civic leaders who preferred to "get things on a business basis" and play it safe. Many annual productions had become routine and lacked dedication and vision. Worst of all, from Green's point of view, the movement had become "producing theater instead of playwright's theater." None of the outdoor plays he read in later years had "any real lift and reach in the language."

Green's Legacy

Remaining a full-time writer until his death at 87 in 1981, Green just refused to quit working. His death cut



Photo by Linda B. Walters

Paul Green at his Chapel Hill home, Windy Oaks.

short plans to drive to Texas to discuss a new production. Perhaps partly because of his refusal to stop writing, Green seemed to outlive the historical significance of some of his greatest accomplishments. His groundbreaking work in folk drama and black theater was followed by successful collabora-

tion with the preeminent innovators of pre-World War II Broadway, then success in popular films, and finally his bold attempt to merge serious theater with historical pageants. Spurred on by his intensely idealistic determination to avoid having his art be controlled by commercial constraints, Green seemed to end up very close to where he had begun, struggling to improve an artistically immature but commercially successful dramatic form.

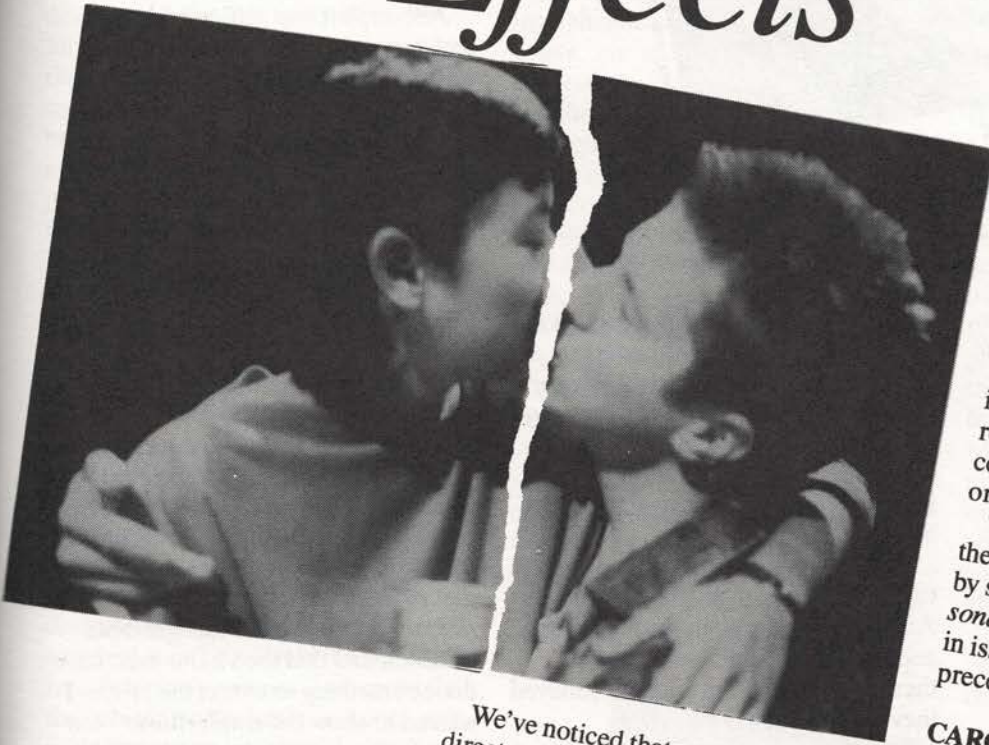
Perhaps with the exception of *Johnny Johnson* and *Native Son*, Paul Green's work is largely ignored today by literature students and major theatrical producers, and it will probably continue to grow in importance more for social historians than for aspiring playwrights.

Sometimes it seems that the major theme in Green's life was leaving things behind: He left the farm, he left folk drama, he eventually left Broadway, he left academia, he left movies, and right up to his death, he was challenging his colleagues in outdoor drama to improve their work or perhaps leave the field. But Green did not so much abandon earlier commitments as he built upon them to enlarge his capacity to express his own dreams.

Throughout his restless career, two things remained constant for Paul Green—his love for the South, and his commitment to creating theater that served the needs of ordinary people by telling their stories and inspiring them to keep building up their personal and collective dreams. And that remains perhaps his greatest legacy to the artists, activists, and audiences who pick up where he left off. □

Larry Vellani is co-director of the North Carolina Prison and Jail Project, Inc. and the producer of "Lone Vigil," an annual art event which commemorates Paul Green's contributions to the struggle for social justice and benefits the work of North Carolinians Against the Death Penalty, which Paul Green co-founded in 1967.

Personal Effects



Effects, an original script on which we and others collaborated, exploring the issue of rape. The two-act play, which was developed from research-supported improvisational acting sessions, was performed last August for two nights. It played to packed houses in the 312-seat Longstreet Theatre and received acclaim from both the theater community and local counseling organizations.

The success of the production and the media attention it garnered took us by surprise; none of us expected *Personal Effects* to pique the city's interest in issue-oriented theater to such an unprecedented degree.

CAROL SCHAFER: I had long been interested in using theater to educate and motivate audiences on important, community-related social interests. When discussing these ideas with a friend, I developed the idea for a production dealing with sexual assault.

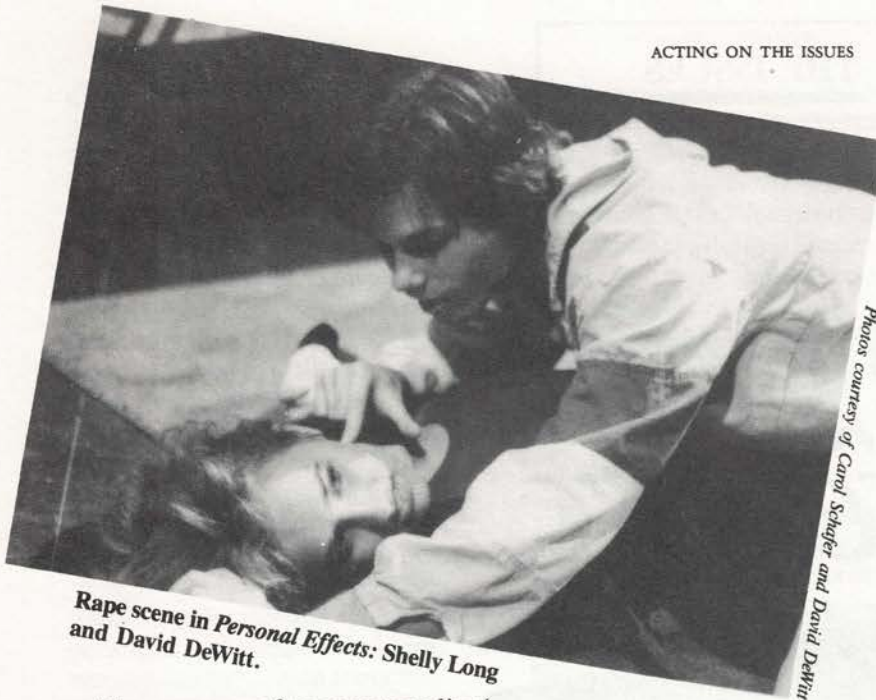
Although I probably would have considered myself a feminist at the time, I had little grasp of the underlying societal problems that manifest themselves in rape. I began reading extensively on the subject. As I read, my motivation to present this issue to the community intensified. Much of the literature on sexual assault tends to be statistical and distant from the personal experiences and emotions of those whose lives have been so greatly affected.

I found myself getting more angry

We've noticed that most actors, directors, and playwrights shun blatant issue-oriented theater, protesting that such productions reduce art to didactic propaganda. In Columbia, South Carolina, where we work, the theater community accepts this belief. While the city has a thriving and fast-growing interest in drama, the shows produced by the area's community, educational, and semi-professional theaters generally do not speak to specific community needs. Exceptions do exist, but we think it's accurate to say that Columbia — like most communities — tends to label issue-oriented theater as cheap, something less than artistic.

We hope these biases were prodded, exposed, and perhaps even laid to rest by the 1985 production of *Personal*

by Carol Schafer
& David DeWitt



Rape scene in *Personal Effects*: Shelly Long and David DeWitt.

Photos courtesy of Carol Schaffer and David DeWitt

with every page of more personalized books like Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. I began to understand the oppression of women and identify with it. I was especially interested in books that quoted interviews with victims of rape, but I became really intrigued with those that quoted rapists. I wanted an answer to the question of why some people turn to this form of violence. Even the most helpful books, such as Nick Groth's *Men Who Rape*, were unsatisfying. There were no easy answers.

After learning a good deal and reading several interviews with rape victims, offenders, and others on the subject, I desired first-hand accounts from local sources. Columbia's Rape Crisis Network staff was excited about the project. They referred me to several valuable sources.

I talked with a police officer who had helped establish the Columbia Police Department's procedures following a rape victim's call. She took me through the initial contact with the victim, the procedure at the hospital, the investigation, and the beginning of the legal process. Although this woman was very warm and understanding and I understood the need for these procedures, all the questioning and paperwork seemed to me to be very cold, official, and confusing for someone who had just been through a major trauma.

I talked with the Richland County Solicitor's Office, local reporters, defense attorneys, social workers, and

psychologists. I made sure I talked to counselors who worked with both victims and offenders.

By far the most helpful interviews were with victims and offenders themselves. The Rape Crisis Network introduced me to several victims who graciously told me about their experiences and their lives. Their stories were both heartbreaking and horrifying.

I talked with recent victims and victims who had been raped years ago. All had experienced difficulties in coping with the changes forced on them by these violent acts and believed they would never be the same.

One particular story concerned a young woman who, after an argument with her boyfriend, decided to walk home alone. She was attacked and raped. The woman then blamed her boyfriend for letting this happen to her. This story was later a building block for one of the scenarios in *Personal Effects*.

One of my greatest concerns was portraying sex offenders realistically. A prison social worker invited me to visit inmates who had been incarcerated for sexual assault. On a cold and rainy day I visited Columbia's Central Correctional Institution, the largest maximum security in South Carolina. I can't express how nervous and insecure I felt walking through those hallways right among the prisoners.

For my initial interviews, the social

worker had picked a couple of the inmates who had seemed to make the most progress in their attempts at rehabilitation. I later talked with others. While some men were very open about their lives and what they believed were the reasons for their assaults, others said they were drunk or on drugs and couldn't even remember the incident for one reason or another. Still others said that what they had done "wasn't really rape" and blamed the woman for turning on them. I heard lots of excuses and lots of justifications.

Although it was difficult for me to feel sympathetic, the interviews allowed me to talk with men who admitted to committing rape, and who acknowledged their actions as violent and criminal. Some of the men were actually very likeable. One of them described himself as being out of control, constantly nagged by his wife and mother-in-law. This inmate's dilemma became the general source for the background of one of the *Personal Effects* rapists.

After six or eight months of research, I was ready to begin work developing a script. I was eager to translate all this background work into interesting and thought-provoking theater. I wanted to destroy the myths that rape is a sexual act, that the offender is some kind of recognizable monster, and that the victim must have done something to attract the crime. I wanted to show the similarities — too often unheeded — between the violent "stranger rape" and the "acquaintance rape" or "date rape."

I decided to gather a group of four to six actors to approach the subject through improvisation. There were several reasons for this decision. I am not a writer, and I felt strongly that we would learn more about ourselves and our society by developing characters that were real, that were part of the actors themselves. The actors, then, would be creators, not interpreters.

I planned to begin work slowly, playing games to build trust and developing characters through life studies. After collecting interesting characters with their own histories, we could begin touching on situations and relationships that involved rape.

Unfortunately, these plans didn't work as I'd hoped. It was difficult to

find actors who would commit themselves to a project that was so nebulous. I began work in June 1985 with two men and two women. By the month's end I had lost both males.

I began to doubt my ability to inspire and create what I had envisioned at the beginning of my research, but I was fortunate to find two men willing to work at such a late date (the deadline was the end of August). With the two women who were already committed to the project, we began work in earnest near the end of June, leaving about a month and a half in which to develop a script and ready it for performance. With the scary realization that time was running out, I decided it was necessary to give up the trust-building exercises and the development of character histories. We jumped in with both feet, beginning work almost immediately on issue-related improvisations.

DAVID DeWITT: *Personal Effects* was a challenging and exciting acting experience. Obviously the chance to develop our characters improvisationally, to own our characters completely, was enticing. Also attractive was the chance to play several different characters in one show, for we knew from early in the process that our desire to show a broad-based look at rape and its effects could not be realized in four characters. And certainly, the subject matter leads to scenes rich with drama and intensity — which most actors love.

But the project was intimidating, too. First, of course, was the enormous responsibility the actors had for the success of the entire project. We, the creators, were in no position to blame failures on the script. The short time factor — preparing an entire show from its embryonic stages to the finished product in about eight weeks — was staggering.

In addition our technical and artistic support was limited. Rehearsals were often frustrating experiences, as the lack of clear production capabilities, coupled with the lack of air conditioning in the theater, made five young thespians wonder just what they were knocking themselves out for.

The answer to that question didn't come from my peers, who considered

the project a waste of time. "What is there to say about rape?" one female friend demanded. "Rape is bad. So what?" Others seemed to agree that trite didacticism would be the only result of a show about rape, because it was such a black-and-white issue.

That worry, that fear of sounding such a stereotypical note with the production, haunted me throughout the rehearsal process.

Two scenarios formed the backbone of *Personal Effects*. In one, two unemployed, working-class men break into an opulent home and, after stealing valuables, rape the woman of the house. The scenario showed the domestic backgrounds of the rapists and the victim, following the woman through parts of her recovery.

The other scenario — the "date rape" case — featured two sets of college students. After being introduced to the audience, the two couples are shown meeting in a bar. One woman leaves the bar and makes love with her date. The other woman leaves the bar and is raped by her date. The scenario explored the reactions of all four characters.

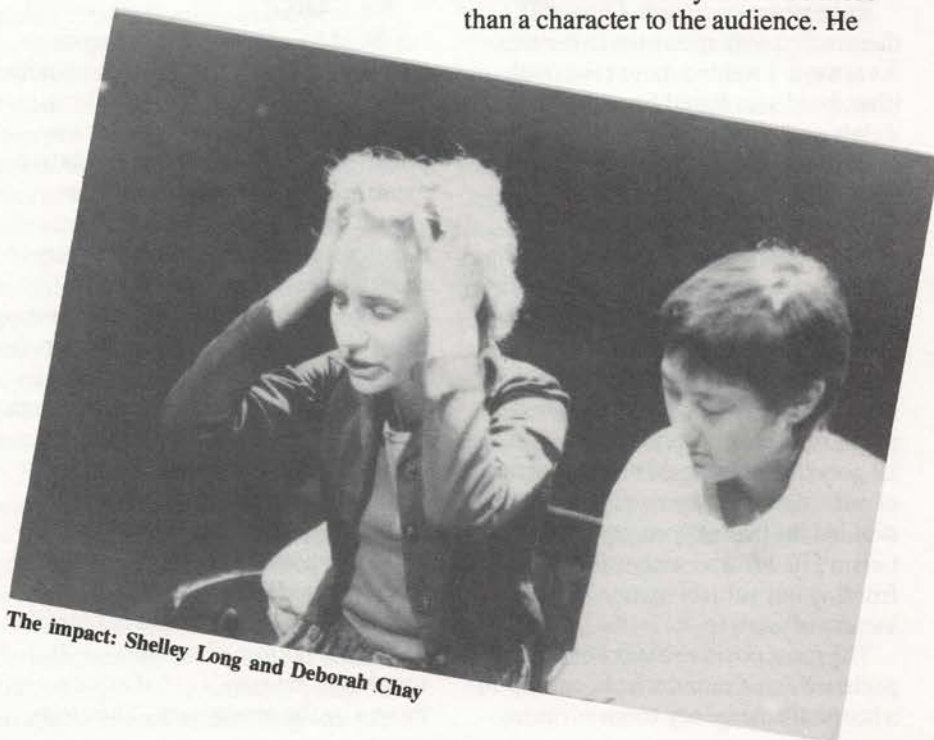
Both scenarios were developed organically. Basically, two characters would be put together in a situation, and the actors would improvise; all improvisations were recorded on audio tape. If a scene or its characters

seemed promising, we developed ways to explore those characters further.

I thoroughly enjoyed the early stages of the rehearsal process. The cast responded well to improvisation, and our commitment and sense of ensemble created some exciting moments ripe with truth. As the date of performance neared, however, I became anxious. My friends' words — "there's nothing to say about rape that hasn't been said" — weighed down my spirits. I also began to realize that though our scenes were theatrical and honest, our binding theme was an issue. While trying to individualize our characters, we had a responsibility to be representative. And that was frightening.

A case in point was my portrayal of Jay, the law student who was our "date rapist." In many ways, I was ideally cast in this role, for though Jay was certainly an arrogant, aggressive man used to seeing women as objects — a typical profile of a date rapist — my physical and vocal qualities lend themselves to a "nice guy" persona that gave Jay an ironic individuality. My work with the actress who played my victim was good. We trusted each other, physically and emotionally, and were consistently connected in our scenes. There was a lot to be pleased about.

But as showtime drew near, I became aware that Jay would be more than a character to the audience. He



The impact: Shelley Long and Deborah Chay

would be a representative of the entire date-rape phenomenon and analyzed with an academic preciseness. Experts called in to watch rehearsals had varying reactions to Jay. While some found him ideally and shockingly representative, others questioned gestures, oddly placed sighs, or even my techniques of seduction as inappropriate to a real rapist. My dilemma was clear, if its answer was not: how could I make Jay an individual, and thus uphold his theatrical integrity, while still satisfying everyone's vision of a date rapist?

Meanwhile, word about *Personal Effects* had filtered out to the local media, causing us to speak about our feelings for the show. We all were fighting simple technical battles such as impossible costume changes, late line revisions, and further physical delineation of our characters. A discussion of our most tender problem, the purpose of *Personal Effects*, could easily have betrayed our insecurities about the show.

Instead, these interviews galvanized the cast and director, provoking declarations of solid faith in our work. We discussed how our purpose was to show that rape is a problem facing our society, not to provide an answer to the problem. Surprisingly, I was most vocal in describing how my conception of rape had changed, that I no longer saw it as a black-and-white problem, that there were gray areas.

By performance time, I was still dissatisfied with moments in the show. As always, I wanted more rehearsal time, but I also found lines that just didn't work as they did in the original improvisations. But I was generally pleased with the theatrical and thematic aspects of *Personal Effects* and was overwhelmed by the incredibly strong response to our work.

I hope that in some small way *Personal Effects* had a similar effect on the audience. But if it didn't, I'm at least convinced that we entertained people and made them think — which all good theater does. Perhaps because of our improvisational origins, we had avoided the preachy, empty didacticism I had feared while still confronting our subject matter from a variety of angles.

The most positive aspect of this experience came months later, as I lay in a hospital emergency room suffering

from acute appendicitis. The attending nurse was sure she knew me. Clutching my belly, I asked if she attended local theater, assuming she recognized me from a public performance. She answered with a definitive, "Oh, no. I never go to the theater." She left the room to find me a doctor. Minutes later she scurried back to my gurney, exclaiming, "I remember now! You're the rapist!"

She never attended "theater," but she had seen *Personal Effects* and was moved by it, as evidenced by her excitement at finding the "rapist" writhing in pain before her. I realized then what had been accomplished by that show: we had enfranchised a new audience for the theater.

My pride in *Personal Effects* grew a thousandfold. Moments were recalled with fondness and specificity. My four characters, the worldviews they presented, all rushed back to consciousness. Objectified anew, their inner lives took on a special truth and significance. Mostly, though, I realized — through that nurse's eyes — whom I most hoped my work would touch. The show became a symbol of what could be accomplished by recognizing community concerns and presenting them in a concentrated, focused production that, through the magic of theater, may reveal their truth.

**AFTERWORD
BY CAROL
SCHAFFER
& DAVID
DeWITT**

It's hard to pinpoint exactly what we took away from our experience with *Personal Effects*, but perhaps the show's broader implications are most affecting to us as theatrical artists. We are now convinced that if one begins with a nebulous concept and trusts the process of honest improvisation, it's possible to create a heightened sense of ensemble, as well as a concrete product that is striking and meaningful. And within this environment of artistic awareness, we realize that when we appreciate the power of a script's issues, it is the art we celebrate, not ourselves as theatrical artists.

Unquestionably, the show had an effect on its audience; the local Rape Crisis Network reported that several untreated victims of sexual assault sought the network's aid after being moved by the production. The after-

performance discussions, prompted open debate between audience members representing three generations of age and experience; provocative points were raised concerning the nature of crime, revenge, sexuality, and personal freedoms.

At the time of the performances, Columbia had suffered a summer of fear following two highly publicized and brutal rape-murder cases. While *Personal Effects* was in no way designed to capitalize on this fear (work on the show had begun before either crime had occurred), it was obvious the show had touched a nerve. With limited publicity, *Personal Effects* filled a 312-seat theater on Monday and Tuesday nights; kept half of its audience for after-performance discussion; and sparked debate within the local theater community as to the worth of such theater. □

What the Audience Thought

Alden Richardson, manager of El Centro hair-styling salon: "*Personal Effects* was a strong yet gentle portrayal of intense, traumatic events. The characters became real people dealing with a difficult situation."

Anonymous survivor of sexual assault: "Several of us saw the play and used it as a tool for discussion in our support group. It helped us face our fears and enabled us to talk about all the feelings and problems that victims have in common."

Candy Waites, Columbia city councilwoman: "It stirred the emotions — sometimes anger, sometimes sympathy, sometimes horror or terror. It was very effective, at least for me, in getting those varied responses."

Bob Hallman, attorney: "...a powerful exploration of a difficult subject. I'd never fully recognized the difficulties shared by rape victims, male as well as female."

Carol Schaffer and David DeWitt are master's degree candidates in theater at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Schaffer leads support groups at the Rape Crisis Network. DeWitt holds a master's in English from USC.

At first glance, North Carolina's Gaston County prison unit looked like a Boy Scout camp. The dorms and trailers within its cyclone fence might have housed 11-year-olds for a summer of basketball and archery, campfire skits, and arts and crafts. But within these confines of steel and concrete, 106 grown men idled in groups, shooting hoops, pulling on cigarettes, scowling at guards, and heckling the occasional visitor.

Three years ago, when this unit still housed youth offenders aged 16 to 21, volunteer Pat Hall suggested a different approach to pre-release training: a program to enhance communication through dramatic technique and exercises. Inmate theater had been experimented with at other institutions.

"Before you can teach these guys anything, you gotta get them to open up," says Hall, explaining his rationale for developing a prison theater program. A lanky 36-year-old redhead who had spent 19 months in a federal penitentiary, Hall headed the Gaston County unit's Community Release Training program. "When you're in prison you learn to shut yourself off from any feeling, just to survive. The only emotion you can allow is a negative one — to avoid getting beat up, or ripped off, or raped.

"And drama's an excellent way to get them to relax," he continues. "You can get them to smile, laugh, enjoy themselves and others. Creative drama can show them how to share group responsibility, and how to interact as a group."

To put his idea into practice, Hall approached Constance Welsh, artistic director of Taradiddle Players, a repertory theater group in nearby Charlotte. Hall had been her student at the nearby University of North Carolina-Charlotte, where she was developing theater as an educational tool to take on a tour of the state's high schools.

Despite her initial fears, Welsh was surprised that she "encountered no

A DRAMATIC ALTERNATIVE FOR PRISONS



By Melinda Meschter

resistance whatsoever" from the inmates on her first day at the prison.

To introduce the inmates to dramatic technique, she began with a simple exercise. "I started by showing them an object — a pack of cigarettes — and asked them who wanted it. From there, we built a drama. Wanting something breeds conflict. We planned a scene with a beginning, middle, and end around this goal. The peer structure was obvious — you'd have a leader, a clown, an egotist. But the nature of the experience in drama is a sublimation of egos to communicate a scene."

Welsh calls the project an immediate success. "In fact, I was a bit overwhelmed. Their hunger for problem-solving, for sharing, was scary. They were very excited."

Welsh coaxed the inmates into performing exercises that taught concentration: "posing as statues, being out in space" — activities "they wouldn't

think of doing in another context." But the men did them "because they could see the scenes improve."

The prisoners readily invented dramas about prison life. "At first I was tempted to shy away from scenes that hit too close to home," recalls Welsh, but "I learned it was foolish to deny the obvious. In fact, they responded best to a story about a lifer, a drug addict who befriended a new inmate, also with a drug problem. The lifer kept trying to tell him to get off the stuff, but it didn't sink in." Until the lifer himself died of an overdose. It was the *morality* of these scenarios they came up with that was so startling."

Although Hall's and Welsh's project was an experiment, Welsh believes it would have been effective as an ongoing, weekly program. "If [inmates] were offered the classes upon entering prison; if we could have built up scenes into a whole play to wrap up the sessions; if we could have gone the whole works, with props, lighting, costume — so they could have the sense of performing together. They would all gain a sense of cooperation, of achievement, of something positively theirs."

Like many other prison theater projects, this one, too, was destined to be short-lived. The state converted the Gaston unit to an adult prison and dispersed the young offenders to two farflung prisons. Hall comments, "It's darn near impossible to sell a government agency on the validity of doing this." He feels the benefits may be too subtle for bureaucrats to perceive: "You're simply helping an inmate open up after closing off everything and everybody. You give him 30 minutes to escape a negative environment and share something. How do you possibly measure results?" □

Melinda Meschter is a writer and editor in Charlotte, North Carolina.

A PLAY BY REBECCA RANSON
Warren

Warren was first presented in Atlanta at Seven Stages in August, 1984. The play was written about Warren Johnston who was a close friend of this issue's guest editor, playwright Rebecca Ranson. Johnston lived for several years in North Carolina and worked at WVSP public radio station in Warrenton. He also drew some illustrations for *Southern Exposure*. Johnston died in San Francisco on Friday, April 13, 1984 from AIDS. The play has been presented in 10 cities around the country, often as a fundraiser for AIDS emergency care and other AIDS organizations.

The following scenes take place when Warren receives his AIDS diagnosis and must deal with the suffering his illness will cause others. Kelly, an actor, is Warren's friend and former lover.



Photo by Chris Bouchard

Excerpt

KELLY: AIDS?

WARREN: Yes.

KELLY: Oh, no.

WARREN: It's better than not knowing.

KELLY: I guess.

WARREN: I think I should call Mama and Daddy.

KELLY: I will.

WARREN: No, I will.

KELLY: Tell them I'm staying here with you.

WARREN: You're not.

KELLY: Yes, I am.

WARREN: Kelly, I don't want you to stay.

KELLY: I'm not leaving you in San Francisco like this.

WARREN: Yes, you are.

KELLY: I won't leave.

WARREN: I'm in a hospital. They'll take care of me.

Warren (Jon Goldman) ponders his life after contracting AIDS in a 1984 production at Seven Stages in Atlanta.

KELLY: I know that, but I want to be here.

WARREN: Go do the show. They need you.

KELLY: I need to be here with you.

WARREN: Tough. I don't want you here.

KELLY: Warren.

WARREN: You wouldn't have any money to live on.

KELLY: I would figure it out.

WARREN: How?

KELLY: I don't know how right now.

WARREN: I don't want anybody around me. Only the doctors.

KELLY: Why don't we talk about it tomorrow?

WARREN: You're leaving tomorrow. You're going home now, packing up the car, driving home for Christmas, and then going to Tennessee to do the show.

KELLY: I can't.

WARREN: You can. You have to.

KELLY: Why can't you let me decide what I want to do?

WARREN: Because you'll decide to stay here, to give up everything so you can stay and watch me be sick and die.

KELLY: What's wrong with that?

WARREN: You need to get on with your life.

KELLY: Getting on with my life means being here, Warren.

WARREN: Okay, all right. I'll tell them not to let you in. You'll be staying out here for nothing. They won't let you come in if I ask them to keep you out.

KELLY: You wouldn't do that, would you?

WARREN: Why not? Look what you're trying to do to me.

KELLY: It's for me, Warren.

WARREN: I'm too sick. I don't feel like having you around me.

KELLY: Well, tough.

WARREN: You'll make me feel worse. I don't want to be guilty over you.

KELLY: You don't have to be. I'm the one making this choice.

WARREN: I'm not going to cooperate with your choice.

KELLY: Then don't. I'm staying anyhow.

WARREN: Well, it won't help me if you stay.

KELLY: Well, whatever... *(A long silence)*

WARREN: I never finished anything I wanted to do. I don't have a legacy. Kelly, what if you get it too?

KELLY: If I do, then I do.

WARREN: I could have given it to you.

KELLY: I could have given it to you.

WARREN: Why is this happening?

KELLY: It isn't fair. It just isn't fair.

WARREN: I don't want to die, Kelly.

KELLY: I don't want you to.

WARREN: I feel so bad.

KELLY: I know, sweetie.

WARREN: I have to call everybody.

KELLY: Okay.

WARREN: I hate to do this right before Christmas but I won't be able to get home. I have to tell them something.

KELLY: I know.

WARREN: At least they finally gave me a diagnosis. I think knowing is better than not knowing. Could you hand me the phone? I wish somebody would be there with Mama. *(Warren dials and phones ring for Wylie, Warren's father; Florence, Warren's mother; Rebecca, Warren's friend.)*

WYLIE/FLORENCE/REBECCA: Hello.

WARREN: It's Warren.

WYLIE/FLORENCE/REBECCA: Warren.

WARREN: I've got some bad news.

WYLIE: What's wrong, son?

FLORENCE: You're coming home for Christmas, aren't you?

REBECCA: Are you still feeling sick?

WARREN: Listen. Just listen to me for a few minutes.

WYLIE/FLORENCE/REBECCA: Okay.

WARREN: I'm in the hospital
on a special ward
the AIDS ward.
I got a diagnosis
I have AIDS.

WYLIE/FLORENCE/REBECCA: I'm coming out there to see you.

WARREN: I'm pretty sick.
I have pneumocystis and meningitis.
Don't come now.
Wait.
I wanted to give you my phone number.
I'm doing okay.
Don't worry too much.
Kelly is here with me.

WYLIE/FLORENCE/REBECCA: Good.

WARREN: I'm tired.
The medicine makes me sick to my stomach.
Good night.

WYLIE/FLORENCE/REBECCA: I love you, Warren.

WARREN: I called everybody.
Mama
Daddy and Helen
William
Wendell
Taylor
Don
Roger
Jack
Rebecca
Everybody knows.

KELLY: And *you* told them.

WARREN: I wanted them to hear it from me.

KELLY: You were strong.

WARREN: Now I'm not. Now I feel like crying. □

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Unexpected Drama Deep in the Interior

A Chronicle of the Road Company

by Pat Arnow

The first time I saw a Road Company production was at the Veteran's Administration Theatre of the Mountain Home Hospital complex in Johnson City, Tennessee. In the half-full auditorium were some of the veterans who lived on the grounds.

The Road Company was premiering its company-developed play, *Blind Desire*. The performance wasn't what I expected to see in East Tennessee. The only set was a giant mobile. Actors dressed in hand-painted costumes chanted about snakes being my soul. Two characters jauntily dashed on the stage and promised to explain it all later. The themes that emerged were political, about our foremothers and about peace.

An old veteran snored behind me. In front of me another old vet spit tobacco juice into a paper cup every couple of minutes.

At the end of the play, the applause was polite. I asked the old vet with the cup what he had thought of the performance. He said he liked it just fine — he never missed any of the Road Company shows. "I would have liked a little more singing and dancing," he added as he shuffled up the aisle.

If Bob Leonard were a realist, he never would have set up a theater company dedicated to new work in Johnson City. While the Appalachian countryside here is beautiful, this city

of 40,000 is not exactly a theater center. And 17 regional tours still haven't made the company's existence a practical proposition — most of the places it goes aren't exactly theater centers either. Surviving, sometimes even thriving for more than 10 years has proved that stony realism isn't what keeps the Road Company going.

What keeps it going is the intrepid nature of its founder, producer, director, and at present, entire office staff. Bob Leonard, a native of Massachusetts who studied theater at Wesleyan and Catholic universities, looks the part of the theatrical impresario — tall and thin, with a flowing white-streaked mustache and piercing gray eyes. In spite of the financial problems that stalk his non-profit theater company, the 42-year-old director is not tempted to abandon his mission of creating original theater. He is not swayed by the gentle suggestions from some pillars of the community that his troupe might do better to stage more accessible productions like *1776* or *Annie*. Local amateur companies do that sort of thing very well, Leonard thinks. But the Road Company has created nearly two dozen plays, and with its regional tours it has gotten good at ensemble playmaking. Leonard and his troupe are itching to do more.

Honing the craft of creating shows

Road Company-style has involved some stormy episodes. Until *Blind Desire*, serious differences of visions always afflicted the parties involved. The playwright didn't always understand or appreciate what the actors were trying to contribute. The actors weren't always crazy about what the writer was trying to do. And the director always had his or her own ideas.

Somehow amidst this chaos the process worked well enough that some interesting and popular plays emerged: *Mountain Whispers* and *Chatauqua '77*; *Horsepower* and *Little Chicago*, written by the company and Jo Carson; and Rebecca Ranson's *One Potato Two*.

Blind Desire was two years in the making and is the company's most fully realized piece, Leonard thinks. The troupe unanimously describes the play's development as its most successful and harmonious collaboration, which started in the winter of 1983. Without the restraints of money (there wasn't any) or time (they were all unemployed) the ensemble gathered with the idea of creating something new.

The members already knew each other well. They had toured together, sharing motel rooms and long hours on the road. But this was the first time that this configuration of people had tried to invent a play.

Margaret Baker, a Smithfield, North Carolina native, spent a year teaching in the public schools before deciding she didn't fit that role. She went to graduate school and earned her master's degree in acting and directing. After a stint in outdoor drama, she became a member of the Road Company for three years and helped produce her play, *The Happy Ever After*, a post-nuclear age character study. Now Baker is a new wave humorist in Philadelphia.

John Fitzpatrick came from Natick, Massachusetts, but he has lived in Johnson City for more than 10 years. He became a member of the Road Company, as both road manager and actor, during the final tour of *Little Chicago*.

Emily Green is a 28-year-old Nashville native who came to the Road Company five years ago almost directly out of college acting training at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (She and Baker were classmates.) Because she is a feminist with a playful, absurdist sense of humor, *Blind Desire* probably reflects her personality more than anyone else's in the company.

Christine Murdock, from St. Louis, represents the third generation of a family of performers. She is the senior member of the acting troupe, with eight years and 17 regional tours behind her.

Eugene Wolf grew up in Tennessee's Greene County, not far from the Road Company's Johnson City headquarters. When he first joined the troupe three years ago, he knew from his experience in dinner theater that he could handle acting jobs but he had never tried creating characters as he would in the Road Company.

When this group of actors met with director Leonard to begin making *Blind Desire*, they were determined and ready to do something completely new, something that would incorporate all the techniques they had developed as an ensemble.

First, there were practical matters. To pay the rent on their rehearsal hall, a drafty room above Dave's Hobby Shop in downtown Johnson City, they staged performances of their children's show, the *Flying Lemon Circus*. The proceeds went to the landlord. Then they got to work.

"We started by talking about what was important to each of us," says Green. She remembers some of the items that surfaced: "Concern for the earth, women's issues, unemployment, being single, Ronald Reagan."

A study of the evolution of religion, *When God Was A Woman* by Merlin Stone, also stirred the discussions. The book was introduced to the group by Marlene Mountain, a poet, artist, and feminist who worked as the Road Company's secretary until she was laid off when money ran low. Mountain shared ideas and sheafs of her poetry celebrating the goddesses. The actors eagerly discussed the issues she raised.

Bob Leonard knew that a play would



Circus performers Cathy DeNobriga and Lucinda Flodin in Road Company's *Corner Rooms*.

not come simply from discussions. "If you talk it to death before you get started, then you can't act it," he says. He got the troupe working — with acting warm-ups, games of motion, improvisations, "sound sculptures," and pantomimes.

"We didn't know what was going to come out of it. But there was an incredible creative freedom — to start from nothing, to start from scratch," says Margaret Baker. She remembers, "I'd come out of those rehearsals so elevated."

Eugene Wolf believes that the job and money crunches that each of the

ensemble members had to face forced the group to throw themselves into the effort. "There was a little feeling of despair that went into this show. Things looked really bleak," says the actor.

Green agrees. She believes that now that her life is a bit more comfortable and financially stable, she wouldn't be able to make the same effort. "I think you'd have a hard time getting that kind of work out of me right now," she admits.

The company actors acknowledge that Leonard's best talent is as an editor. He knows how to synthesize, how to grab onto a fine moment and dump the rest, how to put things together so they fit. "He's really good at helping find where freedom can take you, or when you need the discipline of repeating something," says Baker.

The actors also like Leonard's directing style. "Bob lays back and lets things happen. It's much freer for the actor. Most directors tell you what to do," says Green.

Wolf, recalling his work in dinner theaters, nods vigorously. "Yeah, they'll say, 'Move here and say this line funnily.'"

The ensemble members all talk about a technique they developed that winter to preserve the work in progress: the invention of a shorthand that could bring an improvisation back to mind. Leonard explains, "I'd say, 'Rage in a blue room,' and they'd know what that meant. They'd be able to go back to it. Not necessarily the lines, but the feeling, the essence of what was going on."

From the months of rehearsals emerged a wild, eclectic mix of satire, serious political statement, otherworldly costumes and sets — even slapstick.

"Hello. My name is Jean and I need a job," Emily Green tells the audience. Behind her, voices try to remind her of her great-grandmother, of her mother, of the ancient goddesses.

Timidly, the unassuming young woman continues talking. She lands a job with a giant company, McMan-kind, and allows herself to be "made over" so that she will be suited to her new role. "Hi, my name is Jean, and I have a job! Can I HEP YEW?" she shouts happily as she struts across the stage, showing off her newly learned

walk. Later, though, after being completely caught up in her life at McMankind, Jean becomes confused. She begins asking questions. Finally she listens to the voices that have been whispering to her all along.

As Jean makes her way as best she can through this absurd, frightening world of the near future, the other four actors play some 30 characters — supervisors, co-workers, a pair of pompous announcers, a bartender, a preacher, and a bridegroom. The choreographed scenes of mindless McMankind routines are interspersed with what the cast calls their “woo-woo” scenes, the dream-like dancing, singing, and sounds that are glimmers of the underlying themes.

In its early stages of development *Blind Desire* wouldn't have been too easy to describe. It was long on the “woo-woo” scenes and short on plot or character development. But all of the issues that the group had outlined as important at the beginning of the creation process made it to the initial versions of the show.

The cast's editing process started with performances of rough-draft versions of the play at the Down Home (a local bar that usually features music), at the veteran's hospital in Johnson City, and at the ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters — South, see articles on p. 110.) annual meeting. The troupe received some much-needed praise and encouragement, as well as some good advice, especially from their colleagues at ROOTS.

Nearly a year passed before the cast was again able to schedule work on the show. Eugene Wolf describes the process of revision jokingly: “We honed down a little. From 10,000 ideas, we narrowed it down to 2,000.”

They agreed the story would follow Emily Green's character, Jean. Each actor had specific ideas about what message the play should convey and how forthright that message should be. “There were some pretty major disagreements,” Wolf admits. “When it comes to doing a play about women's issues there's a real fine line between serving up the issue intelligently and going overboard and preaching.” Their shared purpose kept their disagreements from becoming pitched battles.

Kelly Hill, a former Road Company

actor who had moved to San Francisco, rejoined the troupe for the revising process and tour, replacing John Fitzpatrick who had gone to New York.

The cast added scenes that put Jean through the paces of womanhood in the 1980s. She works, gets promoted, dates, and marries. In an extravagantly silly wedding scene, Jean steps across the stage wearing a wild cardboard and plastic gown, carrying a bouquet made of a bleach bottle and plastic garbage pail liners. Interspersed with the vows, the minister reels off high tech phrases, and Margaret Baker recites — in a society editor tone — the details of the outfit, “...she wore a turn-of-the-century hat with a waltz-length veil



Emily Green as Jean in the Wedding Scene in *Blind Desire*.

overlapping a full-length veil of lace....”

When the cast decided to invent the wedding scene, it might have been a coincidence that Emily Green had just gotten married. It was no coincidence that Margaret Baker's lines about the wedding gown were an accurate description of her own sister's wedding dress — she had lifted the bit verbatim from the newspaper account.

After an intensive three weeks of revising and rehearsing, *Blind Desire* became a coherent polished work created by seven authors. In a review in Atlanta's *Creative Loafing*, Tom

Boeker praised how well this “improvisational/ensemble recipe” worked: “Where most theaters succeed in creating avant-garde mud pies, the Road Company pulls off a tight and entertaining, albeit wildly eclectic, show.”

Other reviews were equally flattering. *Los Angeles Times* critic Dan Sullivan called the play “a real winner,” and said that “Green plays Jean with real respect, the way Judy Holliday did Billie Dawn.” Carl Rauscher of the *Atlanta Art Papers* said that *Blind Desire* was “The most impressive play, and the highlight of the [1984 ROOTS] Festival.”

While the praise heartened the group and impressed their friends, it didn't translate into busy tours or grants or guarantee full houses. Even after slick brochures went out to every possible customer in the South — from arts councils to university women's studies programs — the fall 1985 tour promotion netted only nine bookings.

This sparse showing reflects a grim trend for the Road Company's tour planning. As funding has shriveled everywhere, fewer of the colleges and arts councils that might have scheduled shows have been able to do it. Though Leonard is a good grant-writer, money is harder to find these days and he has less time to look for it. Since 1981 office staff has dwindled from a high of five to the solo operation it is now.

But according to the ever-optimistic Bob Leonard, the solutions seem imminent. Since the tours that used to support most of the Road Company's budget are drying up, Leonard and the board of directors are concentrating on gaining more local support. Together they beat the bushes for money.

They've had to scramble to gather even a modest \$84,000 for the proposed 1985-86 budget. The ticket sales, art auctions, garage sales, and mail and telephone fundraising campaigns staffed by volunteers cannot bring in enough to support the company. Government and private grants must still be the basis of the operating budget.

Leonard is always ready to plan new productions on the slimmest promise of funding, not just for the satisfaction of producing the dramas (though that is that), but because the ensemble

Photo by Chris Bouchard

members depend on the shows for their livelihoods. Generally, he aims to schedule one or two regional tours a year, a home season of three or four productions, and a playreading series with the work of regional writers.

Last year during the company's home season, it produced a new play by an East Tennessee native, Randy Buck. *Adjoining Trances*, the story of the friendship between Carson McCullers and Tennessee Williams, featured performances by Jo Carson and Jeff Showman. The ensemble also staged a reading of Carson's newest play, *Preacher with a Horse to Ride*, based on the writer Theodore Dreiser's disastrous trip to Harlan



Photo courtesy of Road Company

The Flying Lemon Cirque, a Road Company touring band, takes circus outdoors:

County, Kentucky during the Depression (see article and excerpts on p. 87).

The Road Company stages repertory work, too. In 1985 the troupe did *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, Wendy Kesselmen's strange thriller, *My Sister in This House*, and the musical comedy *Gold Dust* by Jim Wann.

Yet even when they're doing several plays a year, cast members visit the unemployment lines regularly. The layoffs aren't as grim as they might seem at first glance. Murdock points out that work is steadier in this company than in most acting jobs, citing Actor's Equity statistics that the average professional actor earns only about \$1,000 a year. While the Road Company members are unemployed more often than they were in the early big-grant years, they still are able to perform more often and make more money than most struggling actors.

There are other advantages for the troupe. The cost of living is much lower in the company's headquarters of Johnson City than in most theater centers. Perhaps most important to the performers is the flexibility. "If there's a play I want to do I can say to Bob, 'Let's do this,' and a lot of times we can do it," says Murdock.

"I would stay here and do this for the rest of my life if I could," the actress says. But her long-term commitment and loyalty aren't unconditional. The lack of consistent financial rewards doesn't concern her, but she is upset that because of cutbacks, she has had so little chance to perform in the past year. She is committed to her profession. "I want to act," she says simply.

That goal fortifies each of the members of the ensemble. But the Road Company's uncertain future has compelled some of the long-time actors, including Baker and Fitzpatrick, to move to cities where there might be more opportunities. Other former Road Company members have remained in the area, making their living in ways other than acting, and they sometimes rejoin the cast for specific productions.

The small but cohesive arts community in Johnson City and in nearby Jonesborough holds other attractions. "The Road Company has been a catalyst, it's put us together in lots of different fashions," says playwright, board member, and local resident Jo Carson.

But beyond the arts community Road Company faces problems gaining local support for its work. Most area residents are natives of southern Appalachia and their lives are centered on family and church, not on the theater. The values and social structures in the area are mostly traditional and at times conflict with the message, or even the existence of the theater. For instance, last year one Road Company fan urged an acquaintance to see *Jacques Brel*, elsewhere a regularly produced and uncontroversial musical revue. The woman liked the play and was interested in seeing more, but after the performance she got in trouble with her husband for coming home so late.

East Tennessee State University and the Texas Instruments complex in

Johnson City bring in the outsiders who make up most of the local audience of the Road Company. But this group cannot always be counted on for support. Some are simply not intrigued by experimental theater, in seeing a work that may have rough, raw parts, or something that might fall on its face because it's a new idea.

Bob Leonard points out that nationally, "No more than 2 percent of the American public goes to the theater. Now, if we were in a theater town, I'd be inclined to play for that already-paying public." But he knows that in most of the small towns where the Road Company performs, even 2 percent of the population won't fill an auditorium for a one-night stand.

He keeps hunting, working on "creating new theater for a new theater audience." Developing *Horsepower* after holding public hearings and *One Potato Two* after radio call-in shows were attempts to find and speak to a broader audience. While the plays that came out of those public forums made some successful tours through the South, much of the company's work is just too unusual to attract big crowds.

But Leonard does not back off into the kind of traditional storytelling that is more acceptable and popular here. He thinks that his company can find a new language that will be appreciated. "It might be esoteric in the short-term, but if it's popular it won't be esoteric anymore," he reasons.

Discovering a new language that will work is a lot to ask, and while Leonard isn't a pragmatist, he admits that he is sometimes daunted. "It's tough. I don't know what will electrify 50 percent of Johnson City. The problem is, I don't even have access to 50 percent of Johnson City.

Bob Leonard doesn't believe in giving up. Neither do Road Company's actors, writers, and supporters. Jo Carson admires the Road Company's policy of not choosing the safe, more surely pleasing methods: "The Road Company sticks its neck out in a place where chickens get their heads cut off, and that's extraordinary to me." □

Pat Arnow is a writer and photographer who lives in Johnson City, Tennessee. Her short story, "Point Pleasant," was selected "best story" at the Hindeman Writers' Workshop in 1985.

The Bridge That Brung You Over

BY TOM BOEKER



Every Now and Then I Get the Feelin' displayed Jomandi's own dancers in a tribute to generations of black dance and dancers.

Photo courtesy of Jomandi Productions

Atlanta has about three dozen theaters. Two are black, and the rest aren't called white. "White theater" sounds like an insult. It has racist connotations. It feels exclusive, like a club where Williams, Shepard, Shakespeare, and Neil Simon go to drink, where the only blacks are in the kitchen or waiting tables. White theater, egad, who would use such a term? No, they're simply theaters. Just because the majority of the audience is white doesn't mean that blacks can't come if they want to. Hell, their money's good. Of course Shakespeare isn't racist, even though directors insist that most of his roles must be played by white people. There's always Othello and Caliban. Maybe one of the three witches. White theater? Preposterous! Pass the paté, would you?

Equally weird is the notion of "black theater." It evokes the Afro-American '60s, drums, young bloods

in loincloth, Nigerian hoedown choreography, a macramé display in the lobby. Or else it's yet another funkless blockbuster, like *Ain't Misbehavin'* or *Dream Girls*. Sure it's Broadway, but at least it's black.

Yet black people need to recognize themselves, their lives, up on the stage. And besides, the white people have all those other theaters. Now we're talking about a black-run theater, using black actors, with black plays, for a black audience. Black theater — it sounds independent, righteous, thematically limited, and rather exclusive. It doesn't mean that the white people can't come. Their money's good too.

Jomandi Productions, one of Atlanta's two black theaters, was founded in 1978 by Tom Jones and Marsha Jackson. Jones and Jackson, both educated in New England, gave up graduate school to return South and start their theater.

At first, Jomandi had no permanent home. The company used to play at a community center on the South side, but the location was obscure, divorced from the nightlife, and considered dangerous by black and white alike. Last year, Jomandi moved uptown to the Academy Theater on Peachtree Street in the midst of what passes for Atlanta's theater district. Despite the predominantly white setting, the move has proved advantageous. Jomandi has higher visibility, and Atlanta's other black theater, Just Us, performs right across the street.

Jomandi produces mostly new works — plays by Baltimore playwright Alonzo Lamont, company-developed shows, and adaptations such as last season's *Cane*, based on the novel by Jean Toomer. In Jomandi's early days it used to produce four or five new plays a year. It cut back to two this season, trying to focus resources. "It's hard to do new plays," Jones

acknowledges, what with a six- to ten-week development and rehearsal process, compared to a shorter period for established plays. But as Jomandi's reputation gets around, more new scripts are being sent in.

Jomandi has most recently toured with a dance/music/theater collage called *Voices in the Rain*. It's a collection of work by established artists from Langston Hughes to Al Jarreau, as well as some original pieces by Jones and Jackson. The company developed the piece, and the cast of four was headed by the founders. Jomandi's winter '86 tour of the South was partially funded by the Southern Arts Federation. Three weeks alone were spent in New Orleans, playing to virtually every middle and high school there. Last year, the same show went on the road to Sweden, Denmark, and Germany as part of the Other America Festival, an annual alternative theater tour of Europe.

Meanwhile, guest director Andrea Frye mounted *Do Lord Remember Me* back in Atlanta, the second show of Jomandi's '85-86 season. It's another company-developed work, based on interviews with former slaves conducted in the '30s under the Works Progress Administration. The February production coincided with Black History Month, although Jackson doesn't characterize the show as a history lesson. "It serves no one if we simply quote facts," she says. She prefers to place black history in the context of progress, using an expression she heard as a child: "Don't forget the bridge that brung you over." She also feels that Jomandi is a bridge, one to the future, from "what is" to "what could be."

But the future, and change in general, are problematic, as was aptly illustrated last season in Jomandi's production of Alonzo Lamont's new play, *21st Century Outs & Back*. The protagonist, Daphne, is the daughter of a middle-class family. Her return from college entangles her in family obligations and racial bonds. She wishes, if she could only be free, be her own woman. She has just as much right to be a yuppie as anyone else. No, she doesn't want to be white; but does she have to turn her back on her own mother, her own race, to get free?

Now that's a risky subject — a black

woman, sympathetically portrayed, trying to escape a threatening whirlpool of what used to be called black heritage. Jomandi took a small beating at the box office. The company also fielded some complaints from the black audience. But — and Jones and Jackson feel this was their highest praise — some people remarked that the play had made them think, that they just hadn't seen things that way before, and they were grateful.

That's the challenge that Jomandi pursues. The idea is to engage the audience, or failing that, at least get them to consider what Jomandi is saying. Of course, that might mean opening avenues of discussion that people really don't want to pursue. It might mean openly criticizing some aspect of the black community or lifestyle, as in *21st Century Outs & Back*. But Jomandi recognizes the importance of self-criticism, despite the pain, because that critical eye frees the black community from the yoke of being judged from a white point of view.

Some people think of black theater as falling into two categories: plays (usually upbeat musicals) which cheerlead the black experience, and dramas (usually depressing) which chronicle the unjust victimization of the black people. Much of this, but not all of it, is true. Playwrights like Ed Bullins and Lorraine Hansberry have laid the ground work for something else, a theater that reaches beyond narcissism and despair.

Black theater could offer the black community more than simple recognition that it does exist. "Theater could draw from the life and blood of the black community," Jones argues. In examining the specifics and nuances of human relationships, theater explores the hows and whys of existence. Most of all, theater can be a humanizing medium. That is, when a play's investigation of the human condition is more than skin deep, the findings are universal—good for blacks, good for whites, good for all of us together.

That's the kind of theater that Jomandi wants to be.

Not that it isn't. On its last tour of *Voices in the Rain*, audience participation once stretched the running time of the show from the usual 45 minutes

to an hour and a half. Jones's "street blood" characterization rallied a good bit of audience feedback. And Jackson's fundamentalist preacher's monologue had the audience shouting "amens" and humming in chorus, just like at a Sunday morning service.

Jomandi's greatest problem, a problem, incidentally, shared by all of Atlanta's theaters, is its lack of a strong, visionary director. Its productions don't have the focus provided by one mind/one director. Instead, Jomandi operates on a collaborative basis, capitalizing on the various talents in the company, adapting to one another's contributions. In the process, the company struggles to develop a working vocabulary for its art, trying to capitalize on its diversity. Jomandi's shows don't have a smooth homogeneity, but they do bristle with the enthusiasm of creation.

It's hard to write about the future, and harder to build a bridge to it. Artistically, Jomandi is healthy and growing. It has had to put more ambitious plans on hold, however, until it can gather more personnel and funds. Funding is erratic. Atlanta and Fulton County governments have largely black administrations, which doesn't hurt when arts grants are doled out. But the economy of Atlanta is still in white hands, and corporate sponsors are wooed only by proof that a theater has a large audience, preferably one that drinks Coca-Cola. (Coke maintains its corporate headquarters in Atlanta.)

So if Jomandi thrives, it will be because it produces quality theater. That is, of course, if quality theater has an audience. If it does, it's probably made up of quality people. And quality people, no doubt, are curious, able to withstand and generate change, and unwilling to let racism stand between them and a good time. □

Tom Boeker is an Atlanta theater critic who writes for Open City magazine, Creative Loafing, and Atlanta magazine.

Staying Behind

by Nancy Carpenter and Jeff Davis



Photo courtesy of Roadside Theater

“This place makes a body think, and if you listen real close it can help you find the answers...”

In Ya' Blood.”

The place: the Appalachian Mountains. The voice: an old man. The lines are from

a play written by high school students in Whitesburg, Kentucky who are among a growing corps of young people awakened to the beauty and pathos of their heritage by the playwrights and storytellers of Roadside Theater.

In Ya' Blood, in turn, is a by-product of Roadside's parent organization, Appalshop, a nonprofit media group which includes Appalshop Films, June Appal Recordings, “Headwaters”

television show, and WMMT-FM Radio in Whitesburg.

In 1969, Appalshop received a federal grant to teach filmmaking to minority young people (in the late '60s Appalachian youth were considered a minority) — a job-training program which was to be an instrument of economic and social change. One of Appalshop's first students made the film *In Ya' Blood* which was the inspiration for the students who wrote the play fifteen years later, in 1984.

From the Appalshop base, Roadside got its start in 1974, dedicated to producing theater by and about the people of Southern Appalachia. The new

theater company faced some tough audiences: Appalachian school children still confused about who they were and what the future held in store for them. The Roadside storytellers started out telling the stories of Appalachia to the children of Appalachia, many of whom no longer heard the yarns at their parents' knees.

Jack — the well-known hero of many mountain tales — has the quick wits and good fortune to triumph over any adversity, despite the poverty of his circumstances. For the performers — who grew up under the stigma of being from Appalachia themselves — the tales of Jack's exploits gave them a vehicle for showing children that being from the mountains is a source of pride rather than a shameful heritage.

Roadside members learned tale-telling from the masters they found around them: country preachers, aunts and uncles, farmers and fiddlers — anyone, in short, who had the time. In performance, they evolved a technique of improvisation, of breaking into another's story, of expanding on ripe details, and of doubling voices. They didn't just simulate some "hillbilly" reality: the tales improved with the telling. That experience, coupled with the egalitarian belief that their talent and success were within the reach of anyone, has kept Roadside Theater working in the schools and in its Appalachian community.

In 1985, 70 percent of Roadside's performances and workshops played to school children; yet school work accounted for only 25 percent of that year's earned income. To keep the theater financially stable the performers must spend a good deal of time on the road. Roadside regularly takes its shows to Atlanta, New York, Washington, and San Francisco. Currently there are four full-length plays touring with eight actors performing in various combinations. Roadside averages 200 performances a year.

Despite the necessity of performing in the flatlands, Roadside draws its artistic nourishment from the hills. Dudley Cocke, director of the troupe, admits, "We couldn't do this theater living in, say, New York. After a while we'd lose touch with the day-to-day reality here that we need to anchor our work."

The network of grants which keeps

many U.S. artists crisscrossing the continent like medieval vagabonds helps Roadside maintain its contact with schools across the country and in its home region. It has worked with Indian settlements out West, in predominantly black communities in North and South Carolina, in northern Alabama, and in Virginia's coastal communities.

Wherever they are, Roadside members refuse to rely on the typical "15-minute song and dance" workshop for children. Instead, an educational program has evolved that fits the com-



Roadside Theater

pany philosophically by involving everyone in the company — playwrights, directors, and performers — and that suits the communities they visit as well. The workshops and the performances share a common goal: discovery. Roadside performer Ron Short explains that Roadside doesn't bring along a list of skills the student must master. "We say, 'This is something you can do. Now together let's figure out how.'"

"We are attracted to communities that, like ours, are struggling in some way," says Cocke. "Part of Roadside's message is, 'Look to your local culture and to your heritage to help figure out who you are. Then figure out who and what is causing your problems. Having clarified the problem, search for the solution in a way that gives you hope of solving those problems.' Sounds simple, but in our experience it is very hard to do."

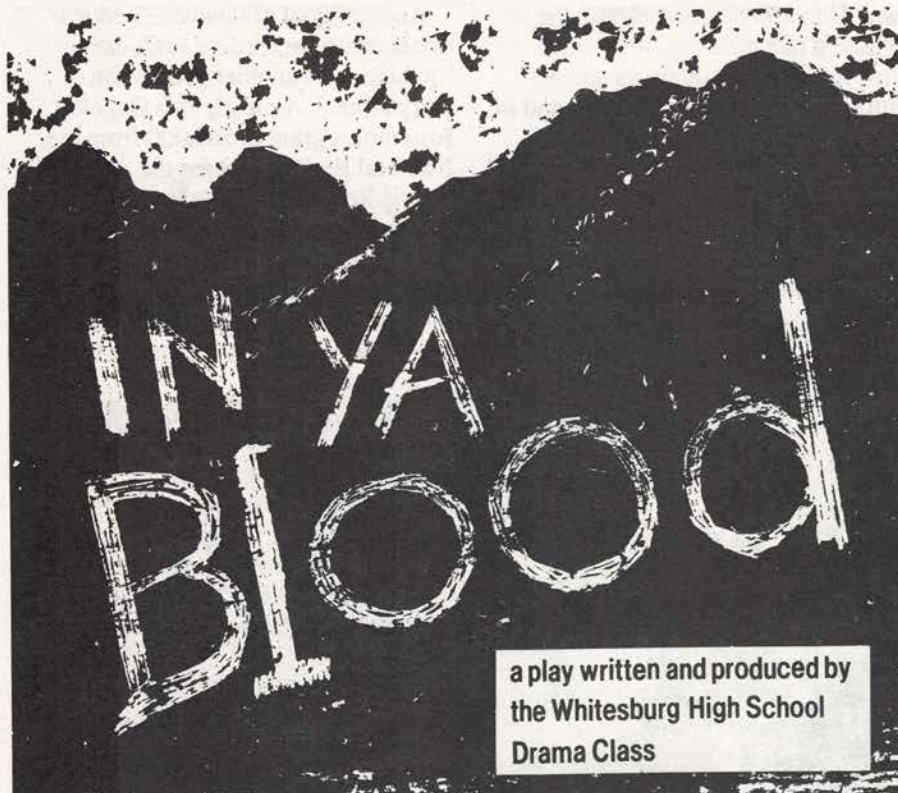
Another goal of Roadside's educational thrust, according to Cocke, is "to help raise another generation of storytellers." A prestigious Ongoing Ensembles grant of \$60,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts will enable Roadside to develop new plays, playwrights, and storytellers during the next five years. (Roadside received one of only eight awards made under the first year of this grant program, and it was the only rural theater to receive one).

While most Roadside members are either approaching or in their 40s, younger faces are being added to the company. Jeff Hawkins, administrator, developing actor, and playwright, is 25. In 1978 when Hawkins graduated from Fleming-Neon High School near Whitesburg, coal markets were booming and employment was close to an all-time high. Today unemployment is officially 22 percent and many believe the real figure to be closer to 50 percent. Hawkins can count perhaps 15 of his 75 classmates who still live in the area. Like so many of Appalachia's brightest, Hawkins left the region for college, but unlike the majority, he returned. That decision influences much of his work in the schools.

Seeing the need for drama in the school system, Hawkins initiated the first Whitesburg High School drama class, with help from a local English teacher. *In Ya' Blood*, the first student production, deals directly with the decision to stay behind — or the dilemma of being left behind — that all the kids in the region face.

Hawkins limited his role in *In Ya' Blood* to an advisory one, avoiding any effort to turn the production into his own or to have it mirror the more polished work of Roadside. He met with the students daily, joined from time to time by other company members. "The first scenes they wrote were really little TV sitcoms," says Hawkins. "I figured then that we better try to find something that mattered more to the kids."

The issue of their future and the future of the mountains evolved after careful questioning by Hawkins. Despite a certain flatness in the characterizations, the play has an admirable reality: these aren't just retooled Beverly Hillbillies or Dukes of Hazzard. The young characters lug



IN YA' BLOOD is a stage adaptation of Herb E. Smiths' 1969 film release, by the same title, made while he was a senior at Whitesburg High School.

The play follows the basic theme of the film made 15 years before—the difficult decision faced by all Appalachian youth; whether to stay in the mountains or to leave...

MAY 11TH & 12TH at 8:00 pm
at
APPALSHOP THEATER

306 Madison Street Whitesburg, Kentucky

***4⁰⁰ Adults *2⁰⁰ Students & Senior Citizens**

This presentation is funded in part and made possible by a grant from the Kentucky Arts Council with Special Thanks to Jeff Hawkins, Connie Lester and Roadside Theater.

Posters courtesy of Roadside Theater

around their ever-present boomboxes, mimic comics from TV, and crumple beer cans, but they also listen to their elders and the old stories and songs. This is an Appalachia not of bare feet and moonshine, but of satellite dishes, mobile homes, and a desire to find a way in the 1980s.

The play has a powerful effect on its audiences, both young and old. Many parents remembered the dilemma the play poses all too well, and were moved to see their children dealing with the problem 20 years later.

Working in Whitesburg as a Kentucky Arts Council artist-in-residence gave Hawkins the opportunity to nurture his students as they developed as

writers and performers. The following year, Hawkins' class developed an original play, *Gift of Choice*.

Though closer to Roadside's work—an old woman, her brother, and their tales predominate—the kids work an interesting variation. The old woman's listeners are her grandchildren from Cleveland; they are hearing these stories for the first time and seeing the hills as outsiders. They hear her brother Caleb's lament, "It's the place that brings you back... Somebody who's really from here could live anywhere else and they'd still want to be here, as bad as it is."

Hawkins is a cautious teacher, encouraging the students to work up

the material on their own. He told student Robert Engle, who played the grandfather in *In Ya' Blood*, to "watch the old folks. Take notes. See how they hold their hands."

Roadside's caution and care produce enduring results, whether of a strong, unsentimental characterization by a high school student or of a theater company with surprising long-range goals. The NEA grant will enable Roadside to continue its own educational efforts and to maintain a connection with its cultural and historical training—the older storytellers, musicians, and the churches.

Roadside will "continue to work with young audiences and in educational settings, trying to find different ways to do that," maintains Cocke. "It would be a mistake to think we've got it all figured out. We as a community, and as a region, face tremendous problems. Our work welcomes those who face similar difficulties. Working with kids is one of the most optimistic places that we know to meet such a challenge."

Once thought of as hippies—albeit local hippies—Appalshop and Roadside now hold a more responsible position in the community. The two have become major local employers and cultural resources. In choosing to stay behind, Roadside has found a measure of unity, strength, and even light.

In one of Roadside's productions, an ensemble sings, warning of the dangers of Mammon:

*You can lose your very soul
Living in the Cities of Gold...
Won't you listen to the music...*

They're the songs of fathers and mothers

Aren't you glad they're still here.

And in *In Ya' Blood* an old man says, "I believe that these trees understand me and they listen better than most people. You probably think I'm a crazy ole coot, talking to trees and all, but I think that the spirit of this place is alive, and more real than we'll ever know."

Nancy Carpenter and Jeff Davis are writers living in Lexington, Kentucky.

IN YA' BLOOD

by students of Whitesburg High School

The following excerpts are from the play written by Whitesburg High School students. The lead character, Jon, seeks counsel from his grandfather, who lives alone back in the mountains.

Later, with the old man's permission, Jon and his friends camp overnight on the grandfather's land and continue discussing their futures. In the final scene, Jon has made his decision and announces it in his high school graduation speech.

GRANDPA: What's on your mind Jon? You look like you're about ready to bust with something but you're keeping it all inside.

JON: Oh nothing. Just thinking about graduation and all.

GRANDPA: Come on, boy. I know better than that. You might be too big for me to get after you with a hickory switch but you won't ever be too big for my foot. Now what's bothering you?

JON: I don't really know where to start.

GRANDPA: Just jump in anywhere, boy. Old Regular Baptists been doing it and getting away with it for years.

JON: *(laughs)* It's really nothing, I guess. I had a fight with Brenda the other night at a party about what I was going to do after graduation.

GRANDPA: That's not unusual, is it?

JON: No, I guess not. We've already made up again. It's just that I really don't know what I want to do. I "love" Brenda but I don't want to marry her right now and get a job and everything.

I feel like I really need to do something with my life. Don't get me wrong, I don't think that you haven't or that Ray won't — it's just, I don't know if the mines are for me.

Graduation has made me think about a lot of stuff I didn't want to, or didn't have to before now. It's just, you know, easy to be in high school. Nobody really expects you to do anything but graduate. But when you get out it's like people say, "You're an adult now so you've got to *be* something." It's not that they put pressure on me as much as it is me putting pressure on myself. It's like I have to prove to myself that I'm just as good as anybody else, partly because I come from the mountains I guess people think we're all stupid. I don't know. I just get to thinking sometimes and wishing I was somebody else or that I was someplace else. I mean, well, you know, like I was a hero in a movie or something. One of those guys who never did anything wrong and always knew who he was and where he was going. I just want to *be* something, and I don't even know what yet. I want to do good and make...people proud of me.

GRANDPA: You're going in the right direction, son. At least you know that it's more important to suit yourself than somebody else. I remember Daddy told me once that you've got to think about things long enough to figure 'em out, do what you have to and then quit worrying about it. So don't worry yourself so much, son. Just figure out what's right for you, then go ahead and do it. *(Short pause.)*

I can't solve your problems for you but I don't care a bit to listen to 'em and help you try and sort them out.

JON: Yeah, I know. Thanks Pap.

GRANDPA: You're welcome. Now, I've got to go feed my dogs. You gonna stay around for supper or go home? *(Grandpa gets up.)*

JON: I'll probably sit here for a few minutes and then go on home. Mom's more than likely waiting dinner for me.

GRANDPA: All right then. I'll see you tomorrow. *(Grandpa exits. Jon sits, staring at the floor for a time.)*

JON: It seems like I have two choices. I can stay home, get a job, maybe I can find one outside of the mines, and get married someday. Or I can try and go to college and get a education that'll help me get a better job.

I'm scared to stay home and *not* try but I'm scared to go to school because it's so different than what I'm used to.

No matter what choice I make I'm going to be hurting somebody.

ACT II SCENE I: Camping

(Subdued lighting giving the atmosphere of a camp fire. Old man enters from stage left.)

GRANDPA: This land here has been in my family since my family first came into this country, and that was after they all got run out of Ireland.

People ask me sometimes, they say, "Old man, why don't you just get rid of that old hill? It's so steep and rocky it couldn't be good for nothing."

I smile at 'em and nod my head, treat 'em like children you know. Cause that's what they are when it comes to understanding the way I feel about this old homeplace.

Ya see there's a great secret to this land. It's got its own special ways, and unless you're a part of it you'll never catch on. Like farming, fer instance. On the flat land when you dig your taters up you gotta dig the whole hill and row. But down here, we just plant that row up and down the hillside. When it comes time to harvest, all you gotta do is dig a hole at the bottom of the row, throw your burlap sack under there and they all come tumblin' down. *(Wink)*

These young fellers like to come up here where they can be off to themselves and whoop and holler and let off a little steam.

But I come up here to think. And I believe that these kids do too whether they'll admit it or not. I believe that these trees understand me and they listen better than most people. You probably think I'm a crazy ole coot, talking to trees and all but I think that the spirit of this place is alive, and more real than we'll ever know.

My Grandpap sold off all the timber back in 1912; cut down every last tree except for one big yeller poplar back on top of the ridge. I don't know why they left it, maybe just for a reminder of how things could have been.

I don't know when Pap sold off the mineral rights but they've got a little piece of paper now saying that he did.

They've been after me for 15 years now to let 'em strip mine this old place. Keep telling me about all the money I could make and the big fancy things I could buy with it.

Whenever I get a little too tempted, I come up here. This place makes a body think and if you listen real close it can help you find answers... *(Old man exits stage left, lights go down.)*

MARK: The job scene around here really sucks.

JON: Now hold on a minute. I don't agree. I think we're missing something here. Making a lot of money is not the most important thing in life. What about liking the place you live in, and your family, and being at home, and...

STEVE: It's kinda hard when you're starvin' to death.

JON: I'm serious. Around here we know people. We have relatives and we can go just about anywhere we want without having to worry about getting mugged or raped.

LORI: It's not that bad in the cities, Jon. We have just as much violence and probably more going on right around here. Every boy I know and half the girls grow up learning how to fight. And they enjoy it!

RAY: But around here we know who our enemies are.

CHRIS: And that makes you feel better?

RAY: Well sure. At least better than I would if I didn't know who I could trust and who I couldn't turn my back on.

CHRIS: You all sound like you're talking about a war or something. I know that people's families around here take up for one another, but...

LORI: They do more than take up for one another. Some people would fight you for 50 years just because their cousin had an argument with you.

CHRIS: But isn't that kind of bad? If somebody in your family doesn't like someone else how do you treat that other person?

STEVE: That's just it. You don't. If one member of a fami-

ly gets mad at you they're all mad.

RAY: Well I'd still rather live around here a lot more'n I would someplace where it's so crowded you can't even go out in the backyard to pee without somebody calling the cops on you for indecent exposure.

JON: And around here we're all pretty much free to do what we want. We don't have to keep up with the Joneses. We can be our own selves without being condemned.

MARK: You know the *worst* thing about this place? It's dry. *(laugh, silence.)*

FINAL SCENE: Graduation

JON: I came here tonight with two speeches prepared. The first speech was a traditional one, the kind you always hear at graduation ceremonies. I wrote about the brightness of our futures, about how we would slay the dragons before us, rescue fair princesses and become heroes on our way through life.

It is a fine speech, probably the best I've ever written. You would have enjoyed it. We could have all left here tonight knowing that we are safe and the world is good.

In a way I hate *not* to read that speech to you. But as a friend I know says, "You've got to suit your own mind." The second speech I wrote suits my own mind.

There are so many paths before us, and each of them seems darker than the one before.

Our fear at leaving does not come from a lack of drive or the threat of having to work for ourselves. Our fear comes from not knowing what lies beyond the boundaries we live in.

On TV and in magazines we see the way people live in other parts of the country. In a way it seems so different from what we know; different, exotic and beckoning. To live beside the ocean, to eat at fine restaurants every night, to have everything that exists and some things we'll never even see if we stay here.

But we all know that life, or a place, is never the same as what it seems to be. How many movies, and books about hillbillies really remind us of ourselves?

Leaving this time and this place is not going to be easy. We will never really leave it all. No matter where we go we'll take a part of our home, these mountains, with us. Our parents and their parents before them drew strength from these hills and loved them for it.

This place and all its people flow through us and around us and we'll carry it and them with us to wherever we *must* go. If we stay at home here we will be thankful for the opportunity and accept it as a gift. If we are forced to leave our home because we can't find a job or for some other reason then we will go and take at least a little part of our home with us, inside of us, because...IT IS IN OUR BLOOD.□

Accidental Angels

The greatest dream of any artist is that his or her work will awaken something in people, that it will open up hearts and bring something in them to light.

In the fall of 1985, the *Texas Monthly* ran an article on Richard Avedon's photography exhibit, *In the American West*, then on display at Fort Worth's Amon Carter Museum. Everybody was talking about it. Some viewers were disgusted by what they felt was Avedon's staged version of the West: freaks who had been separated from the rest of the human race by their savage environment; haggard, hopeless faces against a backdrop of unrelenting white. Others felt a kinship to this hollowness, to the faces

ravaged by wind and lost dreams. With this range of reactions, the exhibit stirred many Texans to examine this myth they were living and to define themselves from the inside out.

Even before the Avedon exhibit, Jim Fritzier, director of Big State Productions in Austin, Texas was putting together a workshop for his theater group. It was not clear what the next project would be, but Big State had been toying with the idea of doing an evening of one-person, one-act plays.

The public reaction to the Avedon exhibit provided the final impetus for Big State's upcoming workshop, which they called "In the West." The workshop was originally set up to be a three-week-long process in which each

By Joy Cunningham

participant would get the chance to direct, write, and act in three separate monologues. Artists from outside the Big State family were invited to join the project, and I luckily found myself in this group. At one of the first meetings, we all took turns swapping tales of childhood. We discovered that

although some of us had never written a lick, we were rich in stories, and somewhere in each of us was a writer. So the process began with 15 artists, some familiar and some not so familiar to one another, thrown together to try to bring our portraits to the stage.

The nightly meetings that followed seemed harum-scarum at first — and our main concern often was wondering where to go for coffee afterwards. We had some doubt as to exactly what was going on and how it would turn out. Writers who knew how hard it is to write were secretly skeptical about

Excerpt

BE YE NOT FORGETFUL

From a monologue written and acted by Jo Carol Pierce.

(A woman enters and speaks to the unseen photographer.)

How do you want me?

Tresa Valentine — T-R-E-S-A. I drive a litter-gitter for the highway department.

Yes, sir.

(She poses and smiles big for the camera.)

That's not what you want? Mr. Avedon, I figured it wasn't. Could we talk about that?

When I saw you looking at me in the cafe, and later when your assistant came out to the house and asked me to pose, I thought, "Wonder what is wrong with that man's eyes? Why isn't he taking pictures of Katie Crawford?" She's our Maid of Cotton. But she said, "No, it's you he wants." Well. Pride goeth. I signed up. And then you know what I did? I looked in the mirror. For days, like a fool kid. Then I drove up to Fort Worth and saw your pictures in the museum and I saw what is wrong with your eyes.

Now everywhere you look are people whose faces look like the ones in your photographs, but they don't look like that but once in a lifetime and that is when they're dead in their coffins.

Didn't know what in the world to do. Play along? End up plastered to the museum wall? No. I'd believe that picture and think "Tresa, what tore the life out of you and when did it happen?"

Thought about lying, "I'm so sorry I've got choir practice that afternoon."

Then I thought, "Nope. It's a horse. Better saddle it up."

So here's the deal. We can forget the picture taking, shake hands, no hard feelings. Or I'll tell you what's wrong with those pictures and how you can make 'em right and you can take it or leave it. Then if you still want to take my picture, you can. So what'll it be?

That's not what I expected. You got character, I'll give you that.

O.K. The first thing is, we're not standing all alone out here like the people in your pictures. If you took a real picture of me, there'd be literally hundreds of people in it. But those people in your pictures look like nobody knows them. People where you come from one thing look like that, the few I've seen. So one thing you could do is change your title from "In

the American West" to "People in the East dressed up to look like people in the West."

It is hard not to take it real personal how you look at us. But I know you're not trying to be rude. You're just ignorant.

And that's so easy to fix! There was this hitchhiker through here one time, '69 I think, that for some reason, I'll never know, I stopped and picked him up. He rode to town with us and got out, got a job and stayed three years. Said the reason he stayed was we were talking about God and he never had heard anyone talk about God before. That on the East Coast they talk about psychotherapy. We taught him how to drive and he taught us how to make spaghetti. Then he went back to New York and became a famous writer. He writes about us and cyclones and God and he gets it right.

You can see what I'm leading into. Your mind just races, doesn't it? You got to live the life if you want to take a picture of it. There's guest rooms in this town to last 'til Glory Be.

Now I'm remembering why I stopped for him, though his face looked like he might have a mean or troubled mind. It was because of that Bible verse that says, "Be ye not forgetful to entertain strangers for, thereby, some have entertained angels unaware." And I think that's what you are too. An angel unaware. I'm getting where I can spot 'em.

I've said my piece. Want to take my picture? □

*Excerpt copyright © 1985
Big State Productions*



Jo Carol Pierce as Tresa

Photo by Bill Leissner/Live Shots

those of us who hadn't even written letters to our mothers since college. Almost all of us felt shaky in at least one of our assigned areas of responsibility.

Once the monologues began to appear on paper, however, the workshop took on a new feeling. We were coming close to something, "some world," and we were all arriving there at the same time. All of a sudden we had these monologues, and simultaneously 15 voices piped up to deal with the intricacies of making them work. We created a wife-beater who loved his wife, a boy-child left alone in the woods by his parents, a woman pleading her sanity in court. All had to be cut and rewritten, but nothing was ever discarded as completely unworkable. Feelings of "owning" a particular monologue were set aside for the good of the play. Somewhere in those 15 monologues was a show. How they would all fit together was still a mystery.

Three days before our show opened, Jim Fritzler returned to Austin from New York, where he had been during the entire workshop process. What he discovered on returning bore not the slightest resemblance to the Avedon exhibit. In place of the stark, despairing faces was a group of live-wire characters, each with a bucketful of faith and dreams. The actors Fritzler left a month earlier had moved from a sense of separation to a sense of union. We had gotten there by what Jo Carol Pierce, a playwright and "In the West" participant, describes as "the left-handed path," or, as it seemed to most of us, simply by accident.

"In the West," the workshop, became *In the West*, the show. After a premiere performance at a university theater, we moved to a small museum where people packed in, standing and squatting among marble busts of Texas heroes. They cried and cheered and told us that they saw themselves and people they knew up there onstage. These characters could have lived anywhere. Unlike Avedon's subjects, they were not freaks determined and limited by the land in which they lived.

Austin Chronicle theater critic Robert Faires saw our characters as "people...in whom faith runs deep. And whether that faith comes from the land or a religious upbringing or some

purity of soul, it sustains these people in a way that bread cannot."

That was poetry enough for 1985. We had a hit, and no one was more surprised than we were. *In the West* has run for seven months in Austin and has played Fort Worth twice, almost always to capacity houses.

The show seems constantly to change and somehow stay the same. We rework or drop monologues, add new pieces, have new actors do old pieces. Our original structure — with each participant writing, acting, and directing — fell apart, and each of us began to do what we do best. Now we all discuss and vote on major artistic decisions, a process that is often chaotic, but that spirit demonstrates itself in the show. We critique each other's performances of the week before, audition new pieces, and haggle over a barrage of new and old business. From an original 15 monologues we have accumulated close to 40, and have added another five actors to our group of 15. We somehow managed to have the original monologues copyrighted; the application contained no less than 20 signatures, each claiming equal share of the manuscript.

After our first flush of success, producers from out of town started arriving. They told us that a 20-actor, 20-writer theater production was too unwieldy a package for most producers to touch. They also offered tips on how to make *In the West* work better. The audience response seemed to indicate that it was working well already and didn't need a lot of fixing. Still we panicked slightly, these people being from New York and California. After a few weeks of fretting over production concepts, we made no drastic changes. We continued to hone what we had and to try new things. By doing this, we discovered the unifying element that existed there all the time. *In the West* gives perfect voice to one of Big State's original statements of purpose: "thematically to affirm positive human nature."

When asked just why *In the West* has been embraced so wholeheartedly by audiences, we all have our own theories, but we also admit we don't really know why. In trying to explain it, we frequently use words like "honesty" and "love." But the most

common explanation has to do with what Jo Carol Pierce describes as the show's "gritty spiritual nature that doesn't ever name itself, because once it does, it gets self-conscious." The characters of *In the West* are very much a part of this mundane world, yet at the same time they walk in some larger realm that people seem to yearn to touch.

It's one thing to be stopped in the grocery store to hear how the cashier loved your show. It's quite another experience to hear that he was so inspired that he went home and wrote a monologue — and that he would be very happy for us to consider putting it in the show. *In the West* is made up of stories from people just like that cashier. It makes audiences feel that their stories are worthwhile, too, and that what they have to say is just as important as what is going on onstage.

None of us knows where *In the West* will go from here. We have plans for bookings across Texas and other parts of the United States, with a possible tour abroad. Nothing is sure except for a general agreement among us that if it closed down tomorrow, it still would have been an amazing thing.

A founding member of Big State, John Perkins, believes our mission is "to keep doing this show until it's done." Maybe one day we will know why it works, and it will all be over. Or maybe it will just begin again. Whatever the outcome, it has given us all faith that what we do matters. And that faith gets passed on to those who come to see *In the West*.

In the last monologue, Tresa, who drives a litter-gitter for the county, invokes scripture: "'Be ye not forgetful to entertain strangers,'" she tells the audience, "'for, thereby some of you have entertained angels unaware.' And that's what I think you are, too. An angel unaware."

And that's what we feel like sometimes — human beings accidentally doing the work of angels. □

Joy Cunningham lives in Austin and is now a member of Big State Productions.

Tried by Sorrow

STONEWALL JACKSON AT ROCK KILN RUIN

by William French

Rock Kiln Ruin Theater may be the most unusual theater setting in the United States. This outdoor theater in Lexington, Virginia once served as the site for three kilns that converted rock from nearby quarries into lime.

The audience enters through a tent that serves as box office and lobby. Three hundred seats face a stone-walled amphitheater rising 30 feet above the pit, and three massive lime kilns stand at stage left. Time-bleached sycamores, box elders, and gnarled oak trees combine with moss and vines to surmount the crumbling walls. Narrow landings, broken spaces in the rock face, and steep paths create a large but very intimate visual space which is especially effective under dramatic lighting. It is now the setting for *Stonewall Country*, a musical drama based on Stonewall Jackson's life.

The site of the old kiln was obtained in 1983 by Don Baker, who wrote *Stonewall Country*, and a classmate from nearby Washington and Lee University in the 1960s. They formed a non-profit corporation, Lime Kiln Arts, obtained a 50-year lease for a dollar, and established a theater dedicated to presenting music and drama which would reflect, according to the Lime Kiln mission statement, "the life, history, and heritage of the people rooted in this place." Baker calls this region the "Scotch-Irish South," which he says stretches from West Virginia and Kentucky through Southwestern Virginia and North Carolina to the hill country of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Born in Pulaski, Virginia in 1944, Baker identifies strongly with Appalachia and draws the material for his plays from it. As a child, he and his cousins "did plays" for all their aunts and uncles based on books, movies, or television shows they had seen. After graduating from Washington and Lee, he performed at Washington, D.C.'s Theater Lobby, directed at the Back Alley Theater, and studied acting at the Washington Theater Club. He supported himself by painting and exhibiting pictures, by designing, building and renovating houses, and by teaching drama and art as rehabilitation therapy to psychiatric patients.

His life took an emphatic turn toward theater when he joined Appalshop of Whitesburg, Kentucky in 1974. Appalshop gave him the opportunity to draw upon his Appalachian heritage. Baker became founding project director of Roadside Theater (see article on p. 56), a repertory theater where he was actor, manager, and playwright for 10 years.

Baker sees himself as part of a new birth of theater in the South, one that is rich with dramatic material. Baker wanted to build a theater that makes sense for the Southern Appalachians. The instrument for making that theater is Lime Kiln



Eddie King as Stonewall Jackson
Photo by Bill Blanton

Arts as well as Rock Kiln Ruin. Both emphasize local materials — to build plays as well as to form the theater. Baker aims to create plays reflecting local values and cast in the language used by local speakers.

What possessed Baker to write a musical about Stonewall Jackson? He was looking for a subject with local and regional associations to the site of Rock Kiln Ruin. In Lexington and all over southwest Virginia and West Virginia, Jackson's name possesses instant recognition. He was the Confederate general who stood on the battlefield like a stone wall, and he was mortally wounded by fire from his own troops at Chancellorsville in 1863. Jackson taught at the Virginia Military Institute for many years and is buried nearby; his Civil War exploits captured the imagination of the world, and locally his name inspires pride.

Still, Stonewall Jackson—awkward, secretive, dyspeptic, strange enough to be widely thought crazy — would seem an unlikely subject for a musical play. But Baker has made him into the center of an American drama which neither glorifies Jackson nor savages him. *Stonewall Country* explores his peculiar but effective behavior in an effort to understand the man who has been called the “American Napoleon.” Baker juxtaposes episodes in Jackson's life and career as a soldier with other moments of Civil War history to bring individual life and historical matrix into perspective. It forces the audience to confront some interesting issues about the war and about Jackson as one of its most fascinating — and in some surprising ways, most representative — figures.

Jackson comes across as mysterious, remote, and devoutly religious. The first words he utters on stage are, “I knew that if Providence set me a task, He would give me the power to perform it. So I resolved to grow up and you see I have. What I willed to do, I could do.”

Jackson's secrecy was as intense as his devotion to God and duty. In the play, his fellow Confederate general Jeb Stuart says to him in a good-natured way, “General, I never knew a man so secretive as you.” Jackson replies, “If my coat knew my plans, I would take it off and burn it. And if I can deceive my friends, I can be sure

of deceiving my enemies. Always mystify,” he admonishes the eager Stuart, who seems hardly to need such advice.

His secrecy is only part of the mystery of the Jackson in the play, however. To Baker, Jackson exemplified the Victorian spirit in America — a belief in the rightness of material abundance and worldly success, a pragmatic will to power, and a sense of moral superiority. As a result of an excellent West Point education and a lifetime of wide travel and extensive reading, Jackson shared those beliefs.

But something in his character also contradicted those values. Born in the mountains of what is now West Virginia, Jackson was the crude product of a wild frontier. To his West Point fellows, he was clumsy and out of fashion, a country bumpkin. All his life he was an outsider, and he carried to his dying day a strange kind of frontier Puritanism.

These conflicting pulls on Jackson become — in the play — the larger forces in American society that were sundering the social body. This then broadens with the hanging in 1859 of John Brown, the militant abolitionist who raided a federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia with the idea of using the arms to free slaves. Blood, sin, and guilt then dominate the play. A Yankee POW describes the thriving trade in dead bodies as “articles of merchandise” and talks about the fights that erupt over disputed ownership of corpses in the prison camp.

The play grapples with ideas like honor and freedom, with what the North called the South's “peculiar institution,” slavery. Baker does not shy from the fact that Jackson, though he thought himself “civilized, Christianized, and chivalrous,” owned a slave. But he also founded and taught a Sunday school for black children, at the time an illegal act. The mystery of the man — and of the society that nurtured him — deepens as the play searches.

The play's original music and most of the lyrics were written by the frequent *Prairie Home Companion* musicians Robin and Linda Williams, who researched Jackson with Baker. Some of the songs were adapted from traditional 19th-century music, but in

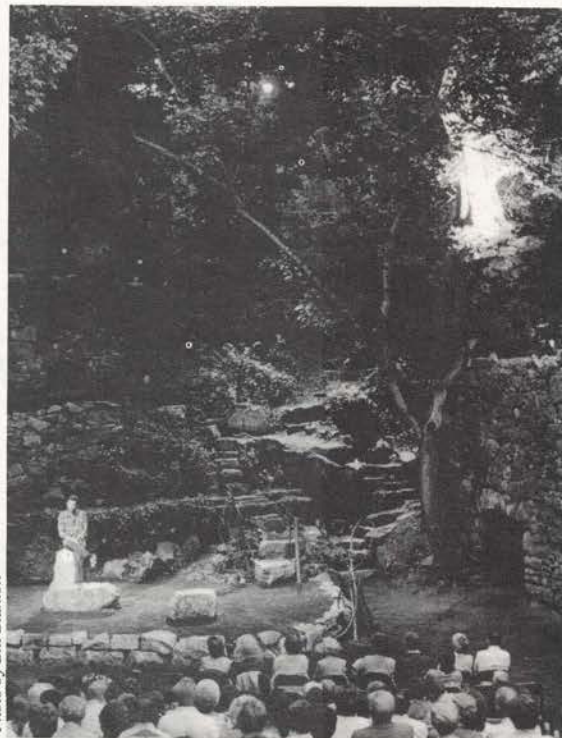


Photo by Bill Blanton
The Kiln

original scores like “Duty,” aspects of Jackson's character are revealed:

*A Heart must be tried by sorrow
Like gold must be tried by the flame
I bless the cleansing fire
And the furnace of living pain.*

This play and Rock Kiln Ruin are ideally suited. Part of the wall “blows up” and “rocks” and “boulders” come crashing down the cliff into the pit during the war. Battle scenes rage all over, and gunfire is heard from above the rim of the cliff and in the overhanging trees. Jackson's appearances have an unsettling effect because he usually appears at the rim of the cliff, posing statuesquely under a spotlight — as remote, unapproachable, and mysterious in the play as he was in real life. □

For information write the Rock Kiln Ruin Box Office, P.O. Box 663, Lexington, Virginia 24450, or phone 705-463-3074.

William French, an associate professor of English at West Virginia University, wrote the article on the oral history play, *Cabagetown*, on p. 66.

YOU DO ME BETTER'N I DO

People helped each other out more. They was neighbors. They didn't bite your back. They talk about this place, but it's ever'where. People don't care about their younguns long as they're out leaving them alone or out stealing. If we'd stole something, my daddy had a belt on our butts taking us to givin' it back.

These words belong to Effie Dodd Gray, one of the three real Atlanta mill village women whose stories are told in R. Cary Bynum's *Cabbagetown: 3 Women...an oral history play with music*.^{*} The voice is Brenda Bynum's. She has played the part of Effie since May 21, 1978, when *Cabbagetown* first opened at Atlanta's Academy Theatre under the direction of the Southern Poets Theatre.

Effie Gray came to the theater to watch "herself" in the play that open-

^{*}(Foxfire Press: Rabun Gap, Georgia, 1984).

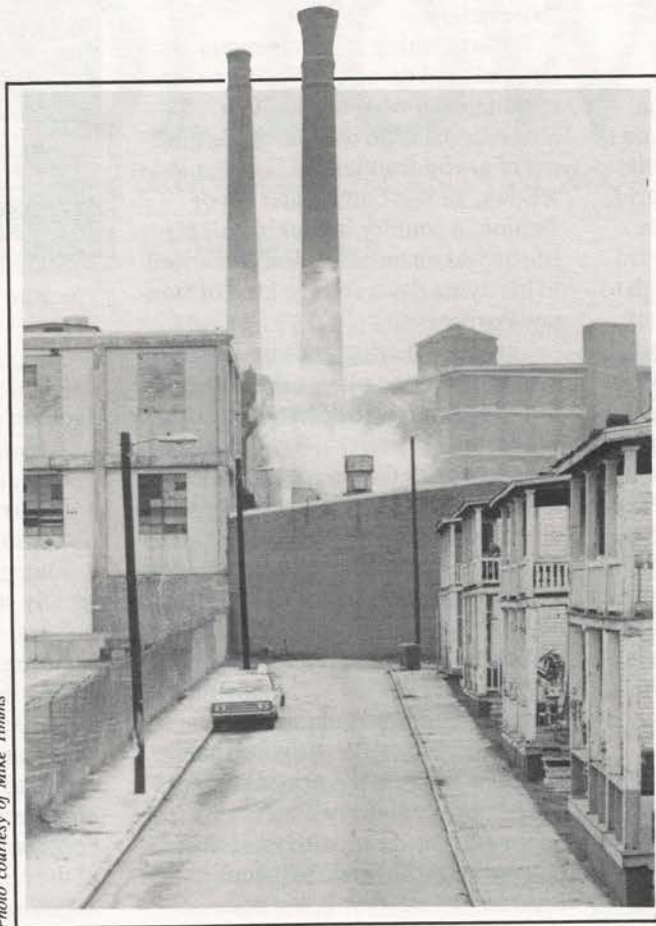


Photo courtesy of Mike Trnms

CABBAGETOWN'S ORAL HISTORY PLAY

By William French

ing night. So did Lila Brookshire and Beatrice "Aunt Beadie" Dalton, the other two women of the title. At the play's end, the three women stood up in the back of the audience and waved to all the people. They received a standing ovation. Many Cabbagetown

people were in the audience; they had come to see their play, to hear other people — actors — speak their words.

Later, the actress Brenda Bynum made a point of seeking out her role's model. "How did I do, Effie?" she asked. Gray replied enthusiastically, laughing, "Lawd God, honey, you do me better'n I do." Bynum was deeply moved by Gray's words, for they confirmed the feeling she had acting Effie in the play, the feeling that the whole theater was in a state of grace that evening. "My God," says Bynum intensely, "I had to think this is where we come from." She meant that she shared Gray's sense of place, a love of

where she comes from, a sharing of heritage and rootedness.

This feeling can be powerfully evoked in the theater when a play catches ways of life and deep-seated values and feelings in the words and rhythms of those who speak them.

Sometimes theater “does” reality better than reality; it is far more economical and direct. A play like *Cabbagetown* can reveal to its audience how important and beautiful it is to be human and rooted in a certain time and place.

This enhanced sense of reality is especially true of plays made from oral history like *Cabbagetown*. Nothing much happens in the play; its power to gain and hold our attention lies not in a plot of contrived events. Its charm rests in the voices, the words, of three mature women of a small village-like enclave within a mile of downtown Atlanta’s gleaming, surreal modern office and commercial towers. The voices weave in and out and spin yarns, tell funny and sad stories, gossip, recollect old times, give folk remedies and recipes, relate how people felt about other people, recall events at the mill where they worked, tell about their parents and their children, their lean and hard times and their better days. They set forth, in short, a way of life and a set of shared values and beliefs.

Cabbagetown is Cary Bynum’s most well-known play to date. Its success may owe something to the fact that Cary and Brenda Bynum feel so strongly about their Southern heritage, their roots in Atlanta, the feelings they share with the *Cabbagetown* women.

Cabbagetown perfectly reflects the Bynums’ deep interest in and concern for Southern places and people. The idea for the play occurred to Cary in 1977 when his wife gave him a copy of a paperback cookbook, *Cabbagetown Families, Cabbagetown Food*.* Pam Durban had put together this little book, now unfortunately out of print, and crammed it with oral history of the Atlanta enclave.

The community’s origins, we learn, go back to 1868 when the Fulton Cotton Mill was franchised for the Jacob Elsas family. Jacob Elsas was a highly

enlightened industrialist of the nineteenth century, a firm believer in the Robert Owen model of community movement.

Owen had worked his way up through the ranks of workers to become owner of cotton mills in his native Scotland; as an owner he tried to spread wealth through a number of social experiments including shorter working hours and improvement of working conditions. He established model communities and sought to eliminate poverty and unemployment through cooperatives and profit-sharing plans.

Inspired by Owen’s model factory-

cents per week).

This paternalistic arrangement suited many, although some workers did chafe against the restrictions. The neighborhood was self-contained and very cohesive. The workers’ mountain heritage and their economic arrangement gave the *Cabbagetown* folks a sense of village identity, though the city grew up around them.

The community comprised about 12 city blocks, bounded to the north by the Georgia Railroad. Memorial Drive now marks the southern boundary. The crumbling red-brick mill sits astride the railroad tracks on a site occupied before the Civil War by a steel rolling mill. The population of the community peaked at about 2,000 in 1957.

That year the heirs of the Jacob Elsas family sold the mill to a group of financiers. The new owners had no interest in the village or in Elsas’s benevolent ideas. They offered the houses for sale to those who lived in them. Some bought, but most could not afford even a modest purchase price. “That’s when the devil started,” says Effie Gray. Gradually, the character of the village changed as new people, not attached to the mill, moved in. Mill work declined during the ’70s and in 1981 the mill closed down entirely. Unemployment, of course, brought all its curses: crimes, drugs, violence, loss of pride and of neighborhood identity. The community has wrestled with these problems for two decades now.

Recently, the neighborhood has been fighting off a variety of developers. In 1980, developer Priscilla House formed the *Cabbagetown Restoration Society* and bought a number of the houses, envisioning an area of fashionable renovated cottages, trendy restaurants, and galleries — a gentrified “ginger-bread village,” as House put it, less than a mile from Atlanta’s downtown skyscrapers. If *Cabbagetown*’s houses are somewhat dilapidated, it still has — in a developer’s mind — ideal loca-



Play photos courtesy of Brenda and Cary Bynum

Annette Coleman as Aunt Beadie Dalton.

community at New Lanark, Scotland, Elsas recruited the workers for his new Atlanta mill from sharecropping families in north Georgia’s poorest Appalachian counties — Hall, Cherokee, and White. The mill opened in the mid-1880s. For the workers Elsas built houses whose rent was \$2 a month for a two-room house considered finer than average by the standard of the time. He provided free medical and dental care as well as a nursery to care for the children of working mothers (the fee was 25

**(Atlanta: Patch, 1976).*

Photo from Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University



tion and “historic charm.”

Old Cabbagetowners, of course, see such developers as a threat to their community. In fact, many older people have been evicted. The developers argue that Cabbagetown’s Appalachian heritage is already a thing of the past. Only half of the owner-occupied houses remain in the hands of the original owners, and very few of the rental properties are occupied by long-time residents. The old-timers, however, say that they need jobs, not new neighbors, and they support a plan by the Seaboard Railroad to use the area as a cargo transfer point. Some of the houses have signs posted on the front porches saying, “We shall not be moved—Cabbagetown.” Residents and developers alike wonder what the future holds for the community.

The record of Cabbagetown’s past is not in doubt, however, thanks to a number of people who in recent years have made an effort to preserve some of Cabbagetown’s rich and interesting heritage by recording its oral history. Pam Durban, a long-time Cabbagetown resident, thought a cookbook might be a way to record oral history and make some money for The Patch, a group originally organized to provide a center for young people aged eight to 16. Now directed by Esther LeFever, The Patch also serves

as a community action group. The Cabbagetown cookbook turned into much more than a cookbook. *Cabbagetown Families*, *Cabbagetown Food* is a unique composite of community chronicle, oral history, and recipe collection. Among other things, the book explores the two main theories explaining the origin of the community’s name:

Maybe it was because a produce truck overturned and dumped cabbages all over the street so that people ate cabbages for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for days afterward.

Or it might have been because a person standing in the window of Fulton Cotton Mills could smell the cabbages for dinner in the homes of people for blocks around.

Effie Dodd explains the origin of the name this way:

The Veteran’s Cab was the ones that started it when they come back out of the service. They called over there around Bellwood the Black Bottom, and they called out there around Grant Park the Salad Patch, and over there around the Fox Theater it was Collardtown. They had each section named. But really what got it to going was when old lady Keel opened this place up here on the hill, the Savannah Street mission. And to get donations and everything, she had pieces wrote

in the paper calling it Cabbagetown.

However it got its name, Cabbagetown gives most people a special feeling, and the cookbook — not to mention the Bynums’ play — conveys that feeling by letting the people speak for themselves:

You could go all over the world, and you can’t find a neighborhood like Cabbagetown. Most of our people are very proud.

They’re poor and they know it, but they hold their heads up.

There really is a closeness here, a togetherness that is hard to find in other places.

The cookbook is divided into sections, each headed simply by its author’s name. “Beatrice Dalton,” “Lila Brookshire,” and “Effie Dodd Gray” comprise the opening three and longest sections. Each woman talks about her life and gives a recipe now and again. Aunt Beadie’s section opens this way:

I was born out in the country, called it the piney woods where I was born. The night I was born, there was a blizzard. Coldest night, Mama said, just sleeting and snowing. A man and his wife was moving from Dallas, Georgia back up to Polk County and they come by our house. They moved in a wagon and they had all their belongings on that wagon and it broke down. It was awful cold. My daddy went down and he invited them up to the house to spend the night and so they was there that night.

She continues to reminisce about her father, who was half-Indian, about chopping cotton and preserving and preparing food, about kinfolks, about sickness and folk remedies, and about coming to live in Cabbagetown in 1923.

Lila Brookshire tells her story and then philosophizes a bit:

They’s been some wonderful people that’s growed up here and ventured out and made something of theirselves. I think that’s the biggest problem is people if they want to make something of theirselves. Mama always said you could be a lady and work anywhere and I found that to be true. I mean I was treated nice. I never had no trouble in the mill.

When the Bynums first saw the cookbook, they immediately spotted the dramatic possibilities in this

material. Cary Bynum telephoned the people at The Patch for permission to adapt the book into a play. He talked with Harriet Treadwell, among others, who told him about Joyce Brookshire (Lila's daughter), a folksinger who had already written songs about Cabbagetown. He decided right away that her music would fit perfectly into the play. The stories in the cookbook "simply knocked me out," says Cary Bynum. Brenda Bynum agreed: "My God, this is where we come from." Neither had grown up in Cabbagetown, but they identified with the strong sense of place, the roots, the Southern heritage, the strong sense of values.

Now in their 40s, the Bynums had almost lost their Southern identity in their youthful quest for theatrical success. After they married in their native Atlanta, they had moved to New York City, aspiring to the professional theater. During the first part of their 10-year sojourn in the city they tried to live and think like New Yorkers. "The place to go in the 1950s and 60s if you wanted to work in the theater as a writer or actor was New York," Cary Bynum says. His New York period brought him success. His play *Sherwood*, an absurdist treatment of life in the city, was produced off-Broadway. *Monkey Palace*, on the same theme, was produced at the prestigious Circle in the Square.

To support himself and his wife and their growing family, Cary Bynum managed a bookstore near Carnegie Hall and then worked as an editor for the publishing firm of Holt, Rinehart and Winston. The job paid the bills and gave him the opportunity to work with the language. Brenda Bynum served as an assistant to a musical director who composed and produced shows and commercials for television. She also did freelance editing and proofreading for several publishing firms.

While they lived and worked in New York, an astonishing change occurred for the Bynums: they discovered their Southern roots. For one thing, the birth of children made the Bynums realize that they wanted their children to grow up in the South. But they also came to realize that the South had a great literary tradition — Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren — and they began reading



Brenda Bynum as Effie Dodd Gray: "People helped each other more. They was neighbors."

Southern writers. They became enthusiastic about the Fugitive-Agrarian movement that was generated at Vanderbilt University in the 1930s by poets and writers such as John Crowe Ransom. They wanted to find ways to develop theater in the South, in their home.

"Incredibly," remembers Cary Bynum, "the Southern Poets Theatre was conceived on the Lower East Side of New York." The Southern Poets Theatre became the Bynums' instrument for developing and presenting Southern writing, Southern values and beliefs and ways of life, and Southern speech. Brenda Bynum says, "Whenever something presents itself that needs to be done, we do it."

The theater group's most recent project is Robert Manson Myers' *The Children of Pride*, a cycle of five plays based on Myers' 1,900-page epic *The Children of Pride*, a compilation of letters written by the members of the Charles Colcock Jones family of Savannah, Georgia, between 1854 and 1868. The Southern Poets Theater presented the entire cycle in Savannah last October under the auspices of the Georgia Historical Society. Brenda Bynum served as executive producer and her husband as artistic director.

"In everything [the Bynums] do, whether it's *Cabbagetown* or *The Children of Pride*, they focus on the

South, on roots, on family, on the decency of human beings," says Helen C. Smith of the *Atlantic Constitution*. "They always find the strengths of the people they're writing about. They have an almost spiritual dedication to that."

Since the couple's return South, Cary Bynum has written several plays, all of them exploring Southern materials and themes. *A Late Rain*, for instance, has a Fugitive-Agrarian theme. The plays he has chosen to direct for the Southern Poets Theatre reflect this interest in Southern materials. One of his more successful pieces was *The Chinaberry Tree*, a selection of readings from Georgia poets.

In putting the Cabbagetown play together, "we went into homes," says Brenda Bynum, and "just talked." "We didn't want to exploit people or invade their privacy," adds Cary Bynum, "and we didn't know if we could make this material work as a play. But I was drawn to the material — it was Southern. And I recognized in the speech of the people a poetry — Effie is a poet — that I wanted to explore." Cary Bynum compares the speech rhythms of Effie Gray and the others to the "prose poetry of Eudora Welty." The difference, of course, is that Welty's folklore derives from the rural South, whereas that of Cab-



The three women of Cabbagetown: Doris Bucher as Lila Brookshire with Bynum and Coleman.

bagetown represents once-rural Southerners who moved to the Southern city in the last century and so have been exposed to the pressures of urban life.

In building the play from the oral history of the cookbook and that which he and his wife gathered — sometimes on tape — Cary Bynum exercised principles of selection. By discarding some material and emphasizing others, he enables the characters to “build themselves.” This procedure, he explains, “allows a more natural character development than to impose or contrive speech. In other words, I let the characters speak for themselves. The characters are shaped from their own materials. That’s my concept of oral history theater. I arrange or orchestrate the material, which is some of the best oral history I’ve seen. All I did was put it into dramatic form.

“I believe this process allows a revelation of real character, an outpouring of the real self, though it involves leaving out a good deal of material. What I wanted to do was put the audience right there on a Cab-

bagetown porch talking with those ladies. What’s interesting is the alchemy of the city on the Cabbagetown people. The dialogues of the people show them evolving from their life on the land through their city life. They have something unique.”

The play does indeed put the audience on a Cabbagetown porch, listening to Beadie, Lila, and Effie talking. The set is simplicity itself: a front porch and yard in Cabbagetown in the spring of 1975. A porch swing at center stage, two stools right stage, a cane-back rocking chair, and a worn metal glider chair on the left comprise the setting, along with some plants in coffee cans, hanging in baskets by rope or chain. The women move sparingly about the simple set. Just as in the book, they reminisce about the past, gossip, spin old yarns, give home remedies, let us peer into their lives in Cabbagetown and their childhoods on the north Georgia farms. One story elicits another. There is little dialogue and no plot or story, though there are many stories, monologue following monologue. The voices convey an authentic sense of the lives, the values,

the fierce pride and independence of the women. Here, for example, is Effie telling us why she has never voted:

When Roosevelt was going back in there for the second term, they would take us up there to vote. That old smart aleck was filling out my papers and asked me: “Well, who’s the governor?” I said, “Talmadge.” I knowed all that, I just couldn’t read and write. And she said, “Well, who’s the senators over Georgia?” “Russell’s one,” I said. “I can’t think right now who the other one is.” “Well, I don’t see how your vote’ll count anything,” she said. “Lady, I’m gonna tell you something,” I said. “You see them papers?” She said, “You have to sign them.” I said, “Uh-uh. I might sign them for Roosevelt and Talmadge and Russell. But you probably have somebody else’s name on them. You just take that paper and tear it in two and ram it up your butt!” And I walked out. They were saying, “Go report her, go report her, she ain’t supposed to talk to you like that!” I said, “Well, he’s going to get it anyway, he don’t need my vote.” I ain’t ever voted. There’s two things I don’t do—that’s

vote and sign petitions.

Then Lila responds with:

I don't know how many different people lived in this house with us on Reinhardt Street; and I never had no trouble except with one, and she kind of got jealous of me and her husband, which she didn't have no cause to. She brought out a word one day — when me and him was standing out on the porch looking down at the kids. She brought out a slur, and I didn't do nothing. I just went to the door, and I told her, "You jealous of me, you can forget it. I wouldn't have another man under the shining sun except my husband." She apologized later. [Sits on swing beside Aunt Beadie]. I reckon everybody thought a lot of me. If I've got any enemies, I don't know about it.

We hear stories of hard work and lean times, embarrassing and funny anecdotes, episodes of alcoholism, betrayal, religious salvation, death, as well as marriage, birth, and deep religious feelings.

One of the play's strongest features is the music — seven songs dot the text—some of it by Joyce Brookshire. Her moving ballads, like "Cabbagetown Ballad," contribute importantly to the tone and imagery:

*We came to Cabbagetown in
eighty-five*

*To work in the new cotton mill;
For we had heard the pay was good,
There were many jobs to fill.*

*We said good-bye to our mountain
homes,*

There to return no more;

*But we brought with us a way of life
That we had known before.*

*We're a mountain clan called
Cabbagetown*

*In the city of Atlanta, G. A.
And if it be the will of God,
It's where we'll always stay.*

The play is also sprinkled with traditional mountain tunes and old hymns played on guitar and harmonica—"Will the Circle be Unbroken," and "I'll Fly Away." Joyce Brookshire herself played and sang in the production, accompanied by Fritz Rauschenberg.*

*Joyce Brookshire's three songs for the play — "Cabbagetown Ballad," "How Long Does It Take to Grow an Orchard," and "North Georgia Mountains" — are printed as music with the text. A wider selection of Joyce's music is available from Foxfire Records as "North Georgia Mountains."

Since 1978, when the Bynums' Southern Poets Theatre opened the play at the Academy Theatre, *Cabbagetown* has played Atlanta intermittently. The three roles were originally played by Brenda Bynum, Doris Bucher, and Annette Coleman, all professional actresses. Its popularity is unrivaled in Atlanta theater, and reviews have been almost unanimously enthusiastic. *Atlanta Constitution* critic Helen Smith in 1978 called the play a "theatrical event of note and of high promise, . . . simple, effective, and moving. It worked beautifully, in a low-key, very human way." Scott Cain, writing the same year for the *Atlanta Journal* called it a "warm and wonderful theatrical experience, . . . simple as pie and just as satisfying, . . . charming and friendly." Later that year Joseph Litsch commented in the *Constitution* that the play's concerns really supercede the Cabbagetown neighborhood and that the play "touches the lives of almost anyone swept along by urbanization." As the play has continued to be produced, critics have continued to analyze it. In 1984 John Carman remarked in the *Constitution* on a local televised version of the play: "You'd have to be from Saturn not to appreciate the durable mountain strain that took root next to the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill." Ernest Schier, director of the National Critics Institute, was quoted as saying, "This fine piece has great potential for a good off-Broadway house."

Whether *Cabbagetown* ever makes it to off-Broadway seems beside the point to its most enthusiastic audience: the Cabbagetowners themselves. Over the years they have flocked to see their play, to watch other people speak their own words. Cary Bynum says that the play astounded and excited them, especially the three women themselves, who have been delighted. Joyce Brookshire says that she cannot get through some parts of the play without crying. "This is just something really special to me," she remarks, shaking her head and smiling. She mentions especially the part where her mother's character Lila talks about Joyce's father leaving home:

I came down here around '32. He, my husband, took to rambling, so I guess that — off and on — we stayed

between here and Gainesville [Georgia] for 12 years. Load up and go to Gainesville, and they'd get tired of us up there, and we'd have to come back here again. Joyce, the fourth child, she was born in April and about June, that's when he left.

Then in the play, the folksinger Joyce sings "The Orchard Song":
*My daddy left home early one
morning
Said I'll be back as soon as I can
I'm going to Carolina to get a load of
apples
We never saw my daddy again.*

*How long does it take to grow an
orchard
And pick all the apples one by one?
Twenty-nine years is a long growing
season
And I guess that's the reason my
daddy's still gone.*

"What the play taught me," Joyce Brookshire confesses, "is that I have real feelings about my past, my heritage." She explains:

"I always knew I loved Cabbagetown, but the play gave me a special feeling about the place. Since the play I've talked a lot more with my mother about the past. It's very important to keep our past, to preserve our oral traditions, to tell how things were and who we are."

Brookshire's deep feeling recalls Effie Gray's words to Brenda Bynum: "You do me better'n I do." The effect of a play like this reaches far deeper than entertainment or diversion. As Brookshire says, it helps us to understand "who we are." It explores roots and identity.

It may do even more. If Cabbagetown survives the onslaughts of the developers as an Appalachian village displaced to the city, it may well be that this play provided inspiration and gave hope. If the community goes under, at least the play survives as a living record of what life there was like, as a chest full of warm memories, and as a reminder of values carried from the hills: "Mama always said you could be a lady and work anywhere, and I found that to be true." □

William French teaches in the English department at West Virginia University.

A Farewell Without Mourning: A Jazz Funeral for Free Southern Theater

PHOTOS BY JACKSON HILL



THE FUNERAL MARSHALL BEGINS THE CEREMONY.

Last November veteran civil rights activists conducted a traditional New Orleans jazz funeral for Free Southern Theater (FST), an innovative, mainly black company born in 1963.

FST had been the brainchild of three civil rights movement activists, John O'Neal, Doris Derby, and Gilbert Moses. The theater's founders envisioned it as a different method of fostering social change which they hoped would augment the civil rights

movement. Conceived as a cultural and political tool, the theater's aim was to involve artists and audiences in a mutual struggle against racism in the South.

For its last few years, John O'Neal had carried on FST mainly alone. By 1980, he realized that FST had died. Over the next few years he looked for funding to organize a conference to mark the end of that company. Loyola University of New Orleans sponsored



THE COFFIN IS CLOSED AFTER PEOPLE HAVE PLACED OLD FREE SOUTHERN THEATER FLYERS, SCRAPS OF PAPER, PENNIES, DOLLARS, AND FLOWERS INSIDE.

the conference, "The Role of Art in the Process of Social Change," held in November. O'Neal planned the funeral to coincide with it.

He explained why FST had failed: "Many of the social and political conditions have changed in American society since 1963. These changes did not invalidate the programs and purposes of the Free Southern Theater, but they served to complicate and make it more difficult to implement

such programs and to realize those purposes. This is due primarily to the fact that the broad-based social movement that gave rise to the Free Southern Theater now lies fallow."

He chose a jazz funeral because he believes in the importance of rituals. "We have to do rituals for the children and for the grandchildren and for the great-grandchildren. Those are the ones the rituals are designed centrally to impress.

"After the FST funeral it occurred to me that I was glad my children had come. I don't think my son will ever forget that image of me crying. I think that's probably the only time he has ever seen me cry. It surprised me that I did it."

Jackson Hill is a New Orleans photographer and longtime contributor to Southern Exposure.



THE FUNERAL MARSHALL PACES THE PROCESSION.



A CHILD CHEERS A MOURNER.

A History of Free Southern Theater

1963

•Doris Derby, John O'Neal, and Gilbert Moses meet in the winter on the campus of Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi to form Free Southern Theater.

1964

•Richard Schechner, then professor of drama at Tulane University in New Orleans, takes an interest in the idea of a theater after receiving a copy of FST's prospectus.

•Pilot plans focus on a 10-week session in Jackson, Mississippi, in the summer. Five plays are scheduled: *Purlie Victorious*, *Do You Want to Be Free*, *Lower Than the Angels*, *Day of Absence*, and *Great Gettin' up Mornin'*.

•FST's receives its first contribution — from Langston Hughes.

•Kick-off party raises around \$10,000 with a gathering which includes Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Robert Ryan, Diana Sands, Barbara Streisand, and others.

•*In White America* opens in Jackson with an integrated cast drawn from the Mississippi Summer Project.

•FST goes on its first summer tour, a 21-town tour of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

•Auditions for a company of 12 players are planned in New York for early September. Headquarters for the new theater will be in New Orleans and Jackson.

•*Purlie Victorious* and *Waiting for Godot* open.

•FST's second tour in the winter covers Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia.

•FST company members are evicted from apartments for participating in a mixed-race group; several are arrested for vagrancy; rehearsal space is hard to find; local newspapers will not review shows.

1965

•FST introduces improvised performances which enlist persons from the audience to assume roles as themselves — civil rights workers, police, judges.

•Hurricane Betsy destroys the New Orleans headquarters.

•FST operations suspended when funds run low in October. Second half of the Deep South tour cancelled.

1966

•Stage production of Gilo Moses' *Roots*.

•Permanent headquarters established in New Orleans.

•Three-year grant of \$62,500 awarded to FST by a Rockefeller family foundation.

•Stage productions of *I Speak of Africa* and *Does Man Help Man*.

1967

•Black Arts South performing poets started; small scale touring began in addition to local workshops.

1968

•"Soul Food at the Waldorf" raises \$84,000 for FST.

•*Slave Ship* by Leroi Jones is produced.

•Big split over artistic direction and policy occurs in organization.



Participants join hands and voices in "Ain't Gonna Study War No More" (John O'Neal, center).

1970

•New direction is taken: actors no longer imported; training program set up to teach and develop local people; community theater program strengthened; writing workshop established; administrative, teaching, and technical staff strengthened.

1971

•FST reopens after five-month break with plans for 1971-72 season. Plans include a permanent touring troupe, drama workshops, and training programs.

•Black music workshop is formed under the direction of Ellis Marsalis.

1972

•FST receives \$20,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts and

\$15,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation.

•Productions include *Terraced Apartment* and *One Last Hook* by Steve Carter, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansbury and *Hurricane Season* by John O'Neal.

1973

•Productions include *Black Experience* and *We Are the Suns* by Chakula Cha Jua and *Where is the Blood of Your Fathers?* by O'Neal.

1974

•Stage productions include *When the Opportunity Scratches*, *Itch it!* and *Going Against the Tide* by O'Neal.

•Video magazine, *Nation Time*, starts on New Orleans' Channel 12.

1975

•FST begins a radio program on WNNR in New Orleans.

•Financial problems jeopardize program and staff continuity.

1976

•FST becomes involved in the Gary Tyler Defense Committee.

•FST attends The New Theater Festival in Baltimore.

1977

•*Where is the Blood of Your Fathers?* is restaged.

1978

•*Candle in the Wind*, by Ted Ward, is produced.

1979

•Household repair business fails. Yard work concession is set up to subsidize theater work.

1980

•*Don't Start Me to Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones*, by O'Neal with Ron Castine and Glenda Lindsay, is produced.

•FST dies. □

Coming of Age in Atlanta

An Interview with Frank Wittow of Academy Theatre

By Rebecca Ranson

Academy Theatre is Georgia's oldest professional resident theater, located in Atlanta on Peachtree Street. Academy celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. The company is in the process of building a new theater scheduled to be completed in December.

The powerful voice behind this long-lived theater is Frank Wittow. Wittow was born in Ashtabula, Ohio in 1930. His parents were first-generation Jewish-Americans, whose parents had emigrated from Eastern Europe. Wittow grew up in Lorain, Ohio, a steel-mill town of about 50,000 people, many of whom were Slavic immigrants of Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox faith. This interview was conducted by guest editor Rebecca Ranson and took place in Wittow's office at Academy Theatre in May 1986. As a freshly minted college graduate, Frank Wittow was drafted to direct a theater company in his hometown: In the fall of 1953 after I had just finished my Master's degree at



Columbia, I went home to Lorain, Ohio. It was during the Korean War and I was waiting to be drafted. I got a call from some people at Lorain Community Theater who said they were just about to fold. They had \$15 left in their bank account and they had heard that I'd done some theater work in college. As a last resort, they wanted to talk to me about their situation. They were looking for some kind of inspiration. They thought I was a lot more experienced in theater than I was.

I didn't disillusion them. I said I would take over and try to do something as long as they let me do anything I wanted to do. They said OK. So I went to the library and got a book on directing theater, because I had never really directed. I had done a little theater in college but my formal education was in psychology. I didn't have much respect for theater as it was practiced or theater people. I thought they were all rather supercilious, not serious enough for my taste, but there was something in me that needed that kind of exhibition.

I looked for a space and found a Slovenian Social Hall. The rent was \$75 a month, so I committed the theater to that. Suddenly — from being ready to quit — we had a theater building to remodel. It was very exciting. People came down to repaint the building and refurbish it, and it became a focal point for that community at that time.

In an amazingly short time we had about a hundred members. I started classes for children. I became artistic director of the theater without really having had directing experience, let alone teaching experience. It was a great act of chutzpah. I was doing everything from designing the sets to teaching and directing, doing the business and advertising. And everybody thought I knew what I was doing.

For me, without question, it was the most exciting and challenging thing I had ever done. I had found something at last that was really meaningful — far more meaningful than what I was pursuing in terms of school psychology. I thought theater could be a way of doing everything I had hoped to accomplish in psychology but with much more freedom.

From the time I was a sophomore in

high school, what I was gonna be was very, very important to me. It was more important to me than to the other kids. I was very concerned about who I was, and what I was gonna do in life. I thought if I could help the world by curing all the emotionally disturbed children — well, boy, what a contribution to mankind! It was that simplistic. That's how the choice became school psychology. It was very idealistic. Then in the community theater, I saw the possibility that those needs on my part could be legitimized by giving something to the community.

It struck me that theater was an area where you could define what you were doing and the objective. It was my first discovery of what it could mean to dedicate one's life to the arts.

Up to that time, I felt my that any interest I had in theater was purely self-serving, purely to indulge myself in exhibitionistic tendencies and needs, a very selfish kind of thing. I had been to Northwestern [as an undergrad] which was sort of a springboard to stardom. It's the same now I think. People go to college in order to make it in "show biz." Some kids at Northwestern had ideas of going off and starting little theaters. But the main idea was making it in New York. That's what I didn't like, what I didn't feel at one with. I had to deal with my own need to perform and show off, but I never could see that as

a serious way of life because it seemed so totally self-serving.

As a graduate student in New York, Wittow had encountered professionally ambitious actors:

I met the "show biz" people, saw Broadway and thought it was a lot of fun but silly, not serious enough for old Frankie. Even in New York I remember wondering why all these talented people weren't out in their hometowns with all their gifts instead of flooding New York with all this competition and horseshit. That was 35 years ago.

I thought they could really be giving something to people who had nothing and instead they were all competing. There was no regional theater at that time except maybe Margo Jones in Dallas. People that I went to school with at Northwestern were in New York and I saw them and it didn't seem to make any difference whether they were not successful or they were successful. They were all worse off as people. I don't think it's changed a lot.

The U.S. Army's draft eventually cut short Wittow's involvement with the community theater in the Slovenian hall:

I was drafted in June 1954. I went to basic training at Fort Knox in Louisville and was transferred to Atlanta as a personnel psychologist. I had never been to Atlanta before and I fell in love with it immediately. The



As Mordechai Weiss, Frank Wittow hams it up for his two daughters in *A Shayna Maidel*.

second day here I took a stroll and walked up Ponce de Leon and up Monroe and ended up on Peachtree. I walked past what was then the art museum and some nice ladies saw me, this soldier boy, and invited me to attend a chamber concert. They were lovely typical Southern ladies, and I thought they were wonderful. I walked a little further until I came to 13th and Peachtree. There was a movie house, the Peachtree Art Theater, and next door to it was a record shop. That record shop is now our first stage. There was a guy there and I started asking him what was going on in theater and expounding on my ideas of theater and talked about starting my own theater. You can imagine how I felt when we bought this building.

I also called the library that day and found out that there were three amateur theater groups at the time. One of them was the Atlanta Civic Theater, one was The Theater Guild, and one was the Playmaker's, a new group that was just starting.

I called the Playmaker's and they were having auditions that Monday. So I auditioned for *John Loves Mary*, and I got cast in the lead. My whole Army career I was doing theater work constantly. In a sense that was my first government grant. I was subsidized. I did get called to the colonel's office many times for reading plays on duty and having my head shaved because I was playing a part.

The February before I was to be discharged, I had met enough people and done enough work that I decided to stay in Atlanta and start a theater. My first theater that was my own opened two days after I was discharged from the Army, June 20, 1956. It was financed with my Army discharge money.

From a modest beginning, Academy Theatre has expanded into an organization with three acting companies that produce about four plays a year on its main stage and another four on its first stage. For 16 years Academy operated out of a neighborhood church, which was sold. In 1977, the company moved on to an enormous theater at Center Stage:

I was frightened to make that leap from a 200-seat theater to a 700-seat theater, but there wasn't much else

available and we had to keep operating if we were going to survive. There was some indication that it might really work and it did seem to work. We went from no subscribers to 2,000 subscribers just like that. We went from 50 students a quarter to over 200 a quarter. We had one of the best ensembles we had had in a long time.

Suddenly we were visible. We had been in Atlanta 20 years but no one knew about Academy. People who stopped coming to the church [theater] because we were doing experimental work started coming back and saying that we had a "real" theater. It's what I call shit flies. We were a larger turd then and attracting a lot of various shit flies. We then began to draw larger audiences than we ever had before. We haven't come close to that kind of attendance for an individual show since then. The second year the landlady doubled the rent. That was a big nosedive for us that we have barely recovered from now. It was just disastrous. That was the closest we came to being a big operation.

To consolidate resources, Academy relocated to smaller quarters, first to Erlanger in 1979 and then to its present location in 1982.

Now during the year I meet with everyone in the theater to see how they're doing and to talk about next year. That is the heart of this theater. In order for me to be happy with what I'm doing, I try to maintain that kind of personal relationship and knowledge of the people I'm working with so I can facilitate their growth as much as possible. The theater has to be a size that I'm capable of keeping in intimate touch with.

For Wittow and the Academy Theatre, the economic struggles always continue:

They never let up. It's a question of how bad it gets. The point is that if you're a non-profit arts organization you're always striving to pay people something, at least a wage they can live on, which we never can do. We're at the lower end of the pay scale. Sometimes we go through a whole season and manage to pay everybody on time. Very often, such as the last two years, paying salaries on time is a major problem. We get behind by weeks and people are caused great hardship.

It's not poor planning or being extravagant. Sometimes there is not the fundraising that is planned or some programs don't come through. It's always a struggle. We constantly work on ways to keep it from being debilitating and sapping energy from the artistic area.

As a versatile theater veteran, Wittow has performed in virtually every capacity of the profession: acting, directing, writing, producing, business managing:

I think acting is the most painful and tension-producing [aspect of theater] for me. I would be very proud as a writer if I could produce a script I really liked. For me, all of the experiences from teaching and directing to writing mean something and all require a different combination of abilities.

I find it fascinating to work with people in different kinds of relationships. I look for company members who are versatile and who are interested in developing in different ways. I think it's a good learning process. I like to think of the theater as a place where we're all continuing to learn. If there were one thing that I loved before all the others then I would just do that but I like all of it.

Once a ham, Wittow in his middle years finds that his youthful exhibitionist streak has faded:

One of the main changes I notice [since I first worked on stage] is that whatever I'm doing or the theater is doing, the base of satisfaction has changed. It's changed from, "Look at me, look at what I can do," to, "It's a privilege for me to be able to give something that's important and to focus more on the worth of what we have to offer people of the community." I think the beginning of a theater is primarily an ego thing.

Unless you find something much deeper than your own ego gratification, you will give it up and go be a star in New York or Hollywood or somewhere. If you stick with it then there has got to be something profound. Academy has survived because I found a meaning that was much more significant than anything else I could think of doing with my life. □

Dark Cowgirls and Prairie Queens

A PLAY BY LINDA PARRIS-BAILEY

Carpetbag Theater, founded in 1970 by W.F. Lucas, is one of the oldest surviving black theater companies in the South, according to Linda Parris-Bailey, its artistic director. The five-member touring company is based in Knoxville, Tennessee. Although Carpetbag is often on the road, Parris-Bailey says, "We are committed to making the voices of our community heard and we want to give something back to the community — a positive image of itself."

The company's current work-in-progress, *Red Summer*, is based on a Knoxville race riot in the summer of

1919, when a white mob stormed a jail which they thought held a black man accused of murdering a white woman. When the crowd discovered that the man had been moved to Chattanooga, the armed white mob attacked black businesses.

"We are interested in how the community responded, in the stories of the individuals involved," says Parris-Bailey. Funding for the project came from the Tennessee Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Original work is an important element of Carpetbag's goals. "The development of our own material has

been a vital part of our identity from the beginning," says Parris-Bailey. Carpetbag is currently touring with *Dark Cowgirls and Prairie Queens*, a play about black women who helped settle the West, written by Parris-Bailey with the help of her fellow actors. The inspiration for the play began several years ago when Carpetbag was asked to perform for Black History Month. "We didn't want to do Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth again," said Parris-Bailey. She came across a book called *The Black West* and began developing vignettes based on the women she discovered in the text. What began as a 15-minute piece became a full-length play which explores the lives of six black women between 1830 and 1890.

Carpetbag also tours with *Cric?Crac!*, a collection of black folktales from Africa, Haiti, and the American South.

Carpetbag members — Jeff Cody, Linda Upton Hill, Adora Dupree, Rafael Clements, and Mayta Haley — work as administrators, producers, technical directors, and costumers as well as performers. They perform in recreation centers, churches, colleges, high schools, museums, and prisons in addition to traditional theater spaces.

"There isn't a tradition in the black community or in the entire low- and middle-class community of 'going to the theater' so we go to where the people are," says Parris-Bailey. All of the company members have outside jobs. In addition to spending 20 hours a week working together each member donates two hours of office work to keep the business end of the theater running. "We know that we are our own best resource," says Parris-Bailey. "We use every additional skill that one of us picks up."

In this excerpt from *Dark Cowgirls and Prairie Queens*, Biddy Mason has walked to California from Texas behind her master's wagon. She goes to court to plead for her freedom, since California is not slave territory. Afterward she goes on to earn enough money to build a nursing home. Here is her plea in court:



Photo courtesy of Carpebag Theatre

Dark Cowgirls and Prairie Queens tells the stories of black women who helped to settle the American West.

Excerpt

BIDDY:

I ain't gonna tell you that I know 'bout the law. I think the law'll be whatever you folks say it's gonna be. No, I don't know nuthin' about the law, and you don't know nothin' about slavery. I guess that's why I'm here. Slave all my life, got three daughters that are slaves. All my life I wanted to be free. I'd heard about slaves running away and going North, but I never did get my chance to go. Two of my babies come close together and I couldn't run when they come to take us.

I heard tell of a woman who tried to go North to freedom with a little baby, but she got caught. They tried to take her and the baby back to her master. They beat her so bad nobody could hardly recognize her. Well, when they finished whuppin' her, they gave her baby back to her and she took a stone and bashed the child's skull. She tried to kill herself too, but the marshall stopped her. She said she would never raise another child in slavery.

When massa Smith told me we wuz goin' to Texas, I felt that woman inside a me. I took a knife and tried to cut my Maggie's throat but I couldn't do it. God knows I tried, but I couldn't. She is here today because my hand wasn't strong. No, you don't know 'bout slavery.

Every slave in this country wants to be free more than anything on earth. And everyone of us is working for it in one way or another. Some of us never get a chance in life to be free, but we works for it anyway. Den some of us be in dese free states and still be slaves. No sir, I don't understand your law,

and you don't understand slavery. There's a man ah heard about name a' Dred Scott been tryin' ta get his freedom in the courthouse for 10 years now. They say he tried ta buy his freedom, his family's too, but his master cheat him and steal the money he saved. He live in a free state. Don't the white man have no law for the colored that he got ta obey?

I want to be free. I been workin' all my life to be free, now is the time. I done heard some folks talkin' 'bout it bein' a waste of time to have niggas in the courtroom, most of 'em so lazy they couldn't even make it on their own. Massa should let a few of 'em go just to save time. Let me tell you, ain't nobody lazy 'bout freedom, no matter how they go 'bout gettin' it. If you told me I had to walk through hell ta get freedom I'd do it straight away. I ain't goin' to Texas. Ain't no way on God's earth ta make me live in slavery again. I figure every man, woman and child gets one chance to do what they gotta do in life.

This is my chance. And if you don't let me do what I gotta do, then you better keep me and my girls in the jail house, 'cause I'll find my courage somewhere and take all us to the maker some kinda way. Now, you done let me talk and I done told you about slavery. Now all you gotta do is tell me about your law. Ten years is a long time to wait for the law, and I won't be a slave for 10 more years while you tryin' ta make up your mind. □

Excerpt copyright © 1983 Linda Parris-Bailey.

7

STAGES

Del Hamilton is a risk-taker. As artistic director of Atlanta's Seven Stages theater — a group committed to producing new plays — Hamilton takes pride in giving a voice to many writers whose work “would not be possible in institutionalized theaters.” Such plays often do not appeal to traditional funding sources or traditional theater patrons.

But Seven Stages succeeds because it has linked itself to the surrounding community. Begun in 1979 in a small storefront, Seven Stages is located in a transitional neighborhood. Its neighbors include several theaters, bars, vintage clothing stores, pizza joints, and a bookstore. In addition to producing new plays, Seven Stages has also become a forum for local artists to do readings of new plays and poetry or even to gather for a covered-dish Thanksgiving dinner.

When Hamilton discovers a project that he thinks would be valuable for the community, he includes it in his plans for the theater. For example, this past year Seven Stages offered a women's series of concerts, poetry readings, and workshops through a series titled *Women's Voices*. Included in this series were works by Kay Gardner, Odetta, Minnie Bruce Pratt, June Jordan, and Adrienne Torf. As an outgrowth of the series, Seven Stages also recently produced the world premiere of a new musical, *Bang Bang Uber Alles*, a collaborative effort between June Jordan and Adrienne Torf that explores the social and political responsibilities of the artist. In the play, a group of artists decides to take a stand against the Ku Klux Klan.

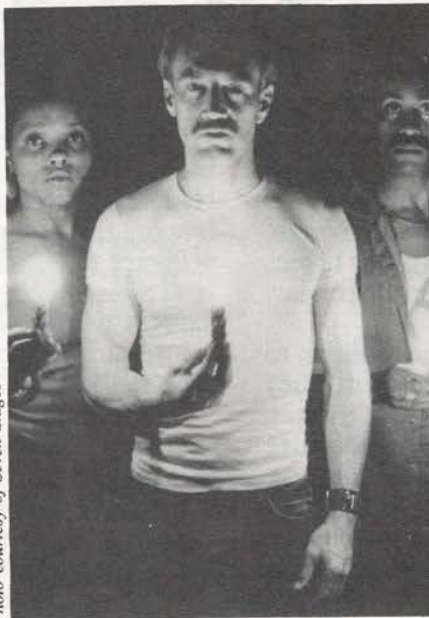


Photo courtesy of Seven Stages

In *Rising Upon the Land* at Seven Stages, former 1960s activists reenact a protest in the 1980s.

When the show opened June 14, about a dozen Klan members staged a demonstration outside the theater.

Hamilton says, “Our management and programming have become responsive to who is currently among us to continue the work. In this sense we have become truly radical, truly ex-

perimental. The experiment, which is not unlike a scientist's search for truth, has now led us to a deepening awareness that the work responds to the people who create it as much as it is a result of those who planned it.”

During the past seven years, the theater has produced an abundance of new plays, as well as classics, musicals, and a number of Sam Shepard plays. While some of the plays failed to draw audiences, a few couldn't accommodate the crowds anxious to buy tickets.

Hamilton is also working to build a global community of theater artists. When he became aware of the work of South African playwright Adam Small, Seven Stages produced his *Kanna — He is Coming Home*, with Small in residence. The 1986-87 season includes two more plays by Small. Hamilton and Michael Keck, an Atlanta musician and actor, are working with Small on a new play. The South African government recently declined to issue visas for the two Americans to make a scheduled trip to the country to continue the collaboration with Small.

Hamilton has forged other international connections, including some with German artists. Through the Goethe Institute in Atlanta, Hamilton and Faye Allen, another Seven Stages staff member, traveled to Germany to study theater there. The visit was returned this spring when writers and critics from Berlin spent a few days in Atlanta watching rehearsals and sharing ideas from current theater activity in Germany with the local community. □

Placing the Playwrights

INTERVIEWS BY BEVERLY TRADER

Playwrights know their place. It's that empty landscape called a stage. In the hands of the best playwrights, however, those few square feet may be transformed into the Emerald Isle, the South Pole, or the well-traveled terrain of the American South.

The following writers were born or have worked in the South. They were happy to speculate on the importance of a sense of place, both in their plays and in their personal lives.

DEER

Sandra Deer was born in West Palm Beach, Florida and grew up in almost every Southern state. She now lives in Atlanta, where she is the literary manager for the Alliance Theater Company. Her comedy *So Long on Lonely Street* broke box-office records there as this season's opening production. It was staged in February at the Nickerson Theater in Norwell, Massachusetts and then moved to New York where it was directed by Atlanta's Kent Stephens. Deer's adaptation of *Pinocchio* was mounted by the Atlanta Children's Theater this season, and her version of Dickens's *Great Expectations* played at the Alliance February and March.

"When we talk about writers having

a sense of place, we are almost always talking about a place in the memory that has gone from actual existence, leaving only shards and cemetery markers. It's not the place, but the sense of place that the work comes from, because work comes from the imagination where images are combined in special ways. Most of the images — the best ones — come out of deep memory: childhood, where the things of this world are fresh. A sense of place doesn't have anything to do with a region. It's just what the child stored up for the adult to recreate with. Places and things. And the names of places and things."

STEPHENS

John Stephens was born in San Francisco — Irish Catholic on his father's side and Irish Protestant on his mother's. He is associate director of the Academy Theatre in Atlanta and is founder and artistic director of Theater Gael. Stephens has authored over a

dozen plays for children and adults. He is now at work on a drama which deals with Irish emigration to this country.

"I am drawn to Ireland. That's the area that I have written about the most. And I admit to some romantic notions about the quality in the Irish character that is seen through a love of words, a fluency in music and poetry, in the depth of their imagination. It seems, almost in a spirit of survival amongst the Irish, that they use their poetry to protect themselves. And I think that's what I do myself as a writer. Ireland inspires me as a place. Whenever I return from there I feel more focused. I'm an American through and through, but I understand some behavioral aspects of myself which come through my heritage."

STERRETT

Jean Sterrett was born in Toowoomba, Australia and now lives in Atlanta. Her play *Afternoons at Waratah* won the 1983 National Play Award. She



SANDRA DEER



JOHN STEPHENS



JEAN STERRETT

also directed her script *The White Rose of Munich* at Nexus Theater in 1983. A classical pianist by training, Sterrett is also a critically acclaimed actress. She is currently working on several scripts for both children and adults.

"I rejoice in plays or films which can transport me into a certain place and time. It can happen in reading, too. A few people have commented on the sense of place in my work. With *The White Rose* (set in Munich in 1943) I was trying to capture a time and place and sense of apprehensiveness — to have my actors constantly on guard. I like to try to bring a place to life, a time to life. Having been a musician, I'm extremely aware of sound. I like to choose the music and have it integrated into a script. In *Waratah*, I've got background birds and even the didgeridoo. I was also working with childhood memories of a particular place, a particular house and its veranda. Then characters began to speak in a language I had completely forgotten. By being removed from Australia, things which had been placed in a timeless vault could be brought out and used."

HUEY

Tom Huey was born in Birmingham, Alabama and now lives in McLeansville, North Carolina. He is also a member, along with Sandra Deer and Frank Manley, of the Alliance Theater's Playwrights Project in Atlanta. Huey's *High Standards* was produced by the Alliance Studio last season and *Through Line* was presented there this June. His adaptation of the tales of Edgar Allen Poe was staged by the Atlanta Children's



TOM HUEY

Theater this winter. Huey has published a novel, four books of poetry, and co-authored a screenplay with James Dickey.

"I live in the South because it's easy for me here. Not only is it my home, but I can work without interruptions. I have a lot of time to be alone here. It's not so much that the old metaphors of the South apply to my work; but as my plays become more rooted in autobiography, the South crops up in them. I still try very hard to transcend regionalism. One thing that's becoming more apparent is that the old stereotypes no longer apply here. We go from the particular to the general. The important thing for me as a writer is to find the ground rules that are recognizable wherever you go. We're all human. That's the real territory."

PIKE

Bonnie Pike was born in Omaha, Nebraska and has lived in Atlanta for 26 years. Her *Three Brass Monkeys* premiered on Academy's First Stage. Atlanta's Theatrical Outfit subsequently offered two separate, and well-received, stagings of the work in April and November of last year. Pike serves as literary manager and playwright-in-residence at the Outfit and is currently working on a play set in Savannah.

"I want my mind free and my feet planted. I want to be as at home in a truckstop as I am at the Ritz in Paris. Stability gives me freedom. If there's anything wrong in my household or with my kids, I can't work. My mind is so locked into my own reality that it can't get into anybody else's.

"I guess my roots are primary. I



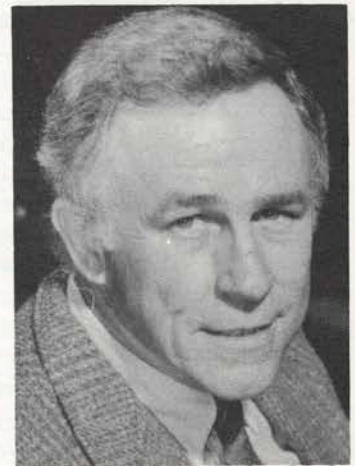
BONNIE PIKE

hope, as I mature as a writer, however, my work will become universal, and not rooted to a specific locale. I think a more limited approach might be limiting to me. Those things which seduce me go beyond place — I think that people are the same once you learn their culture and their humor. The primal passions of the Spanish may be masked in England. But if you get down to the core of it, we're all feeling the same thing."

MANLEY

Frank Manley was born and now lives in Atlanta. He spent over a decade, however, studying and teaching in Baltimore, Maryland and New Haven, Connecticut. His *Two Masters* was staged by Atlanta's Theater Emory in 1984 and *Prior Engagements* was produced there earlier this season. *Two Masters* was awarded the Great American Play Award at Louisville's Humana Festival in 1985. The recipient of two Guggenheims and other honors for his poetry and scholarship, Manley is currently working on a commission from Alliance Theater in Atlanta.

"I never felt comfortable in a New England landscape. And although I'm never conscious of writing about the South or aware of myself as a Southern writer, I often look up to find myself in a Southern landscape. You never try to write about a region. You just use the region to strike through to something more permanent that goes beyond the region. Most of the people in my plays have been lower-class Southerners. I've written about characters who live outside this region's cities, but I'm concerned that they not be perceived



FRANK MANLEY

as stereotypes, particularly by people outside the South. I think that Southern people are often missserved by the rural stereotype. It's a burden that Southern writers have to carry — like an accent. People tend to pigeonhole Southern writers and think of them in literary terms, comparing us to writers of the Southern Renaissance. They tend to use their second-hand experience to stereotype Southern writers."

TALLY

Ted Tally was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and he grew up in nearby Greensboro. He now lives in Manhattan, where his *Little Footsteps* premiered at Playwrights Horizons this February. Tally's *Terra Nova* has been produced in the U.S. and 10 foreign countries. A 1984 production at the American Place in New York won that year's Obie for distinguished playwriting. His other honors include the Kazan Award, the Field Prize, the Outer Critics Circle Award for best American play, the Guggenheim and a CBS Foundation Fellowship.

"I always start a play by trying to imagine the kind of place where characters live. But in my mind the setting is always a theater. It's never realistic. I want a nonliteral representation — to suggest Antarctica or places in England. A sense of place in terms of the characters is important to me. A sense of place in terms of my own identification with a region is not. I might just as well write a play set at the South Pole as I would set one in the South. I would rather be more free ranging in time as well as place. Living in the Northeast for 15 years is

finally beginning to affect me. In a way I'm kind of a hybrid now. I'm not really a Southerner or a Yankee. A sense of character, of conflict, of struggle affects me more than any regional flavor."

PECK

Jim Peck was born in Clinton, Indiana and grew up in Chicago, Peoria, Fort Lauderdale, and South Carolina. He attended graduate school in Georgia and lives in Atlanta. Peck is a former minister, tennis pro, teacher, and journalist. He now works as a professional actor and playwright. His study of the poet Robert Burns, *Rab, they Rhymers*, traveled to the Edinburgh Festival last summer and *Flint and Roses*, originally mounted on the Academy's First Stage, was produced on Alliance's mainstage this January.

"Most of my plays are located in non-specific settings. I don't have roots anyplace. I grew up all over and went to six different schools the first six grades. It's normal that I don't have a childhood affinity for the deep South and rarely locate my work here. Most of my plays have no specific place names in them. I'm more at sea than people who have a strong smell of place about them. The disadvantage, from a marketing point of view, is people expect a person from Atlanta to write a grits-and-sorghum play. I think that my plays are more cosmopolitan, not that I have a sophisticated point of view. I'm just not writing about atmosphere that much, and am more focused on character and idea than location. I'm not saying my ideas are stronger than anyone else's. I just

didn't grow up anywhere. Or I grew up everywhere. Or I didn't grow up. That's another possibility.

LINNEY

Romulus Linney was born in Philadelphia, but grew up in North Carolina and Tennessee. Now living in New York City, Linney has won the Mishama Award for Fiction, fellowships from Guggenheim and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the 1980 Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. His many plays have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, and Linney's *Tennessee* won the 1981 Obie, an off Broadway and off off Broadway award.

"For me it's a sense of emotional place, rather than physical — the memories that you have from your childhood. The South is an emotional place to me more than a physical one because my youth was spent there. You find something in a place that has to do with your memories. I've written about the Orient because I've been there. But many of my plays are historical plays that seem to have nothing to do with immediate experience. A great life like Byron's or Frederick the Great's, however, is a country that you get lost in. And then you find your way around in it. It's a great adventure. The emotional things that you share with these titanic figures are your guideposts here." □

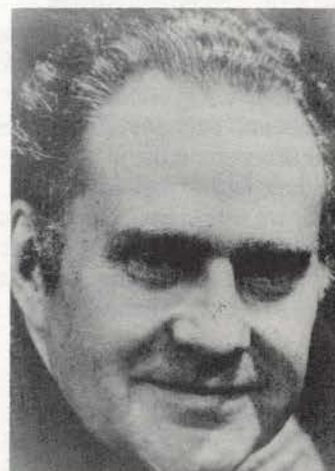
Beverly Trader is a playwright who has had six plays produced in London and Atlanta. Her interviews with Pearl Cleage, Fred Gamel, Alonzo D. Lamont, Jr. and Barbara Lebow appear at the beginning of the excerpts from their plays in this issue.



TED TALLY



JIM PECK



ROMULUS LINNEY

Religious Rite Theater

A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

This article was drawn from a May 1986 interview with Levi Lee and Rebecca Wackler by guest editor Rebecca Ranson.

When Levi Lee takes on the role of an evangelist in the production of *Tent Meeting*, he walks into the audience to shake hands with the "congregation." He may ask them to stand and sing a hymn.

"People stand before they think about it and they feel like they were tricked because it's such an automatic response," he says. Lee draws on this trained response and the conflict it produces. "Those similarities between church audiences and theater audiences are part of the reason we do the kind of plays we do."

The plays that Lee does, with Rebecca Wackler and Larry Larson, are the product of a unique collaborative effort. All three writer/performers are part of the Atlanta-based Southern Theater Conspiracy which was invited to perform twice at the prestigious Humana Festival of New American Plays — sponsored by Actors Theater in Louisville. Not only do the three perform in the plays — referred to as religious rite theater — they also write and produce them.

Such loaded subject matter is bound to create controversy. *Tent Meeting*, for example, has at times offended audience members. "I can see some people with their arms crossed and hostile looks on their faces," says Lee. "In Louisville, we would have maybe four people walk out a night. Some people stay until the end and say they hated it but wanted to see what happened. I think it's a valid response."

At the same time, the plays have proved remarkably successful, especially with the Louisville audience, more accustomed to innovative theater. Says Wackler, "In Atlanta, we

were lucky to have an audience of 30 people. In Louisville, we would have over 300 people a night. We would go to the bar after a performance and people would stand up and applaud us. We didn't quite know what to make of it."

Besides *Tent Meeting*, the trio has also seen its work *Illuminati: Some Things You Should Know Before The World Ends* produced at the festival, which selects about a dozen plays a year from over 4,000 entries.

Tent Meeting, the play performed at the 1985 festival, rides a dangerous line between comedy and uncomfortable religious blasphemy. In the play, an evangelist kidnaps a baby with the assistance of his son and daughter and advice from God. The play treads on Southern stereotypes, fundamentalist religion, family values, and incest.

The idea for *Tent Meeting* began when the threesome attended a party and guests suggested that they ride to a tent meeting in progress. "As soon as we heard that, we knew it was going to be the next play," says Lee. "We had always been interested in religious rite theater. *Illuminati* takes place in the context of a Lutheran religious service and Rebecca had written *The Gospel of Mary*; we just knew that a play that took place during a tent meeting would be a great play."

Lee, Wackler, and Larson, veteran actors in a number of Atlanta theaters, often make use of improvisational techniques — an outgrowth of previous acting work at Atlanta's Academy Theatre. "We do a condensed version of improv now," explains Lee. "We do a sit-around-the-table version." Lee generally places himself at the typewriter and edits while Wackler and Larson forge ahead with ideas. "They get ahead of me and I have to stop them to get our thoughts down," says Lee. "All writing is based

on improv but most writers do it alone in their heads."

The concept for *Tent Meeting* was discussed for months and kept changing. After deciding that they would perform the roles themselves, Wackler, Lee and Larson began to create their characters. Lee found the writing process to be amazingly easy. "It was almost totally free of ego problems. You can run into problems doing collaborative work where the sharp edges and the highs and lows of the piece get voted out and you turn out something bland. In the work we've done so far we've been lucky enough to have the same sense of outrageousness and generally the same point of view."

"We build on each other," Wackler says. "We just roll." Lee laughs, "It's a rare experience and we don't count on having it all the time." But they prefer writing collectively. "It's easier than facing that white paper alone." And decisions get made. Wackler wanted to set *Tent Meeting* in 1945 because that "felt" right and after discussion it made sense because the writers believed the police would have caught the kidnapers quickly in 1986 with a dragnet of helicopters.

Drawing audiences from around the world, the Humana Festival provides opportunities for the playwrights and the players. In Louisville, Lee, Wackler, and Larson had the unusual chance to perform their own work — unlike most other plays staged there with local actors — in an amply funded production. Following the festival, the cast spent eight months touring with *Tent Meeting*, taking it to Charleston's Spoleto Festival, to Ireland, and to Philadelphia. They hope to open the show in New York next fall. □

Preacher with a Horse to Ride

Introduction written by and
excerpts from a play by Jo Carson

"I know this isn't directly related to what you're doing, but I thought you might be interested." I wonder how many projects, literary or otherwise, start with that introduction.

Some stories seem to choose you.

Preacher With a Horse to Ride is based on events in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky following the Depression. In early 1931, Harlan County miners attempted to get union recognition from the United Mine Workers. (See *Southern Exposure*, Vol. IV, Nos. 1-2, 1976 "The Battle of Evarts".) Although the miners organized a number of successful mass protests, marches, and walkouts, UMW had privately joined the coal operators and local officials in thwarting the organizing drive.

Tensions flared, and on May 5, three mine guards and one miner were killed in a gun battle. The entire leadership of the organizing drive was arrested on charges stemming from

the shootings, effectively putting an end to the union movement in "Bloody Harlan."

The communist-led National Miners Union stepped into the void, but by October their efforts, too, were floundering. In November, the NMW brought novelist Theodore Dreiser and seven other writers and activists to hold unofficial hearings in Harlan to revitalize the organizing drive and to bring attention to the widespread abuses of miners' rights and the injustices and poverty rampant throughout the coalfields. The committee hoped that the hearings would bring pressure to bear on the local power structure as well as to raise money for striking or blacklisted miners.

After a University of Kentucky archivist sparked my interest in the story, I read extensively about the place and time, about the Communist Party, the unions, the music, the

church. I read most all of Dreiser's published work and talked to people who remembered "the troubles." There was so much that wanted telling, and I took liberties in presuming I could put words in the mouth of Dreiser or Molly Jackson or any of the others.

I was warned once that a writer must not confuse the facts with the truth. Until I started trying to write this play about people who lived a chunk of history in the region where I live and work, the remark passed by me lightly. It does not pass lightly anymore.

Jo Carson is a writer and performer who lives in Johnson City, Tennessee. She is best known for her "People Pieces" which she has performed on National Public Radio and which appeared in Southern Exposure (Vol. X, No. 4, July/August, 1982.)



Southern Historical Collection photo, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.

Excerpt

THE PEOPLE

THEODORE DREISER: The American novelist who wrote *An American Tragedy*, *Sister Carrie* and other now-classic books. By 1932, he was 61 and had already written his best work. He had become a crusader for the working class at the expense of his art.

MOLLY JACKSON: A National Miners Union organizer, a trained nurse, a midwife, and a radical woman. People described her as a woman of such intensity that she was frightening. She was 50, looked older.

JOHN HENRY BLAIR: The sheriff of Harlan County, Kentucky. Miners believed he was kept in office with coal money and rigged voting.

HENRY FOLLETTE, CALLOWAY HOBBS: Unemployed miners.

FROM THE HEARINGS

THEODORE DREISER: My name is Theodore Dreiser and I am here with The Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. We have come to Kentucky to test free speech and the right to assembly, rights guaranteed by the Constitution of this nation, rights which, according to reports, have been ignored in Harlan County...

MOLLY JACKSON: You are here to listen to the stories of the starvin' people and carry 'em out with you so the rest of the world will know we're dyin' here.

DREISER: The Governor of Kentucky has promised there will be no reprisals for anything that is said

at these hearings.

FIRST VOICE: The governor don't live here. Who's gonna be here when you're gone?

MOLLY JACKSON: Molly Jackson will be!

DREISER: We ask that you be as straightforward as possible in your answers to our questions, and in that interest we will ask that you swear on your name that what you say is the truth.

Who will be first?

(Nobody)

MOLLY JACKSON: Talk, you got to talk... You fools! Somebody's got to get up here and start!

CONFESSION AT JOHN HENRY BLAIR'S OFFICE

(John Henry Blair listens. A court clerk writes it down.)

HENRY FOLLETTE: My name is Henry Follette. I am 31 years of age and I was born and reared in Harlan County, Kentucky. I commenced workin' in the coal mines when I was 16 years of age and on September 14, I joined the National Miners Union. I did not know at the time that it was the Communist Party and I was supposed to get other people to join and I did that, and I was workin' in good faith, but now I find out I was only a tool of the Communist Party 'cause the National Miners Union was gonna be turned over to 'em. They teach that there is no God, that a colored man is equal to a white man and that a nigger has the right to marry a white woman. They teach that

Compliments of T.C. Moore



Christ is a myth and there ain't nothin' to the resurrection and that the government of the United States should be destroyed and the Russian government set up here. They teach that. They say that every church in the United States should be thrown in the lake 'cause it's the churches that's holdin' us back. They say they're gonna overthrow the government in eight months. I was misled in joinin' this organization and I want to tell all my friends that it is un-American and absolutely for the purpose of destroyin' the teachin's of Jesus Christ.

CLERK: Is that all?

FOLLETTE: It is.

CLERK: Subscribed and sworn before me this day by Henry Follette.

(Blair starts to exit.)

FOLLETTE: Where's my \$20? *(Blair doesn't respond)*

Dammit. Where's my \$20?

(Blair exits.)

FROM THE HEARINGS

CALLOWAY HOBBS: My name is Calloway Hobbs and I don't live in no company house. I live in a house belonged to my daddy before he died. He died in a mine. That's the way poor men die around here. He left me his house. And my wife keeps a little garden durin' the summer and puts things by so we ain't starvin'.

I'm better off than most, I know that. But my house has been searched four times. There's thugs that come in with guns when you ain't got one — they took all ours already — and they split open mattresses and chairs...

DREISER: What are they looking for?

HOBBS: Papers. They ain't got no warrant, there ain't no bother with a warrant no more, and they stand the children up against the wall and try to get 'em to tell on their daddy.

DREISER: What papers?

HOBBS: To prove I'm workin' for a union, or liter'ature to prove I'm Communist.

DREISER: Did they find them?

HOBBS: I ain't in jail. Four times I been searched, and then my house was shot up. Six of 'em come drivin' by in three cars, one of 'em with a machine gun and they shot up my house.

My wife and children was at her mother's, they would likely died if they'd a been there. And me, first shot come whizzin' by me and I run out the back and up the hill, and I seen 'em sittin' out there in front of my house workin' that machine gun, and I know who done it. Write that down, anybody that wants to. My name is Calloway Hobbs and I know who shot up my house.

FROM THE HEARINGS

MOLLY JACKSON: You could hear some of the worst stories you ever heard, I can tell 'em 'cause I seen 'em and I lived 'em and I helped bury the children I pulled into this world as a granny woman. Bury 'em out in the back yard. Four on a good week, seven on a bad. A grave a day. It's just a little hole though, it's babies we're a-buryin'.

I am a Communist. I belong to the National Miners Union. I am a Communist because I love America, but I do not love the thing the capitalist loves. I do not love money. I love my comrades, my brothers and sisters and their children and the



National Archives Photo

capitalists is killin' 'em in Kentucky. I'd be ashamed to be a capitalist.

Don't go under the mountain again. Don't nobody go under the mountain again till the money stops jinglin' in the operators' pockets, till there ain't no fat on them like there ain't no fat on us, till they ain't got no clothes to keep warm and no shoes. Do you have shoes? Don't go under the mountain again till you get a decent place to live and fair credit for what you load, and if that don't never come, then don't never go under the mountain again!

I'm gonna sing you'uns a song. It come to me and I sung it in New York and Chicago when we was tryin' to raise some money, and I am honored to sing it here at these hearin's held by Mr. Dreiser and this committee.

(She sings "Kentucky Miner's Wife's Hungry Ragged Blues." It is her song. She is intense, electric, she plays in part to Dreiser. This is a performance.)

The coal minin' town I live in is a sad and place,

The coal minin' town I live in is a sad and lonely place,

Where pity and starvation is pictured on ever' face. Some coal operators will tell you the hungry blues are not so bad,

Some coal operators will tell you the hungry blues are not so bad,

They are the worst blues this poor woman ever had.

(Molly Jackson starts to step down. Dreiser offers her a hand. After a moment, she takes it. His gesture is not seductive, there is an admiration in him for strong women. His mother was one.)

DREISER: I didn't get your name.

MOLLY JACKSON: I am Molly Jackson, called Aunt Molly Jackson. Mark it down, ever'body.

(Molly Jackson exits. Dreiser watches her go.) □

Excerpt © 1984 Jo Carson



THAT SERIOUS HE-MAN BALL



Photo by Jim Alexander

A PLAY BY ALONZO D. LAMONT, JR.

Alonzo D. Lamont, Jr. was born in Baltimore, where he lives at the moment. He has also lived in Florida and Washington, D.C. The recipient of numerous awards and grants, the playwright has seen his shows produced from Washington to Venice, California. His work has frequently been staged by Atlanta's Jomandi Productions (see article p. 54). Lamont's plays include *That Serious He-Man Ball*, *21st Century Outs and Back*, and *The Black Play*. He is currently working on a script titled *Good Humor During Bad Monsoons*.

"Every place I've lived in manifests its own dimension," says Lamont. "I

don't think I become that area, or anything so profoundly grandiose, but I do maintain a kind of bohemian mentality because I feel a strange physical abstraction.... It may sound like so much arty terminology but carried out to its logical conclusion it therefore makes perfect sense that the next great American playwright/sculptor/dancer/whatever would rise up out of Juneau, Alaska, for instance. Because so much is made of the media centers, if you're located elsewhere you get that rebel mindlock. I do find the energy that I get around Atlanta and its artistic scene to be quite inspirational. I think the true issue may not be place, as

much as it is finding people who give off a certain exuberance you want to be a part of. Work with Jomandi Productions does that for me — no question!"

In this play, three old friends from the civil rights movement are shooting hoops in their suburban neighborhood and analyzing their dreams in light of their current comfortable way of life. Sky is a social worker. Jello is an artist. Twin works for Xerox Corporation. The men, in their late 20s, play basketball throughout the entire conversation. The play is set in the present.

Excerpt

(Contagious laughter peaks/settles/trails into smaller giggles, then nods of admission, then, a pause.)

SKY: You too much boy. Hell-of-a Jello!

TWIN: Helluvajello!

JELLO: Member high school?

SKY/TWIN: *(Moan)*

SKY: I member when "poverty-look" was all rage. We wore bejesus outta them army fatigues.

TWIN: Never-ever-wash!

JELLO: Humongous Afros! Never-ever-comb!

SKY: And worse — we stank! *(Hoots/howls)*

TWIN: Oh but swore up and down we intimidated folk.

SKY: Militant and a half!

TWIN: *(Growls)*

JELLO: There was this particular phrase that every single

time we spoke it, it always came out exactly same.
(All look to one another. Light bulb goes on in other two heads. All speak simultaneously.)

ALL: ("Ferociously black") White muthafucka! *(All crack into major pieces, each repetition more comic/exaggerated.)*

JELLO: Bus driver pull off/we running for bus —

ALL: White Muthafucka!

SKY: Police hassle us in white neighborhoods —

ALL: White Muthafucka!

TWIN: Store manager wants to check bags when we don't even *have* bags —

ALL: *(Maniacally)* White muthafucka! *(They descend into hilarity and back. There is a pause.)*

SKY: Yessir. That was our heyday.

JELLO: We thought we had a built-in cause with all the trimmings.

TWIN: Ahhh, wait a minute. *(Pauses)* If, memory serves... *(Pauses)* Someone *promised* us a revolution.

SKY: *(Clears dignified voice)* As black student union president, yes I did promise a few "revisions" —

JELLO: No-no, We paid cash-money "dues" for the soon-to-be-happening revolution.

TWIN: I demand a refund.

SKY: Address all inquiries to: Revolutionary Refund Fund, care of Blumberg/Blumenfeld/Leibowitz/and Zeke —

TWIN: I pays my money, I wants my show —

JELLO: Stand guilty!

SKY: There is a toll-free 800 number, call now and get — free — a handsome ginsu pitchfork... *(Sky/Jello enjoy hijinks)*

TWIN: I see... *(He paces, starts twirling ball casually)* Funny. *(Pauses)* This part doesn't seem so la-di-da...

JELLO: What part, Sport?

TWIN: Here. We still paying dues. Really. I want to know where the money went.

SKY: Aww, take a joke and roll with it, buddy-man. Anyway, we got progress now. All kinds of human betterments...let's see now... *(Chuckles)* Betamax. Smurfs. Cabbage Patch Dummies. Fashionable white-collar crime — the list is endless. *(Sky/Jello redo hijinks).*

TWIN: Yes, I'm rolling with it all right. I'm 'bout to be rolled over, that's what you mean.

JELLO: Scrooge.

TWIN: "Take a joke?" Look at us! We are the joke.

SKY: Why Jello. Would you say he's being a tad preposterous.

JELLO: Why Sky. I'd say he is exhibiting boorish behavior,

and needs to be admonished.

TWIN: *(Shooting lay-ups)*

SKY: Agreed! Boy needs a good admonishing — get out the admonisher and start it up!

TWIN: You're the joke, Sky! And you're the joke, Jello! We all are!

SKY: *(His bell rung, he stands.)* Who's "we," Twin, huh —

JELLO: Why you bring your funk down on us, Twin —

TWIN: We. Us. Whatever manhood is left that we're supposedly strutting the fuck around.

SKY: There you go. Crying black. Crying like them griping, mamby-pamps come moping into my office wanting "assistance."

TWIN: *(Makes loud, crude, vulgar act of spitting that starts way in the back of his throat, (like the vagrants make) slams ball to ground.)* That's what I think of the promised revolution. I wish we'd gone on the hell and had it! Just gone ahead and died and gone to some black valhalla-somewhere — stead of living *this!*

JELLO: *(Aside)* Think the man wants his money back, Sky.

TWIN: No, goddamnit I just want my money's worth! *(Pause)* We had a cause! A conflict and where did it go?

SKY: Somebody explain this shit to me please.

JELLO: Not me. *(Retrieves ball, begins shooting lay-ups)*

TWIN: No. You explain the shit to me. Explain hope. Explain progress.

SKY: Twin. Count em: Urban League. The Black Caucus. NAACP. They all still in the game for us.

TWIN: And all got great new strategies every trimester. Ha! Terminologies and mush. Heart of the matter is you drive through any metropolis and you see same sorry sights —

SKY: We have to institute programs —

TWIN: Oh we been *instituted* all right!

JELLO: Hey. Take on anybody, 50 cents a game, c'mon.

SKY: You don't want to know truth.

TWIN: Look in the dictionary under "reduceable," and I bet it says: "i.e. as in black man"

SKY: And you don't want to believe.

TWIN: Don't have to believe. Just screw. Go to church. Go to work. Screw and watch the box.

JELLO: And trust in Santa Claus.

TWIN: Does Santa trust in you?

JELLO: No.

TWIN: What do you believe then?

JELLO: I believe, "In God We Trust." *(Chuckles)*

SKY: Yeah! Come ere boy! (*He/Jello slap high fives*) You believe in greenbacks! You ole slick shyster... (*Pause. Sky/Jello exchange merriments.*)

TWIN: Well. If the beef was only with Santa Claus and Jello the world would be copacetic.

SKY: The floor open to suggestion, Twin. Let's hear it.

TWIN: All right. (*Pauses*) A black mafia. Kidnap some dignitaries. Dicker for some nuclear armaments, work it from there.

SKY: That all?

JELLO: Get Xerox to give him his raise, obviously.

SKY: Of course. How feeble-minded of me to forget.

TWIN: We can't stay where we are, I know that.

SKY: You on dark side, today. What's hurting you big boy.

TWIN: I tell you what's hurting me. (*Moves, throws water on face, sits.*) It's a knot. And it's shaped like a fist and hitting me dead in my chest.

SKY: Ha! — Deal with it then.

TWIN: I deal plenty. But the truth is we living a double hustle. A hex. Whammy.

SKY: I don't want no proximity to anything sounds like defeat. System works. Just ask them Charlie Chans running Jello's 7/11. You got to get your respect and keep charge of it.

JELLO: My offer for sport still on table —

TWIN: Translation: Be a black man, then a man, struggle for both of em. Few I seen could ever handle it. They sure got "charge" of you something fierce, Sky.

SKY: Nobody "got me." I been there and back, don't be backhanding me — Jello, the pill please — (*Claps, gets ball.*) Five straight.

JELLO: (*Positons for rebound*) From there? Dream on.

SKY: Boy using color as a crutch and it is most unbecoming. (*Shoots, misses.*)

TWIN: You so into your man-thing you can't see out of it, Sky. And 50 cents say you miss every last one.

SKY: Hope you got money on you. (*Shoots, misses.*)

JELLO: E.T. come home!

SKY: Me? I'm trying to better my own personal wherewithall in this here universal squalor. I can only handle but so much squalor at a time, unfortunately. (*Shoots, misses.*)

JELLO: Your game a universal squalor — three straight!

TWIN: (*Aside*) Big whoopee, Sky.

SKY: Big-whoopee-Sky, my ass! Life a test! Bang! That's it. We not running corner store, we must not want the fucker hard enough. (*Shoots, misses.*)

JELLO: Four...

SKY: Did I ask Jello! (*Shoots, misses.*)

JELLO: That's strange. A miss.

TWIN: Just imagine... (*Pauses*) The militant Sky I know, evolving into Protestant ethic material. Angel Gabriel take me home... (*Mild chuckles*)

JELLO: Five straight — Home you can't hit air!

SKY: Can so hit air.

JELLO: Regardless. Let us now listen to Jello's equation of life.

TWIN: (*Aside*) I'd rather see Sky hit air.

JELLO: Silence, please. I am about to speak. (*Pause, preps*) I have my art. Therefore, being an artist I try and see life through here — (*Touches heart*) And not here — (*Touches head*) That, my yokels, is the secret of self-coexistence. Keeping clear of the popular dogma and ensuing dogmatics — throw out the Freud, the Carnegie training, the Born Again, the cults (religious and otherwise) —

SKY: And them what don't have their art, Jello?

JELLO: Lettum eat scooter pies! Everybody has their art. Call it what you will, it's there inside them. It may be another form. Another ability, but it's there. Hell man. Life a fast Chinese fire drill. You get in, get out, do your dance and adios Jack! We living this dog-eared Afro-colored experience, and that's all there is to it. It's our second nature.

SKY: We don't have to just be *living* it. We can make it something else. We can effect upon it — we —

TWIN: Awww Sky! — You been reading *The Prophet* or some shit?!

JELLO: My evaluation is: stay outta complexities, major and minor.

SKY: And that's definitely you, Jello.

JELLO: The only *definitely* Sky is that the moon's a balloon.

TWIN: Which are you, J-Man: Barnum or Bailey?

JELLO: Don't patronize. It's you I feel sorry for, Twin. Xerox done given you an extra insanity pill to stomach.

SKY: I'm hip to that. One. They already took the brother's mind.

JELLO: Second: They swiped his b-ball game! (*Throws tricky pass which Twin bobbles. Sky/Jello chuckle.*) (*There is a pause as Twin retrieves. Plays toss with himself.*)

TWIN: Well. I think it's sadly hilarious.

SKY: I do too. Hate to see a black man play that flick-Ted. It brings shame on all of us, does it not Jello?

JELLO: Sadly hilarious, all I can say.

TWIN: What happened to us? (*Pauses*) We finish being rebels and fall right off the face of the planet. "They" finish being hippies and wind up smack back on yellow streets of gold.

SKY: That's sticking in your craw? — Toss the rock!

TWIN: (*Maintains possession*) Why we stop being rebels, anyway?

SKY: Lazy man's talk. — Flip the pill.

TWIN: Am I a lazy man? (*There is silence. Pause. Twin looks to Jello and Sky*)

JELLO: Pass the rock, honey.

SKY: Nobody said you were, Twin.

TWIN: You damn near said as much.

SKY: Cause you talking like you is. What do you want, Twin, huh?

I'd like to hear it, first person.

TWIN: I want same standards for me and you as there is for that elite classification known world round as: "White Males."

SKY: I knew it. Bellyaching black mens. What the fuck you think we living, *Miracle on 34th Street*? — Give up the ball!

TWIN: Why can't we make them live in the same world. Give them same equal opportunity to be —

JELLO: "Zapped. Splat. Dead."

TWIN: And I want the revolution you promised!

SKY: Now baby, baby. (*Shakes head*) You should know, that it's only a paper moon.

TWIN: Is that a dream? Why is that a dream? We can't be rebels. Can't have no revolution. When do we get to assume our rightful place as men on this earth?

SKY: Question your manhood, not nobody else's.

JELLO: C'mon Twin. Let's play ball. Chill out. (*Twin stares at Sky/Jello. Moves alone to basket*)

TWIN: (*Sits on ball*) You want it? Come take it! It's corner store. Come on and take it! Take bad boy, Sky. You a he-man, right? (*Sky moves to Twin, Jello moves between them, in "matador" fashion he halts Sky's onrush with a towel. Sky grabs towel, holds it, throws it down, walks away. Beat passes.*)

TWIN: I thought not.

JELLO: Might not intervene next time, Twin. Give up the ball.

TWIN: I miss it. Yes. Wearing funky-ass clothes. Funky hair. Attitude. Had a damn sight more going for us then, that's for goddamn sure!

SKY: The ball, Twin. Now.

TWIN: We were arrogant. Restless. Shit! Nowadays mister Chuckie look at us like we dead issue. Him and his girlies cruise through downtown like we some sideshow! Like we streetpeople never get the two-martini lunch! Like we got no power!

JELLO: We came to run hoop, Twin, whaddya say?!

SKY: Naw-naw, let him go on that's what he want. Like dudes everywhere, can't get no satisfaction so come

on court and wanna bitch! Get all diseased in their mind and wanna bitch!

TWIN: Bringing some long-ago passion out in the fresh air, buddy!

SKY: Give up the pill or I'ma kick your ass out in the fresh air!

TWIN: (*Laughs*) That reminds me Sky. Yes it does. See, I never hear your voice no more. Nope. I hear an ancient white man telling us to work hard and hustle.

SKY: Listen to this — trying to Perry Mason my case cause some shit didn't go down right for you from high school, now how you sound?

JELLO: We talking a lot of angry English out here. Let's just tone this conversation down.

TWIN: Sky already toned down. Toned his act way down.

SKY: You like the griping niggas come into my office —

TWIN: Toned down so much he gone sour. Don't even know relationship to his own color. Sky think he still black.

SKY: Griping about Mister Cholly like he some kinda voodoo king and they all helpless to his spell.

TWIN: He think he black. I think he a pussy!

SKY: (*Moves on Twin, Jello steps in*) Punkface mother — get outta my way —

TWIN: Worse! Sour Pussy! Chuckie got the grip on you bad!

JELLO: (*Restraining*) Twin will you take that someplace else —

SKY: Too late now —

TWIN: Too late for us — (*He rises*) I leastways know when mine got cut off! I felt it then and I'm damn sure feeling it now. But you —

SKY: You whipped boy — everybody see that — your mind turned over — you like a great big punk getting fucked all in the face —

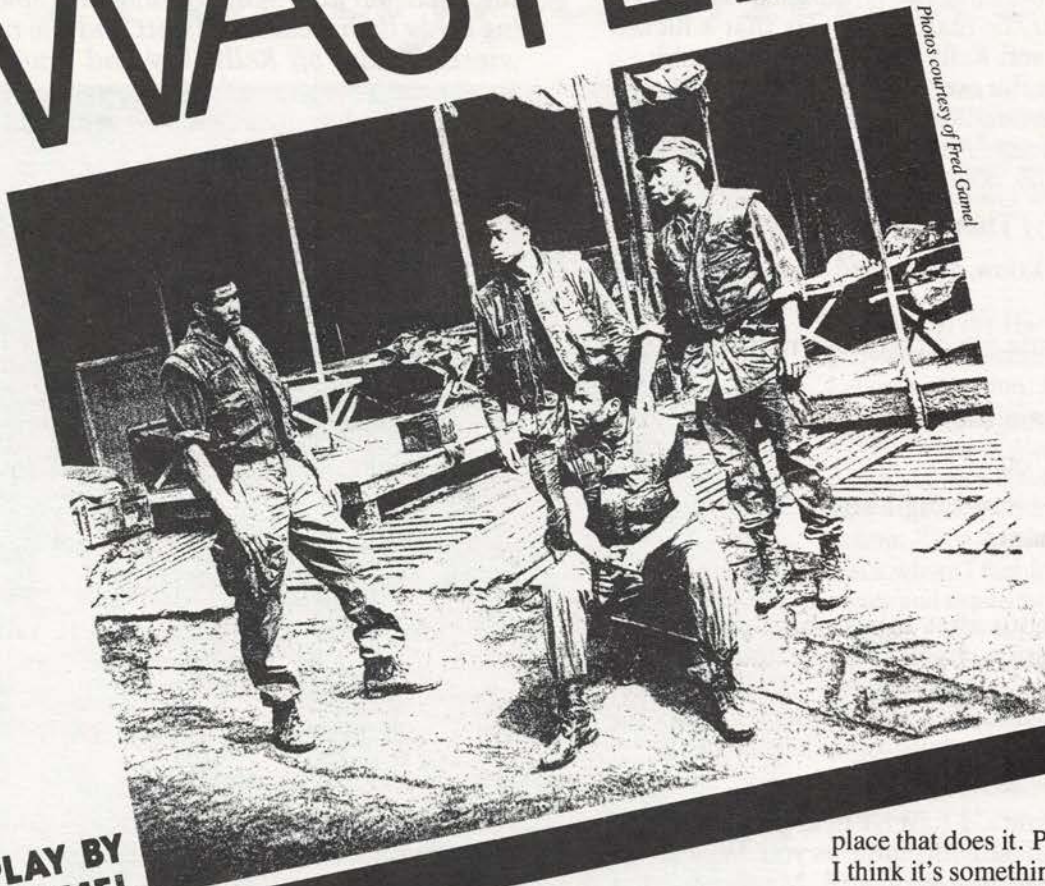
TWIN: You just angry, dickless and still got all common sense free world will allow — you under the spell, Sky!

SKY: Are you gagging on it, Twin? Or does it just slide on down your throat, honey —

TWIN: You got zapped all up your ass and never felt a thing. And why? (*Throws ball at Jello/Sky*) Why don't you feel nothing, Sky! — Why — cause you the worse kinda black nigga eunuch, buddy! Eunuchs don't feel nothing they just get taken over! Buddy, you been raped! (*Sky shoves Jello aside, in a snap, he and Twin are into it thick. Punches are thrown. Jello tries to come between them. In process, becomes a combatant himself. Lights slowly dim, as their silhouettes do battle. A brief final flurry is exchanged as lights die out. The three of them are now sprawled about stage. Lights finally out. The end of Act One.*)

□

WASTED



Photos courtesy of Fred Gamel

Scene from *Wasted* at WPA Theater in New York staged in Spring 1985.

A PLAY BY FRED GAMEL

Fred Gamel was born in Rockmart, Georgia and since he's been grown has been in and out of the state "right regular." His drama *Wasted*, introduced at the 1983 Atlanta New Play Project, was produced by Seven Stages in 1984. It was chosen as the American Theater Critics Association's Best Play of the Year produced outside of

New York, and it was published in *The Burns-Mantle Theater Yearbook* for 1983-84. It was also produced this spring at WPA Theater in New York. Gamel is currently occupied with the people and history of Greensboro, North Carolina.

"I'd have to say that a sense of place is overwhelmingly important. Just 'being' somewhere seems to shape the moment. In the works I've seen that really moved me, it's that reality of

place that does it. Place is paramount. I think it's something a good writer can give an audience that they can take home with them after the play. When we did *Wasted*, we tried to develop in the audience a feeling that they had sand down the back of their necks and mosquito bites on their arms. We also stressed to the cast on stage that in the military when you're in a situation, you can't leave. You're stuck in the place."

Wasted is set among U.S. troops in Vietnam and takes place on the day Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated.

Excerpt

KELLY: Bassett, I just heard some shit I haven't checked out yet, there's been a report that... (*Spider cuts Kelly off, roaring in a rage*).

SPIDER: Hound, I just heard from some brothers in the artillery...aaaahhh!! Goddamn you...just god-

damn you, Kelly! *(Even Kelly is surprised at the rage in Spider's voice.)*

SPIDER: A Report! Fuck you, Kelly. Hey Hound, someone wasted Martin Luther King down in Dixie Land. Blew-the-man-away. The bloods back home are going up against the man everywhere...The government's sending regular troops into the cities and neighborhoods because the fucken brothers have flipped-out. Going up against the man. And here we are...fighting for the man. Now ain't that a fucken blip. Hey, you and Kelly like to shoot the shit so much, shoot the shit over that, motherfucker. *(Spider stalks past Bassett, Kelly and Bassett face each other at center stage. New guys stand clear of Spider, eyes are on Kelly now.)*

BASSETT: *(To Kelly)* That true...about King?

KELLY: Near as I know, happened yesterday or last night...

BASSETT: How come we didn't hear nothing at the firebase?

THOMAS: How come they're keepin' shit from us?

ROY: What's goin' on...?

KELLY: You know everything I know...Mac's gone to get the lieutenant...

THOMAS: Yeah?

BASSETT: What about that other shit Spider's saying...riots and stuff...huh? *(Bassett and new guys step toward Kelly, Kelly's hand moves to pistol holster, then suddenly away. Bassett catches the flickering movement. Kelly is shaken at his reflex move.)*

KELLY: Hey, easy, man. I haven't heard anything yet but second-hand bullshit, same as you. We are still in this goddamned war and Marine Corps together...

SPIDER: *(Shoves past new guys to confront Kelly.)* Well Goddamn! Just listen to the man...you prick, Kelly. You fucken prick! You ought to be partying with your man Drew. I saw your man Drew and he is partying...said I could go to the funeral...said it was damn good shooting...aaahh!!!...Goddamn fucken Drew! *(Spider kicks ammo crate at center stage viciously, turns to Kelly.)*

SPIDER: Go party with your lifer-redneck friends...

KELLY: *(Roars to Spider)* Drew isn't my fucken friend, shithead! Why are you getting so hot, Spider? You were running King down at the firebase...I heard you tell Thomas that King was a Uncle Tom,...that SCLC and the NAACP were all a bunch of Toms...now deny you said that, Spider!

SPIDER: Ain't none of your fucken business..fuck you...asshole!

KELLY: You'd rather fuck with me...I've just about had it with your fucken shit... *(Spider, half-turned from Kelly, pivots and moves toward him.)*

SPIDER: Fuck you! You big gung-ho lifer mother-fucker...think you're John-Fucken-Wayne...I hated your guts the first day I met you...like a cop, telling ever'body what to do...I fucken hate your guts!!! *(Spider leaps to Kelly, swinging wildly, Kelly is surprised and falls to the ground with Spider flailing away on his chest, Bassett and the new guys wrestle Spider off Kelly. Roy and Thomas take Spider to the ground with some difficulty. Acevedo lights a cigarette, watching the scene.)*

SPIDER: *(Spider's resistance is fading into sorrow.)* Hound! They goddamn hate us...can't you see? They act like our buddies, joke and slap our backs...and when our backs are turned they call us niggers and hate our guts...they hate us...and I hate them, I hate every goddamn one of these white motherfuckers!

ROY: *(Holding Spider down, gentle tone.)* Easy, Blood, easy. We know.

KELLY: *(Attempts to move past Bassett to Spider.)* That's it...

BASSETT: *(Blocks Kelly physically.)* I got it, Kelly.

ROY: Calm down, Spider.

BASSETT: *(To Spider)* We'll talk about it, talk about everything. Just be cool one minute. I want to find out what is going on...

KELLY: If you can't cool him down, I will.

BASSETT: Sgt. Kelly, I'll handle this...OK?

KELLY: Hound, I'm sorry about King. I don't know what the fuck to say...but, this is still my squad...

BASSETT: You're sorry...back off! Back the fuck off just a hair, man. We got to talk. Bloods got to talk and...

KELLY: Yeah? And what are the fucken gooks going to do, Hound? Call off the goddamn war while you people have a fucken meeting?

BASSETT: Shit! Kelly, let me take care of this. We need to talk. Blacks. Black Marines. We got to sort things out. Just let me handle this. Just give us a minute...*(Kelly and Bassett lock eyes...)* □



Fred Gamel

A Shayna Maidel



Photo by Bernard Cohen

A PLAY BY BARBARA LEBOW

Barbara Lebow was born in Brooklyn and grew up in Manhattan. She has lived in Atlanta for the last 24 years, working much of that time at the Academy Theatre. Her *A Shayna Maidel*, which she directed on the Academy's First Stage last season, is the winner of national awards and was selected in 1985 to be published in the "Plays in Process" series by the New York-based Theater Communications Group. The work was successfully

A refugee from a Nazi concentration camp, Lusia (Shawna McKellar) arrives in America and ponders whether to don the Western dress worn by her sister (Mary Jo Ammon) and her father (Frank Wittow).

mounted by the Hartford Stage Company last November and, again under Lebow's direction, on the Academy's main stage this past April.

"The sense of place in terms of Atlanta is very powerful to me because I have the security of home," says Lebow. "The Academy Theatre is the place where I feel free to explore and create and experiment. Maybe it's because I have such a strong sense of place in my personal life that I tend to translate my own sense of reality into my plays. The place, in large part, is responsible for the character.

"If you don't have a sense of place, whatever your place is, then you won't know the elements of creating or describing any other place. When I go to see a play, part of what I'm hoping for is that I will walk into a new world. That's what I try to do as a writer. If it's not a place that I know and have lived in myself, I spend a lot of time in research, capturing those tangible, intangible things — the geography, the smells, the sounds, the feel of a place."

A Shayna Maidel is the story of a Jewish family which was separated when the father, Mordecai, escaped from Poland with his daughter Rose just before World War II. The mother stayed behind with their other daughter Lusia. The mother was killed in a concentration camp. Lusia survived. The play examines her arrival in the United States to reunite with her father and sister. The following scene takes place in Rose's apartment while the sisters are waiting for Mordecai's arrival. Rose has given Lusia some Western clothes to try on.

(Tuesday afternoon. A '40s song is heard on the radio in the blackout. The lights come up in the bedroom and in the living room, where Rose is pacing and calling to Lusia, who is in the bedroom.)

ROSE: Hurry up and let me see!

LUSIA: *(offstage)*: Not right. Is mistake!

ROSE: Well at least let me see! *(Rose sits on the sofa. As she waits impatiently, Lusia is coming into the bedroom very slowly, facing directly toward the audience and looking at herself in the unseen mirror. She is uncomfortable, wearing a modish dress and shoes, which fit well but look out of place on her. She wobbles on the shoes.)*

LUSIA: You stay. I come in there. Don't laugh. Is big mistake. Should be wearing this, Ginger Rogers. *(Lusia comes unsteadily into the living room. Rose jumps up, pleased.)*

ROSE: Well, call up Fred Astaire! You look great! Turn around. It's perfect. Very American. All we need to do is fix your hair and you'll look like you were born here.

LUSIA: Was born in Poland, like you.

ROSE: *(Turning off radio)*: But, don't you want to look like you belong, Lusia?

LUSIA: *(Her hand on her chest)*: When feeling here I am home, then I look like belonging more. Before war I have pretty dresses Mama made. I get some again when I can buy myself. No more from you. Everything you want to give me. Already such a present and your bed, even I sleep in. Yesterday before...

ROSE: The day before yesterday.

LUSIA: Yes. You bring me with to movie all day. Ginger Rogers. Cost a lot money. And food, food, food. All the time giving me to eat. And now clothes. No. Is too much. I get it myself.

ROSE: But you have nothing. Everything was taken.

LUSIA: You don't took it. I have suitcase, clothes from Red Cross. Same what everyone get. Soon one day, I go pick out new something. In store. And it has on it .. what tell how much...

ROSE: A price tag.

LUSIA: A price tag on. No one wore it yet. *(Rose looks at Lusia quietly for a while.)*

ROSE: At least let me fix your hair, OK? Won't cost a penny. You won't know yourself. *(She sits Lusia on a chair, begins fussing over her hair)* I'm real good at this, I promise. Everyone at work thinks I get it done, but I always do mine myself. And I know you want to look your best for Papa. Now, don't worry, there's plenty of time. After he finishes at the store, he'll have a shave and maybe get his suit pressed, even though it doesn't need it, and get a shoeshine,

too. Papa's always turned out like a gentleman. Sit still.

LUSIA: Rayzel, letters coming through front door say for Miss Rose White.

ROSE: I changed it, but not really. It's an exact translation.

LUSIA: Why?

ROSE: Just to sound like everyone else. For instance, you could change your name to Lucy.

LUSIA: What your father thinks to change his name, Weiss to White?

ROSE: His isn't changed. I've never told him I use the other. He probably wouldn't like it.

LUSIA: To change the name don't make you safe, anyway.

ROSE: *(Cheerfully brittle)*: What do you mean?

LUSIA: Someone knows Rose White is Rayzel Weiss, no matter. A new name doesn't make no difference.

ROSE: But that's not why—

LUSIA: They come take you when they want.

ROSE: It's just easier this way. I don't have to spell it for people.

LUSIA: Even you should wear a cross around neck, they know who you are. Always with Jewish, they find out the truth.

ROSE: *(Shaky, making an effort at being light)*: The truth is...your hair is all finished. Come and see. *(Rose and Lusia go to the bedroom "mirror." Rose stands back as Lusia looks at herself with an expression of surprise, pleasure, and bewilderment.)*

LUSIA: If I go in street like this—

ROSE: A very attractive young woman.

LUSIA: If Duvid walk near me, he wouldn't know who I am!

ROSE: But you would know him.

LUSIA: Maybe he different, too. Thin or hair falls out, maybe. Or hurt and walks different.

ROSE: But certainly before the war—

LUSIA: Before they take Duvid, already things was bad. Hungry all the time, sickness, everyone frightened. And this was six years ago. I am still a girl your age in little place, not big city. No Ginger Rogers yet. Already I look too much different only from time. I want Duvid should know me, or a friend of him he shows a picture, maybe.

ROSE: *(Sighing)*: I see.

LUSIA: Thank you for pretty dress and shoes and for try to make me look pretty, too. After I find — *(Doorbell. Lusia looks about, panicked, runs off into bathroom. Rose stares after her. The bell and knocking continue.)*

ROSE: Just a minute, Papa. I'm coming. □

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Hospice

A Play by Pearl Cleage

Pearl Cleage was born in Springfield, Massachusetts and grew up in Detroit. She majored in play writing at Spelman College when she moved to Atlanta in 1969. Playwright-in-residence at Atlanta's Just Us Theater Company for four seasons, Cleage saw her works *Hospice* and *Banana Bread* produced there last November. The 1983 production of *Hospice*, at New York's New Federal and Colonade Theaters, was awarded five AUDELCO awards (honoring off-Broadway achievement for minority playwrights).

"I grew up in the North, but my grandparents were all Southern — from Alabama and Tennessee," says Cleage. "Still, I feel a sense of place is less geographically specific for me than it is racially specific. As a black person living in Atlanta, you have a sense that the black population is embodied in every phase of the city's life. I'm more

interested in living here than I am in a place like Seattle, where such a small percentage of the population is black. It just gives me a sense of safety and security — for my life and my writing — to be living in a majority-black environment.

"My primary audience is black. And my plays depend on people being in that setting more than they do on a Southern or Northern location. I think white writers think of themselves regionally. I think the primary identification of black writers is racial."

Hospice is a play about a mother, Alice, and her daughter, Jenny. Alice, a poet, left her daughter and her husband when Jenny was 10 years old and went to Paris to escape the prison of American racism. She has returned home dying of cancer and finds her daughter anxious for some answers as she, Jenny, awaits the birth of her first child. This section of the play, on the next page, is taken from its ending.



PEARL CLEAGE

 Excerpt

ALICE: I have drawn no conclusions. I have made no judgments. You are free to do whatever you please.

JENNY: At what price?

ALICE: We all have to pay for something.

JENNY: Why can't you just be my mother for once and not some world-weary, wisecracking, black caricature of a cynical expatriate?

ALICE: I am being your mother. This is what your mother is, Sister. A world-weary, wisecracking black caricature of a cynical expatriate.

JENNY: (*quietly*) That is not the answer.

ALICE: Don't try for answers, Sister. You don't even understand the questions.

JENNY: That's where you're wrong!

ALICE: Am I?

JENNY: Yes, you are. I understand all the questions. Every single one. (*a beat*) Right after you left, Daddy sent me away to boarding school. He thought I needed...I don't know...stability, safety. There had been bombings, threats on his life. So he sent me off to Massachusetts where I'd be safe. I knew he was doing the best he could, so I didn't tell him how much I hated it. I thought that if he really loved me, he would know. Somehow, he would feel it and come and get me. (*a beat*) But he never did. (*a beat*) That's one of the questions, isn't it? How come people that love you can't read your mind?

ALICE: Why should they?

JENNY: So that they can love you better!

ALICE: There is no better or worse, Sister. You either do or you don't.

JENNY: You make choices.

ALICE: (*outraged*) Choices? Okay, Sister. Take a look! My parting gift to you is a close-up look at the end result of all those choices you're talking about with such enthusiasm. Choices? Take a good long look at me and save your reaction to this terrible truth for the labor room. You can scream about the injustice of it all in there and nobody will pay you the slightest bit of mind. All the ladies do it. They'll never know that your screaming is different. That yours isn't about the pain of your bones separating to let your daughter out. That yours is about the presence of injustice in the world! They'll never suspect a thing. And it doesn't really matter anyway. In spite of their feigned interest, nobody else really gives a damn if you do your birthing and your living and your dying well, or if you shriek and holler and cling to the nurse's arm.

JENNY: You left me!

ALICE: I did not see my future as the dedicated wife of the charismatic leader, dabbling in a little poetry, being indulged at cultural conferences and urged to read that one about the beautiful brothers and sisters in Soweto, or Watts, or Montgomery, Alabama. I couldn't just be that. The world is bigger than that. The world inside my head is bigger than that. Even now...I used to watch your father at rallies and in church on Sunday morning, and he'd be so strong and beautiful it was all I could do to sit still and look prim in my pew. But he was committed to "the movement." He didn't have time any more to lay in bed with me and improvise. I'd been a wife since I was 17 and here I was almost 30, with a 10-year-old daughter, trying to convince your father to let me publish some love poems! But he couldn't. Or he wouldn't. The kind of love he had to give me now didn't allow for that. And I couldn't do without it. So I left. Not much of a story is it?

JENNY: I could have gone with you. I was old enough.

ALICE: I can tell you the day, the hour, the minute you were conceived. (*a beat*) I couldn't stand to look at you. (*changes her tone*) And I'm selfish! You said it yourself. What was I going to do in Paris with a 10-year-old child? Besides, you were always more your father's child than you ever were mine.

JENNY: I didn't have much choice, did I?

ALICE: Neither did I, Sister. Neither did I. I've spent my life trying to heal a hurt I'm not supposed to have. I got so tired of being trapped inside that tiny little black box. No air, Sister. I couldn't get any air. Everybody was mad at somebody, or about something. (*a beat*) My mother spent her life catching the bus downtown to The Anis Fur Company. Sitting there in that hot little back room sewing purple silk linings in rich white ladies' sable coats. I went there with her once when I was little. There must have been 30 black women in a room smaller than this one. It was hot and dusty and close. I felt like I was smothering. (*a beat*) No air, Sister. No god-damn air.

JENNY: Daddy never wanted that.

ALICE: No. He wanted exactly what I was looking for. A way out of that black box. It's just that I was prepared to admit defeat and let the white folks have this particular piece of ground since they wanted it so bad. But your father was different. He was not prepared to give an inch. He was always talking about survival and I was always talking about love. □

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A PLAY BY DALT WONK

Born in New Jersey, Dalt Wonk served his theatrical apprenticeship in New York and London.

"I came to New Orleans without any purpose 13 years ago and I stayed," says Wonk. "I have lived all that time in the French Quarter, which is the set-

ting for *Spiritual Gifts*. My first apartment was a ground-floor slave quarter. The moisture would soak upward in the brick walls, like lamp oil in a wick. I think a sense of New Orleans entered the writing in the same way: gradually and pervasively."

Spiritual Gifts won second place in the Beverly Hills Theater Guild National Play Competition. It was produced on the main stage of the Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, in 1985.

Excerpt

EMILE: Never mind. (*He throws a handful of circulars into a litter basket and rubs his hands in a finicky manner.*) A continental restaurant, they call themselves! The print on these circulars is so cheap, it comes off on the palm of your hands.

No wonder they need a person like myself standing in front to try and entice these Midwestern tourists.

Now the Europeans, a different story altogether, my friend. I hand them a circular. I say a few words. Many stop and enter. I put them at their ease, you see. I lend the establishment credibility.

But these Midwesterners. The Maitre d' has their number. "They come into town with a \$10 bill and the 10 commandments and they don't break either one."

I heard him say that, the other day. I laughed heartily.

He's an Austrian, you know, the Maitre d'. Used to an entirely different class of clientele.

He was the one who hired me. Right on the spot. "You'll do," he said. You could feel an instant rapport.

Of course, I've never had the chance to talk with him as I'd like. He's so busy. Always a wave, just a wave, in passing.

We would have built up a terrific friendship, I'm sure, if we could have spoken.

CLAY: Where were you last night, Emile?

EMILE: Speaking of \$10 bills. Speaking of currency.

CLAY: Where were you?

EMILE: I went to the Whitney Bank this morning, early this morning, and do you know what I found — to my amazement?

CLAY: You were with someone.

EMILE: I found to my amazement all the money had been withdrawn.

CLAY: You were with someone last night, Emile.

EMILE: I met a companion, yes. A wandering young man. A modern troubadour, I would call him. With broad interests, broad horizons. We spent the night in conversation, my young companion and I. We rambled from topic to topic.

Toward daybreak, we walked over to the levee. It was almost cool. The moisture from the river. We sat on a bench.

CLAY: You went home with him?

EMILE: Home? The world is his home, my friend. I left him there, just as the sun was coming up, curled on the bench, sleeping the sleep of the angels.

CLAY: Stinking drunk, probably.

EMILE: We shared a bottle of wine. But drunk, no. Not on alcohol. On communication, yes. When is the last time you and I communicated? Never, that's when. Never in our lives.

CLAY: No one means as well to you as I do, Emile.

EMILE: Is that why you withdrew our money?

CLAY: I knew you was going to try again. I knew it. When you never showed up, I went down to the bank first thing and I took out the money, before you could get to it. I wasn't having you throw it away. Not again. I knew inside of myself and I was right.

EMILE: Some of that is my money.

CLAY: No, it ain't. It ain't yours or mine. It's ours together.

EMILE: I would like to collect my share.

CLAY: The last time, you took it all and you lost it all. That young boy you made friends with, you were going away with him to Key West, Florida. But you didn't go anywhere. The young boy went and the money went.

And the time before that, it was Galveston and working on rich people's boats. And the time before that, I don't remember what all it was.

EMILE: Are you going to give me my share?

CLAY: I earned this money, nearly every red cent of it, right there in that elevator, but it's ours together.

EMILE: Are you trying to prevent me by force? Then I pity you, my friend.

CLAY: I'm keeping it for us.

EMILE: I never thought you would stoop this low. *(Emile turns sulkily, Clay watches him a moment, reflecting.)*

CLAY: It's that job, ain't it, Emile. Something happened on that job.

EMILE: Oh really. Now he has become a clairvoyant.

CLAY: Something happened on that job. Same as all them other times. There was always something happened.

EMILE: There was not. There was not always something. Do I look that pathetic to you? Is it beyond your understanding that I might have other things in mind than standing on the sidewalk all day, handing out advertizing circulars? That I might have broader horizons?

CLAY: Tell me what happened, Emile.



Scene from Dalt Wonk's play *Spiritual Gifts*

EMILE: Impossible, you're like a child. The same thing over and over.

CLAY: I ain't giving you no money.

EMILE: And what if I go ahead and leave anyway? If I just leave. With my young acquaintance. He gave me an address. In San Diego. A seaman's mission. We have plans. What if I go and meet him there?

CLAY: Then, go on.

EMILE: What did you say?

CLAY: If that's what you want so bad. Only this time, don't come back. Don't show up the next morning with that sorry look and all our money gone. This is for good, Emile. *(Clay takes the money out of his pocket and starts counting it.)*

EMILE: What are you doing? Have you lost your mind?

CLAY: I'm counting out your share.

EMILE: On Canal Street, in broad daylight?

CLAY: Fifty-fifty, that's the deal.

EMILE: What about the criminal element? Let's go in somewhere. Talk. Discuss this thing like mature adults.

CLAY: I can't go nowhere. I can't chance losing my job. *(Frustrated, he hands over all the money.)* Here. Take it all, then. I don't care.

EMILE: I don't want it all.

CLAY: Take it.

EMILE: Half of that is yours.

CLAY: *(beside himself)* Take it, Emile, you bastard, take it! *(Emile does not take the offered sum.)* You won't. You ain't going nowhere. Face it. You don't have the guts.

EMILE: Oh, now you've done it. Now you've really gone and done it.

CLAY: *(gentler)* I can't stand it no more, Emile, that's all. Don't say you're leaving, that's all.

EMILE: I hope you're satisfied.

CLAY: I didn't mean to yell. All that talk got to me.

EMILE: That's all well and good.

CLAY: If you just told me what happened, Emile, to get you upset. If you just told me, like always.

EMILE: Not that it has anything to do with it — yesterday evening, I did have a ... an unpleasant exchange with the Maitre d'.

I was engaged in conversation with some French tourists — a charming young couple. And the Maitre d' walked over and proceeded to upbraid me for ... no, rather to chide me, upbraid is too strong a word. He merely chided me slightly on my appearance. He asked in fact if this was the only suit I owned. I laughed naturally. And the French couple laughed as well. It was such an extraordinary remark. □

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MISTER *Universe*

A PLAY BY JIM GRIMSLEY



Besides featuring Southern playwrights and excerpts from their plays [see articles beginning p. 83], *Southern Exposure* sponsored a play-writing contest in conjunction with the publication of this special issue on Theater in the South. Our judges picked two scripts from over 50 that were submitted: *Potato Girl* by Christine Rusch and *Mr. Universe* by Jim Grimsley. Since *Potato Girl* is a short one-act play, we have included the complete text. Two excerpts only from *Mr. Universe* have been included because of its length and our limited space.

"I was born in eastern North Carolina," says Jim Grimsley, "and lived in New Orleans and now in Atlanta. I write about the people I know. I write about poor and working-class people. I couldn't write about rich people or even the upper middle class because I don't know them. I write about the people I do know."

Grimsley's *Mr. Universe* will be produced next year at Seven Stages in Atlanta. *Mr. Universe* is his sixth produced play. Others have been stage by Atlanta companies. He has published short stories in *Carolina Quarterly* and other literary magazines.

Mr. Universe is a play about outcasts. In a run-down apartment building on Esplanade Avenue in New Orleans, four neighbors share a night of events that results in the destruction of all their lives, beginning when two drag queens (Judy, Drag Queen One, and Vick, Drag Queen Two) find wandering in the streets a mute muscle man, apparently having been beaten up. With the help of their friend, Katy Jume, a wild, tough beauty who lives downstairs from the drag queens, they take the Muscle Man home, bandage his wounds, and try to decide what to do with him.

Excerpt 1

In this first excerpt Katy and Drag Queen Two are talking in the living room while Drag Queen One is changing clothes. Katy tells what happened to her that day.

KATY: Girl did I tell you I was hired to do me a commercial? Yes ma'am, just like that Brooke Shields. On TV. Don't look at me like I'm crazy, I'm not lying. (*Exits to the kitchen but continues talking.*) I'm going to be the Mammarmismo Girl. You know what that is? The Mammarmismo Exercise Bra? Lord they gave me one and I thought it would pinch me to death. Got these big wires across it. I told them I would take the job but damn if I wear one of them ugly things except on the commercial. You ought to get you one, maybe it would develop you some breast.

TWO: I don't want no breasts I can't drop in a drawer.

KATY: You mean you don't want a fine set of these here like I have.

TWO: Noo sweetheart.

KATY Anyway, I be standing in front of the camera and I have on this big bra, honey, and the tops of my boobs is all pooched out, and I pucker my lips and say, "Mammarismo the Exercise Bra, the Bra with the Squeeze that Pleases." Can you hear me? "Mammarismo, the Exercise Bra, the Bra with the Squeeze that Pleases." And I got a scarf around my neck and the wind just blowing and blowing from this big nasty fan they got set up. I believe I'll get me some dark glasses too. I be standing there with nothing on but these dark glasses and a big bra. You never seen anything like it. I will be more fine than fine.

TWO: Don't get that cake on my floor.

KATY: You don't hold no truck with me honey, this floor is already filthy. If you stand still too long the roaches be crawling up your legs.

TWO: When do you do this commercial?

KATY: What commercial? Oh yeah. I don't know. They call sometimes tomorrow or the next day. I make \$500 in one day if you can believe it, and I get my hair done free. They gave me a bra too and I'm going to fasten it to the wall and use it to hold up my bookshelf where I keep my magazines. I read *Star Weekly*. You ever read that? Girl you can find out everything. I read about this woman who had a

monkey for a baby because she got the wrong sperm. Some kind of sperm or something. Can you believe that? She was getting artificial disseminated and had a monkey. I say it serve her right. Nobody going to stick any needle in my sweet cake, no no no. I'm not having a monkey for a baby for nobody, I don't care how smart that monkey is. Bad enough having a baby for a baby.

TWO: Do you have a baby?

KATY: I got a little girl, she live with her Grandmama.

TWO: I got a little son.

KATY: Who do you think you're talking to?

TWO: No, I really do. His name William Zachry. He lives with his Mama.

KATY: You really are serious.

TWO: I was married for about three years. Yes ma'am. Back when I was a real man.

KATY: What did you do with your wife to get that baby?

TWO: What do you think I did with her?

KATY: You mean you did just like a man does?

TWO: Katy, sweetheart, I'm not missing any parts. It's not all that complicated.

KATY: But I didn't think people like you could do that stuff with a woman.

TWO: Honey, a monkey could do it if he set his mind to it. If he could get over how funny looking you was.

KATY: Was your wife funny looking?

TWO: No, she was pretty. This blonde hair like you would kill for, and big thick lips, and she was pink colored all over, like a little lollipop.

KATY: Did you like her?

TWO: I loved her. But I got tired of having to try so hard. It was too much after a while.

KATY: What make you like men after her?

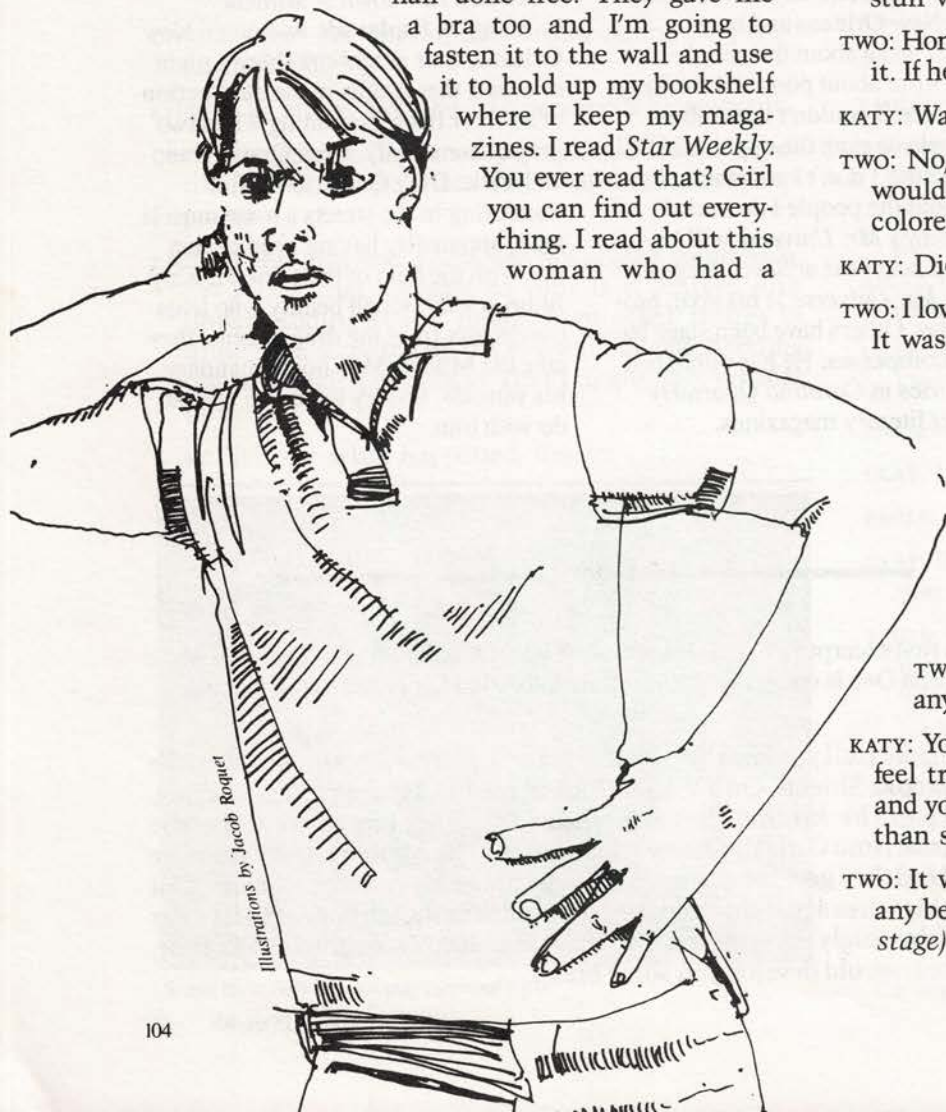
TWO: I liked men before, during and after her, that was the whole problem.

KATY: If my men ever tell me they like men better than me I cut they little head off right there. I mean it. I never did it yet, but I would. I could kill somebody for tricking me like that.

TWO: Why would it be a trick? I won't tricking anybody.

KATY: You must be crazy. You don't think your wife feel trick, sitting there home with that youngun and you out here spending more money on clothes than she does.

TWO: It wasn't like a trick, it was like I didn't know any better and neither did she. *(One calls from off-stage)*



ONE: Come in here and help me unhook this gown.

KATY: And you carrying on with something like that.
Your little child ever come to see you?

TWO: Sometimes. *(To One)* I'll be there in a minute.

KATY: You take him out to the bars with you?

TWO: Fuck off Katy, what do you think?

Excerpt 2

In this second excerpt the drag queens argue about what to do with the Muscle Man while Katy watches.

ONE: Why don't you sit down in his lap? Why don't you just crawl all over him since he likes you so much?

TWO: Did it ever occur to you he might be scared? He's been wandering around, got beat up, can't talk and Lord knows what else. We don't even know who he is or where he's from.

ONE: I'm not interested in his identity problems.

TWO: All you know how to do is try to be funny. *(To the Muscle Man)* Don't worry, I won't let them put the wig on you any more.

KATY: I didn't put any wig on anybody, you leave me out of this.

ONE: This girl is gone on this man, this young woman has lost her mind.

TWO: I'm not a bit crazier tonight than I was this morning.

ONE: Oh no honey. Now you have met the man of your dreams.

TWO: I have not laid a hand on this man except to put on his bandages and wash off his blood. You're just jealous because he likes me and mad because I won't let you play with him like he was a puppy.

ONE: Here is this handsome young man in our apartment who will do anything she tells him to do and suddenly she is the Mother Superior of Dumaine.

TWO: I wish you knew how sick you sound.

ONE: But what's wrong with that? This is a gift from God, this doesn't happen every day. Don't be a prude. You can't look a gift horse in the mouth as they say, not when it's a horse like this. *(Goes toward the Muscle Man.)*

TWO: Leave him alone.

ONE: You must be joking.

TWO: If you lay one hand on him I will pull every hair out of your head.

ONE: You really mean it.

TWO: You will be able to fry eggs on your head.

ONE: I'm over 21 dear, and unless I miss my guess so is he.

TWO: I'm bigger than you are.

ONE: Get out of my way.

TWO: I'll break your nose.

ONE: I'll scratch your whole face off. *(They come as close to having a physical fight as possible without committing to it. Finally One breaks up laughing.)*

ONE: This doesn't make any sense.

TWO: You'll think it's real funny when I put your suitcases on the street.

ONE: Don't start that shit.

TWO: I'm not playing with you.

ONE: I could understand if we were fighting over who's going to get him. But I don't see why at least one of us couldn't fuck him since he's here.

KATY: You don't have any babies of your own, do you Judy?

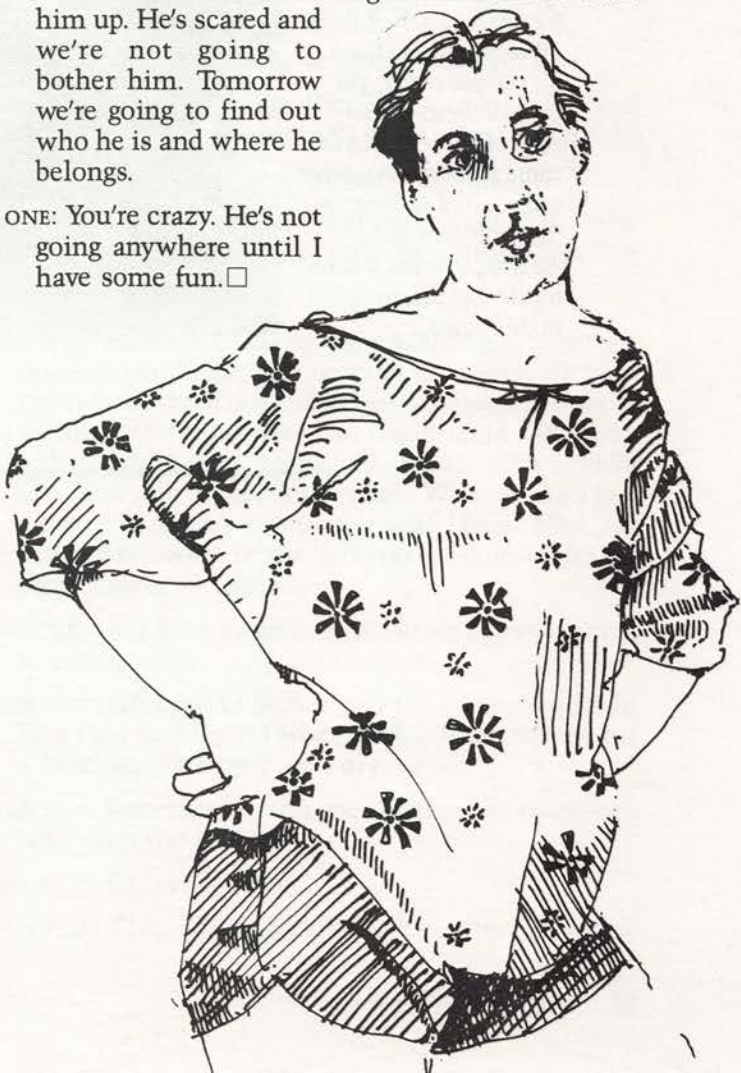
ONE: What?

KATY: You don't have any children do you? You ain't never took care of nothing but you.

ONE: What in the fuck are you talking about? I ain't said nothing about no baby. I just want to know what in the hell we brought him home for if we're going to treat him like a vestal virgin.

TWO: He was hurt and we brought him home to clean him up. He's scared and we're not going to bother him. Tomorrow we're going to find out who he is and where he belongs.

ONE: You're crazy. He's not going anywhere until I have some fun. □



A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY CHRISTINE RUSCH

Potato Girl

Christine Rusch lives in Greenville, North Carolina. The author of more than a dozen produced plays, she is co-founder of the Playwrights' Fund of North Carolina, Inc.

"A sense of place affects my writing because action cannot be structured in a vacuum," says Rusch. "A sense of place is the context in which my characters live out the life segments they let me share. Each of them views the world from his unique place; yet each of them — and each of us — shares the same place: a very large stage, all of us beset by the problems and delights of what it is to be alive at this moment, in this place."



Illustration by Jacob Rogner

Excerpt

Cast of Characters: *Narcilla Jones:* A potato sorter in her late teens. *Dorothy Whitely:* A potato sorter in mid-20s. *Hank Lacey:* The bossman and Dorothy's boyfriend.

Scene: A potato warehouse in the American South. *Time:* The present. *Setting:* We are in a bleak, too-large farm building used as a potato warehouse. There are two crates, seating for the women. One of the crates has a mat. There is potato space between the crates. *At Rise:* It is early morning. Dorothy enters, dragging a bushel of potatoes to the padded crate. She sinks to the mat. Narcilla follows, dragging her bushel of potatoes to the other crate. Narcilla slowly takes her seat.

DOROTHY: Don't it matter, you always gettin the hard one?

NARCILLA: Uh uh.

DOROTHY: I always figger one time I'll come in here late and you'll have this here mat, with me havin to set on the hard one.

NARCILLA: Uh huh.

DOROTHY: Are you listenin?

NARCILLA: Uh huh.

DOROTHY: Well, why ain't you never beat me to my place?

NARCILLA: I like this one fine. *(Pause.)*

DOROTHY: Oh..Well, wait'll you been knocked around some, girl. Had you some kids. See if you don't look out for them soft places like a hound looks to suck eggs.

NARCILLA: Ain't on the way again?

DOROTHY: Does a polecat stink?

NARCILLA: How far?

DOROTHY: Dunno. Usta be ableta tell. Felt so crappy after my second one, haven't kept my time straight since... Get yourself fixed up and you might could turn a boy.

NARCILLA: I ain't tryin.

DOROTHY: You tellin me! Girl, one thing is stuffins. First place they look, and ain't no way you gonna get any with a front like that.

NARCILLA: I said I ain't tryin.

DOROTHY: Stuffins, now. They got em reasonable. Seen em in that there catalogue they got in the shit house... *(She stops suddenly in her work.)* Damn if it ain't a stone.

NARCILLA: Can I hold it?

DOROTHY: What you want with a rock? Oh yeah, you ain't had none. I forgot. *(Laughs.)*

NARCILLA: Look just like a real potato. Don't it? Just like it. If you wasn't fixin to eat it.

DOROTHY: Yeah, be like eatin them rubber pork chops down't the Seven Day Advertisers. Gracion Smithers, she doin service there and she says they eat pork chops what's made of rubber. Or plastic. Ain't proper meat, leastways.

NARCILLA: I'd take one a these here rock taters. Pretty, and they wouldn't get all squishy.

DOROTHY: Get on girl. They'll be pickin all mornin, fore the rain.

NARCILLA: *(Returns to sorting.)* I seen flowers a plastic.

DOROTHY: I got me some. Red and blue. Stuck em along the walk. Right pretty. Every time the snow'd melt, there they was, red and blue as ever.

NARCILLA: *(Looking out the window.)* Cloudin up.

DOROTHY: They ain't gonna get done fore the rain. Short now, bein as Jake's got hisself busted.

NARCILLA: Jake?...Why?

DOROTHY: Don't you know nothin, girl? They broke in, caught em all workin, took his plates and all. He's settin in Columbus waitin for his trial. And Sarah don't know how she's gonna feed all them kids.

NARCILLA: Jake don't pick good anyhow.

DOROTHY: Yep. Don't know why they call it counterfeit when it'll get you milk and beans. Now me, I feed my kids good...You seen them Sugar Frosted Fruities? Finished up two boxes just yesterday. You seen em?

NARCILLA: Went for a walk on lunch break yesterday. Seen three of em settin on the wall. Figured Clyde was home sleepin.

DOROTHY: Sugar Frosted Fruities, girl. You ever seen em?

NARCILLA: I ain't much for noticin names of stuff.

DOROTHY: Purty as you could think after. Red, green, blue, yellor...they don't fade out. Clyde, he gits down there't the floor, so's he kin grab them stragglers.

NARCILLA: What are they? The Frosties. Do you know what they are?

DOROTHY: Fruities, girl. Sugar Frosted Fruities. That's all.

NARCILLA: What'd they taste like? *(Pause.)*

DOROTHY: Think I'd eat that shit? ...Good for em, though. I feed em good...Got me a new table set.

NARCILLA: *(Looking out window.)* Uh huh.

DOROTHY: You know what you make me? Sick. Why ain't you listenin to me, girl? I'm talkin to ya.

NARCILLA: I was just...

DOROTHY: Starin out that window. Lookit you. Ain't got no chest on ya, ain't got no man, ain't even got your taters half sorted out...and there ya go starin out the window. *(Narcilla works to catch up.)* I can't even tell which is your bakin and stuffin, your middle size, and your whole boilin pile... What the hell you doin, tryin to get me in trouble with Hank? Now you just tell me what in the hell you are doin with that there basket of taters.

NARCILLA: I...I have to go awhile before I know which is which.

DOROTHY: Oh Lord in heaven, all the stinkass girls in Paw Paw, and I gotta work with a bitch what's got a head what's empty as a dry moon.

NARCILLA: Sometimes I seen one and thought it was big, till I seen the next...

DOROTHY: Crazy as a coot.

NARCILLA: This...This here's for bakin, this one's mid-

dle, this here's whole boilin...and the rocks go here.

DOROTHY: Well, that's better. My new table, now...If it was here, you could fit alla your piles, and alla mine on it.

NARCILLA: Must be right big.

DOROTHY: Course it is. Alluv us kin set down't it t'gether. When Hank's there, we even got place fer him.

NARCILLA: What's it look like?

DOROTHY: Well, if you was to look at it, you swear it's



In 1982 Barbara Gilmore and Heidi Anderson Lane performed in *Potato Girl* at the Best Lunch Theatre Ever in Greenville, NC.

wood. But if you was to rub yer hand against the top, it don't leave no splinter. Yep, one a the girls was changin Clyde on it just last night, and he ain't got no butt fulla wood slivers now, no sir.

NARCILLA: Sounds right pretty. I'm glad for ya.

DOROTHY: No you ain't... Gold. Got a strip a gold round it, too. All the way around it. Don't you be tellin me you don't want it fer yourself.

NARCILLA: *(Stares out window.)* I ain't got but myself.

DOROTHY: There. All done. Looky here, you ain't but half

done, and I'm all done. *(Narcilla continues to stare out window. Enter Hank, dragging another bushel of potatoes.)*

HANK: Here's some more... *(To Dorothy:)* Well, ain't we feelin good this mornin.

DOROTHY: Hank...

HANK: Damn if you coulda felt like it last night.

DOROTHY: Hank...I...

HANK: Shut up and get busy. Fore the rain. Giver a little and she figgers she kin talk er way outa workin... *(To Narcilla:)* What d'ya see out there, bug eyes? *(He puts his hand on Narcilla's shoulder.)* Willie Joe seen er out walkin, starin, walkin some more.

NARCILLA: Almost done, Hank.

HANK: Lookin? What'ya lookin for, bug eyes? Huh, baby?

DOROTHY: New table works good, Hank. Havin stew for supper.

NARCILLA: There. Bakin...Middle...

HANK: No use lookin out there, baby. It's here. It's right here. And all you gotta do is...

DOROTHY: I says the goddamn table works good, Hank.

HANK: Don't mind her, Narcilla. She gets that way.

DOROTHY: I get this way, Hank Lacey, but I don't get it all by myself.

NARCILLA: Is there another basket out back?

HANK: Another basket? *(Laughs.)* Is that what you been lookin for? Why didn't you say so? Let old Hank get it for you...

DOROTHY: I...I need somethin, Hank. For my back. Hurts somethin awful...

HANK: 'Dya ever hear anybody complain like her? You know what I bet? I bet you wouldn't bitch like that. Would you, Narcilla, baby?

NARCILLA: I'll get them taters myself. *(She gets up and exits.)*

HANK: Spunky little...

DOROTHY: You stay away from her, Hank Lacey.

HANK: Since when I gotta listen to you?

DOROTHY: What's she got? *(He laughs.)* I had you kids.

HANK: You got money. Everybody knows I put you up.

DOROTHY: I been grateful. I have. But...I was tired...

HANK: Well they ain't gonna laugh at me, woman. Old Hank doin favors for his girl and she ain't givin im none. I ain't bein nobody's joker. Nobody's.

DOROTHY: In a little bit, I'll be feelin...

HANK: Yeah. *(Pause.)*

DOROTHY: She ain't got no shape.

HANK: Well looky who's talkin bout shape.

Photo by Marion K. Barnes

DOROTHY: You know what you make me? Sick.

HANK: You know what you kin do? You kin go to hell.

DOROTHY: I been there since I been with you.

HANK: Ain't nobody forced you.

DOROTHY: What'd you know bout that? Ain't no other way for a man to do it.

HANK: You tryin to say...

DOROTHY: I ain't tryin. Just am.

HANK: Bitch. Practically begged me. You begged me. You did. Ain't been for me, you'd be a dried up old thorn-back.

DOROTHY: Think there ain't been nobody else?

HANK: Hah. Knew it. Clyde ain't got my bones.

DOROTHY: Little bastard's spittin likeness if you count temper.

HANK: Probably Jake or crazy Willie Joe.

DOROTHY: You sayin I been with Jake? I ain't that desperate. Willie Joe? How am I gonna get him out't the window? Crap. I ain't that desperate.

HANK: Yeah. That's just what I'm sayin. Said it yourself. You sneakin little...

DOROTHY: You think I ain't seen you over't Sarah's after they come and got Jake? You didn't even wait til er bed cooled off, you dirty...

HANK: She's gotta feed them kids, don't she? *(Enter Narcilla with another bushel.)* Narcilla, honey. Let me help you with that there basket.

NARCILLA: I kin get it.

DOROTHY: Let her get used to it, Hank.

HANK: *(To Dorothy:)* Where you goin on my time, woman?

DOROTHY: Take a leak. *(She exits.)*

NARCILLA: *(Sorting.)* Funny, all them shapes.

HANK: What?

NARCILLA: Taters. Some got one shape, some got another. Lookit this one here.

HANK: Like me and you, baby.

NARCILLA: Mr. Lacey, I...

HANK: The good Lord, my child, made you shaped special, just to fit the way the good Lord made me. Did you know that?

NARCILLA: Dorothy, she don't take long. She's comin back any time now...

HANK: He made me so's I fit you; He made you so's you fit me. Now what could be nicer than that? You just tell me what could be nicer than that?

NARCILLA: I...I got me a man. *(Pause.)*

HANK: Oh, he ain't gonna mind... Who is it?

NARCILLA: I...I see him bout every day.

HANK: *(Laughing.)* Why, you sly little thing. Here, we was all figgerin you was crazy... Who is he?

NARCILLA: I...I ain't tellin.

HANK: Come on, Narcilla. You kin tell old Hank...

NARCILLA: No. You leave me alone, Mr. Lacey. I...

DOROTHY: *(Entering.)* What d'ya think you're doin? Get away from her before I...

HANK: Ain't nothin to worry for, Dotty. Narcilla here says she got a man. *(Pause.)*

DOROTHY: What? And you believe er I guess? Her? She ain't got no shape.

HANK: You ain't foolin old Hank?

DOROTHY: Who is it, girl? Ain't none, is there? Who is it?

HANK: Old Hank don't like his girls tellin stories... *(Beat.)*

NARCILLA: I pass his window every day. Sometimes he's there, watchin *out beyond*. Standin, leanin against the window frame... Like a picture. I've smiled fer him, I've cried fer him, I watch how he moves when he moves... And figger his story. *(Pause.)*

HANK: They was right.

DOROTHY: What'd I tellya, Hank. Crack-brain.

NARCILLA: From my safe place this side of the glass his story is fer me: His empty bed, the new jacket hangin on the nail by the toilet, the rusty sink, the pot roast of oatmeal... The question to hisself as he watches *out beyond* for the answer... He knows what mornin and night smell like... He's got his own safe place that side of the glass...

DOROTHY: Narcilla, you got to keep your mind on your work, girl. You think Hank wants a crazy girl on his payroll?

HANK: I ain't gonna have them laughin at me havin no crazy girl on my payroll... *(Pause.)* She's makin it all up.

DOROTHY: Hank, I believe she's talkin bout crazy Willie Joe up there...Always starin out't the window.

HANK: Goddamn waste a money feedin em. Empty head...That's where our taxes go, Dotty. Oughta line em all up and blow em to bits. What's the use keepin a buncha empty faces fed up?...C'mon, baby. Let's get you some lunch. You always did get powerful hungry when you was carryin...Narcilla, lover, listen to Dot here, and get your shittin taters sorted. *(Exit Hank and Dorothy.)*

NARCILLA: *(To Stone Potato:)* He got no reason...He got no story? I gotta tell you. It don't matter... Lookin for em is how I live.

(Fadeout) (End of Play.) □

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Rooting for Alternatives

By Tom Boeker

In 1976 a group of independent storytellers, musicians, and actors gathered at Tennessee's Highlander Center to see what they had in common. Most of them played to an Appalachian audience, and all were interested in developing original work. Dudley Cocke of the Roadside Theater in Kentucky remembers they found that they all shared social and political views which stemmed from coming of age during the civil rights movement and weathering the Vietnam war.

But there was something else. Up to this point, most of these artists had worked in isolated, rural areas. These performing artists shared a common spirit, but struggled alone, unexposed to kindred efforts, and remained vulnerable to the self-doubt that comes with isolation. By coming together, they found not only mutual support, but the very tradition of Southern culture.

They formed Alternate ROOTS, the Regional Organization of Theatres-South, dedicated to developing original, indigenous work and to ac-

Dedicated to producing theater with local ties, ROOTS member company Roadside Theater of Appalachia performs *Red Fox/Second Hangin'*, the story of the Red Fox of the Cumberlands.

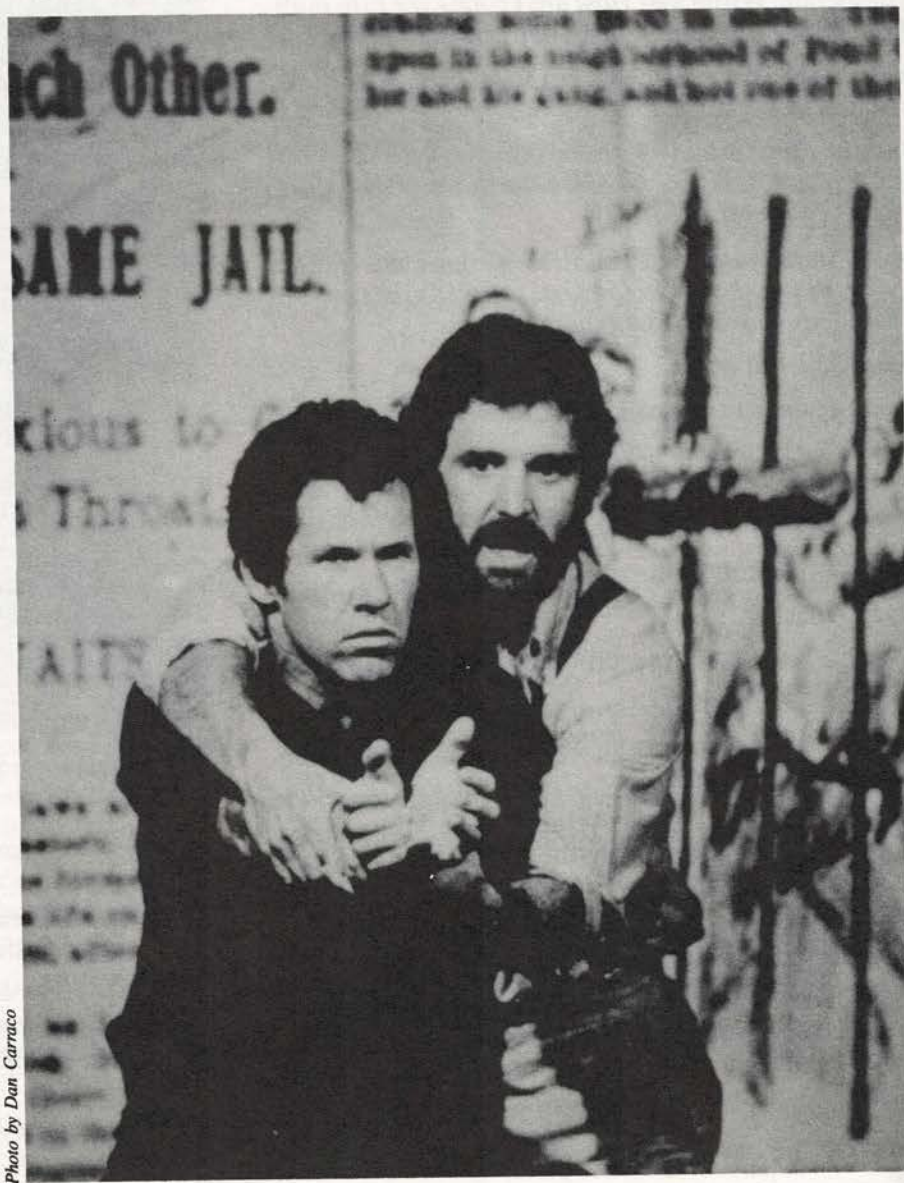


Photo by Dan Carraco

ting as a catalyst for the exchange of art, ideas, and information among its members. The idea was to capitalize on community roots, not to reproduce theater that had its origins elsewhere. In the beginning, says Cocke, "whoever was drawn by this feeling was who we wanted to be there." Since then, ROOTS has grown, and 70 arts organizations and at least as many individuals now participate. Members are spread as far north as Washington, D.C., south to Florida, and west to Louisiana.

ROOTS embraces many performing arts, including theater, mime, juggling, music, storytelling, vaudeville, and dance, as well as performance-oriented writing. But you can't join just by sending in a check. You have to go to one of the meetings or workshops, and you have to bring something worthy of sharing, because ROOTS is an organization where you get out of it what you put into it.

Most of ROOTS' functions are internal. Its major product is a festival held every two years; the next one will be in Atlanta in 1987. The festival is good for publicity, for the audience of course, and for ROOTS members to appreciate one another's finished products. Once every two years, critics and arts writers return to their newspapers with a vision of this other, little-seen America. And they've seen it only because it has gathered together in a large city like Atlanta. The real work is going on out in the sticks, reaching the audience that, by birthright, it belongs to.

The festival, however, is incidental, almost a celebration. ROOTS' major function is networking. This interchange is manifested in regional workshops, annual meetings, a newsletter. And the connections that are made result in collaborations, sharing of resources and skills, mutual criticism and training, more workshops, audience development, touring venues, and just about any way one neighbor can help another. In its simplest sense, probably, ROOTS is about the sharing of information.

At the festival, ROOTS members provide each other with a kind of criticism which they usually don't receive in media reviews. Journalist-critics often provide criticism that is limited in its value to performing ar-

tists because it is a single opinion and may come from a perspective unaffiliated with the artist's culture. Also, media reviews are often based on a single viewing of a performance and directed primarily to the newspaper's or magazine's readership.

Now, the sort of criticism that goes on at ROOTS meetings — like the one last year in Waco, Georgia — circumvents all these limitations. This is collective criticism, by peers, of works in progress. It's developmental criticism, and it's geared for the artist, not the audience. The performing artists generally need that other point of view in order to discover flaws or alternatives in their art.

John O'Neal of the late Free Southern Theater explains that a ROOTS artist generally doesn't

become defensive about peer criticism, because "if you have something larger than yourselves, then you aren't diminished by the critique. You're enlarged by the critique."

The thing that is larger than ROOTS, but which ROOTS participates in, is not too definite. Dudley Cocke characterizes it as a social/political/economic yearning that doesn't disenfranchise the poor, the rural, nor of course the artists. Hence the "alternative" in Alternate ROOTS, not only in an issue-oriented way, but aesthetically as well is a divergence of interest from the opinions handed down by the "tastemakers" who dominate the mainstream media. And, since ROOTS' concerns are regional and community based, that interest might be termed loosely as develop-



ROOTS members Faye Allen, Taylor St. Clair, and Del Hamilton join friend Tom Turbyville in *Seduced* at Seven Stages in Atlanta.

Photo courtesy of Seven Stages

ment of a Southern aesthetic.

What is this Southern aesthetic and where does it come from? First, there's a definite heritage based in folk arts, storytelling, and music. But ROOTS artists don't see their function as curatorial. It's an ongoing tradition, and that's how it differs from the academic approach. There's a strong feeling that culture has evolved more broadly in the South than in other regions of the country.

Roots board member M.K. Wegman, of the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, attributes this to an "accident of history." Communities have been more spread out in the South and have existed for a longer time than those in, say, the Middle West, settled a century later. This isolation has promoted self-sufficiency, culturally speaking — a climate where people are more likely to invent their own art.

This last point introduces an ideological debate which currently challenges ROOTS. In networking, in reaching a larger audience, how does ROOTS sustain the "particularity" which is the very life-blood of its constituent art forms? David Steiling, known professionally Dr. Zog, argues that no matter how regionally based an artist is, he or she lives in a time when art can go up to a satellite and come down anywhere. Mass media, of course, threaten to homogenize the arts.

Some of that danger is dissipated by the "particularity" of the art: it can be too local for outsiders to understand. Some ROOTS members learned this important lesson when several toured Europe last year in the Other America Festival. Neither the Roadside Theater of Appalachia, nor John O'Neal's one-actor show about a Southern black storyteller connected with audiences. Part of the problem, of course, was the language barrier, and some performers also believed that their culture didn't translate. The shows that did go over well exhibited arcane skills, such as a solo performance of *The Tempest*.

Nevertheless, the central committee of ROOTS realizes that, as it asserts *itself in the international scene, it stands at the threshold of a global community.* In a typically ideological discussion, actor John O'Neal

explains:

"It's no sooner that we become an American people, that we will be in an even more compelling era, that is, becoming earth people. Already we live in a global economy, and we don't have the political or cultural apparatus to control it. Economically, we're in a state of nature. These lawless, big corporations are running around without anybody telling them, 'You can't do that to people.'"

Growth presents its own problems, which ROOTS perceives as challenges. Ruby Lerner, the group's administrative director for the past several years who came to ROOTS from the Manhattan Theatre Club, is an articulate spokesperson who voices

alternative theater's criticism of the process of arts subsidies [See article, p. 9]. Writing last year in *American Theatre*, she noted that the relationship among arts groups in Atlanta had "deteriorated into a quietly belligerent 'we-they'" situation because of "an enormous amount of support, both public and private, going to three or four organizations and the remaining dozens of small and medium-sized organizations being forced to compete for an inadequate amount of available funding." Acknowledging that the major arts organizations do serve a constituency, she asserts that "they are addressing the cultural needs and tastes of a small minority of the population" in a city with a majority

Following ROOTS' emphasis on original work, Roadside Theater created *South of the Mountain*. The singers are Ron Short, Nancy Jeffrey, and Tom Bledsoe.

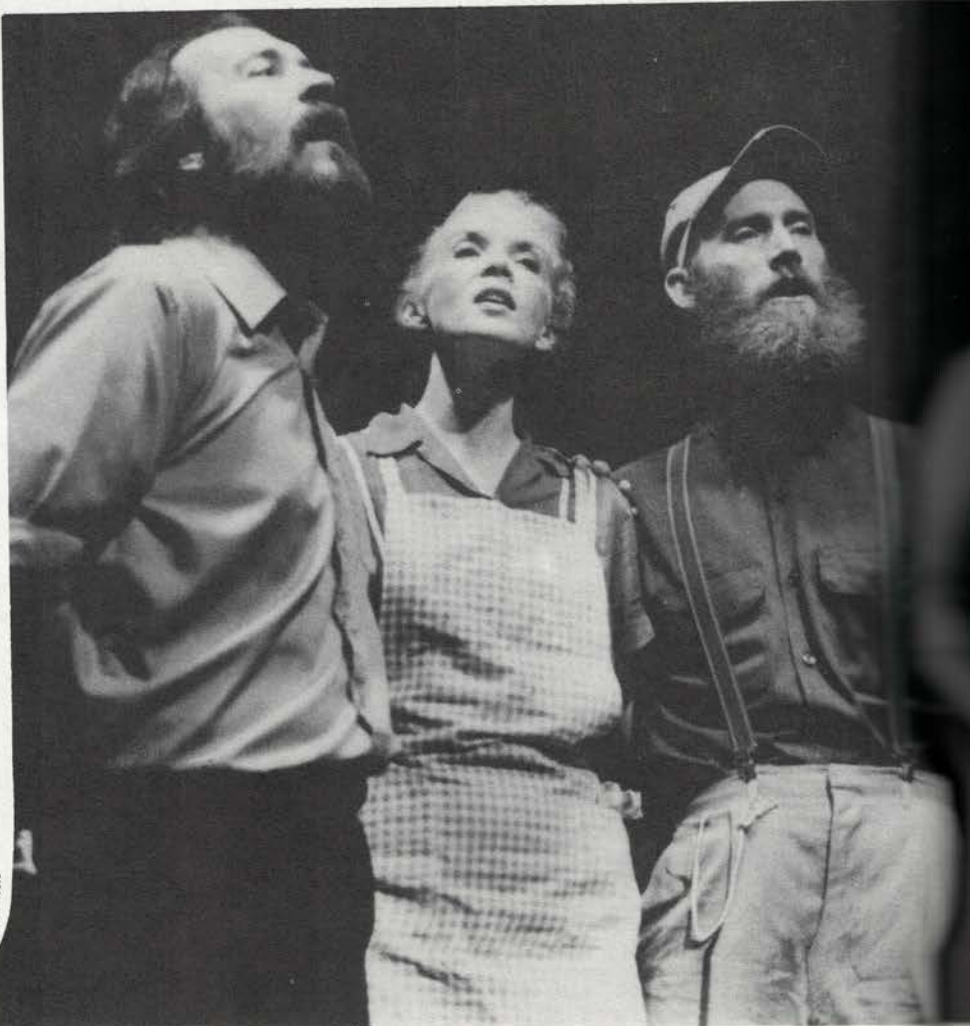


Photo by Judy Eritch

of black people. Further subsidy intended to take mainstream theater to everyday people is a practice "assuming the supremacy of the kind of art produced by these organizations."

More bad news from the private sector — unlike the Northeast or the Midwest, the South doesn't have the tradition of private philanthropy to sustain the small arts groups through the hard times. Nor do the large corporations share the political and economic views of most ROOTS members. Gradually, however, ROOTS is making inroads in the territory of corporate grants. Meanwhile, folks squeeze by, and ROOTS itself survives on an annual budget of \$100,000. That, in itself, is

astonishing, considering that annual membership dues are \$25 per person.

For several years, ROOTS has sought alternatives in theater management, so that marketing doesn't subvert the artistic vision of the member companies. The overall contention is that management should serve the artist, but agreement generally stops there. ROOTS places emphasis on a diversity of management styles and conducts workshops on such subjects as touring and computer skills. The idea is to find what style best fits the company, so that the company doesn't get sucked into the ubiquitous "business model" of management which has prompted so many regional theaters to produce *A*

Christmas Carol each December. Still, there is no all-purpose answer. The emphasis on diversity results in at least one ROOTS member (Academy Theatre, Atlanta) producing *A Christmas Carol* every December.

Right now, financial concerns are a high priority for the ROOTS administration. It seems to be necessarily so. As David Steiling points out, "You can't separate the financial from the artistic, not if you call yourself a professional artist." The trick, of course, is to make it work for you, instead of against you.

What is "it" anyway? What is art? As futile as it may be to try and answer that question, Roadside's Dudley Cocke says that, in one form or another, it comes up at every ROOTS gathering. They have yet to arrive at a consensus. But, in the process of questioning themselves, they reexamine their art. That's important, especially since the performing arts are so heavily oriented toward process, as opposed to product. So it stands to reason, art may be a process, an act of arriving or coming into being.

Perhaps this portrait of ROOTS has shaped up a shade too ideological. It's hard to imagine a contemporary vaudeville performer asking the question, "What is art?" Then again, maybe not. David Steiling best characterizes ROOTS' members' work as art without the capital A, not that it isn't art, just that it's more accessible. It's the spirit of the art, the sharing, the spiritual high he feels at ROOTS meetings that allows him to return home with recharged batteries. It is also a process of discovery.

Steiling recalls his first encounter with ROOTS: "I walked out into the quadrangle at Vanderbilt University and someone said, 'Stand still.' And I found myself surrounded by three pairs of jugglers, passing 18 clubs in the air at once, going by my face in every direction. It was one of the most elated experiences of my life. And so I became a juggler." □

Atlanta theater critic Tom Boeker also wrote *The Bridge That Brung You Over* on p. 54 of this issue.

Fiddler Ron Short and banjo picker Tom Bledsoe play parts in Roadside's *South of the Mountain*.

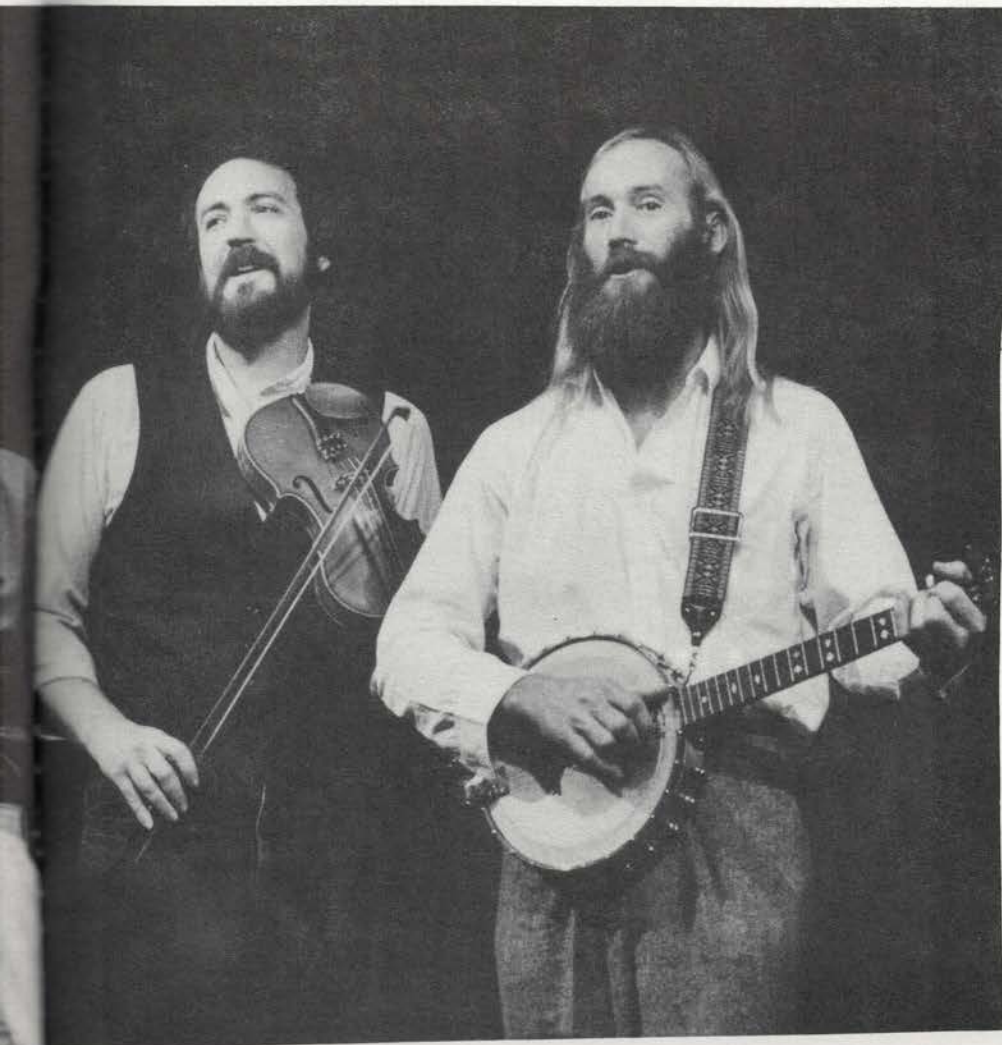


Photo by Dan Carraco

Where to Find Dollars and Advice

By Beth Howard

Besides our listing of grassroots theaters (see p. 116), *Southern Exposure* provides these profiles of Southern-based organizations that fund and support theater in the region.

Southern Arts Federation

With a million-dollar budget and a wide range of services, the Southern Arts Federation is probably the most comprehensive service and funding agency for the arts in the South. Its programs, serving both the visual and performing arts, "embrace folk art and opera, jazz and chamber music, primitive art and the collections of the South's finest museums." Now 11 years old, SAF is a non-profit corporation, yet depends on federal and state arts agencies with whom it works closely to "carry out the mandate of making the arts more available to a wide public." The Federation is also funded through private

contributions and through programs that generate income.

Through the Federation's Performing Arts Touring Program professional performing companies from both within and outside the South, including such diverse groups as the Birmingham Children's Theatre and the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, have been brought to Southern communities. The Federation also sponsors the Southern Arts Exchange, an annual booking meeting where presenters meet with artists to plan seasons, special projects, and festivals in the region.

But in addition to coordinating performances by well known mainstream artists, the Federation is also committed to encouraging experimental work and to providing a "nurturing climate for all the arts." The special needs of minority and emerging artists are addressed through a number of unique programs. For exam-

ple, the Touring Training Program helps emerging organizations develop promotional materials and management skills. The Federation also offers technical assistance through workshops and on-site consultancies. Through the Minority Arts Forum, minority arts leaders convene to identify the unmet needs of such organizations. The Federation also publishes the Regional Black Arts Directory and the Regional Black Presenters Directory.

The Federation also funds art exhibits and sponsors touring exhibits. These exhibits sometimes feature the wealth of indigenous art in the region, including "Spotlight '85: Southeastern Crafts" and "Prints and Paintings of Robert Gordy," a native Louisiana artist. The Federation also supports media and film projects.

Southern Arts Federation, Suite 122, 1401 Peachtree St., NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30309; (404) 874-7244.

ShenanArts: A Playwright's Retreat

by John A. Wells

With luck, novelists and poets may sometimes win fellowships at refreshing residential retreat centers where they may pursue their art in peace. Far fewer opportunities, however, exist for playwrights.

The Shenandoah Valley Playwright's Retreat offers an annual chance for six playwrights to spend an intensive three weeks writing and then seeing their plays produced.

Held in the rolling green Virginia hills, the retreat has been sponsored for nine years by ShenanArts, a Staunton-based performing arts cooperative, and co-sponsored by the American College Theater Festival. It gives six playwrights an opportunity to pursue intensive work on their plays in progress, expand their contacts, and recharge their creative batteries. Pennyroyal Farm, headquarters for ShenanArts, is the retreat work site. The farmhouse, built in 1808, is a low-

ceilinged clapboard structure, surrounded by a white rail fence and 21 acres of farmland and forest. For three weeks in that pastoral setting, authors write and rewrite, directors advise and cajole, and actors immerse themselves in each of the projects.

Selection of the retreat playwrights is competitive: the writers are chosen by a panel of playwrights, arts funders, and ShenanArts staff out of nearly 100 applicants. Each writer receives full fellowship support covering his or her expenses for the program. Participants include national award-winning student playwrights from the American College Theatre Festival along with accomplished writers from around the country. One fellowship is designated for a Virginia playwright with a \$2,000 prize.

The retreat culminates in what is called, appropriately, "Six Plays in Five Days" — the public perfor-

mances of each of the playwrights' completed works. Local performers share the stage with out-of-town professional actors. After each production the audience has the opportunity to discuss and critique the work with the playwright and actors. All performances are free and open to the public.

Besides the annual retreat, ShenanArts offers a variety of programs and workshops for local residents, including a cinema club, traditional music concerts, and a summer theater camp for teens.

For information write ShenanArts, Pennyroyal Farm, Box 167F, Route 5, Staunton, Virginia 24401, or phone 703-248-1868.

John A. Wells, formerly of Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia, is public relations officer at International House in New York.

J. Arc and Company

J. Arc and Company, a privately funded foundation, has a big name to live up to. Named for Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake for following the dictates of her conscience, the unusual organization actively seeks to support "the innovative, the experimental, the socially-conscious, and the visionary," — all traditionally hard-to-fund projects. Founder Beth Parker of Gwinnett Industries in Decatur, Georgia set up the foundation in 1984 as a way of channeling the charitable contributions of the corporation to the arts.

While still in a developmental stage, the foundation has already undertaken a number of interesting projects. J. Arc sponsored the move of the Several Dancers Core, a Houston-based non-profit dance corporation to Decatur. Gwinnett provided space for dance and mime instruction as well as a theater in the downtown area. The organization has plans to provide business assistance to artists and arts organizations and to sponsor international cultural exchanges.

J. Arc and Company, 330 Church Street, Decatur, Georgia 30030; (404) 373-4154

Atlanta New Play Project

The work of the Atlanta New Play Project can be seen in the seasons of the city's theaters. Many now make the production of new plays a priority. That's just what the project had in mind when it set out nearly 10 years ago to encourage the production of new plays by Atlanta's theaters.

The project's main activity has been the annual Festival of New Plays which gives member theaters a low-risk, low-cost forum to present new scripts. As a measure of the festival's success, four of last year's eight festival plays appeared in the Atlanta theater season this year.

Plays from previous festivals, including Fred Gamel's *Wasted*, named Best Play of the Year by the American Theatre Critics Association (see excerpt p. 95), have found their way to Broadway and to other prestigious venues. Frank Manley's *Two Masters* went from the festival to win the 1984 Great American Play Contest sponsored by the Actors Theatre of Louisville.

The project also gives playwrights a chance to see their work in progress and to receive feedback from other theater professionals.

As the project grows, plans are under-

way for programs to serve the theater community throughout the year. These include a dramaturgy workshop, coordination of public readings of new plays, and the creation of a resource system for playwrights and theaters which work with new plays.

The festival continues to expand, each year giving member theaters a greater chance to participate and providing a wider selection of new plays. Not the least to benefit from the Atlanta New Play Project is the city's theater-going public which has the unrivaled opportunity to see the new plays that may be tomorrow's big hits.

Atlanta New Play Project, Inc., P.O. Box 14252, Atlanta, Georgia 30324; (404) 373-8005.

Playwrights' Fund of North Carolina

Since it began in 1981, the Playwrights' Fund of North Carolina has premiered over 50 new works for the stage at its home in Greenville, North Carolina. But that is only one part of its mission. The fund is dedicated to supporting the craft of play writing. As literary director Jeffery Scott Jones says, "There's only so much you can learn from books, and eventually you have to leave your desk and meet the people that make theater work."

New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 1933-1941

James A. Hodges

In the most detailed analysis ever provided of labor relations in a major southern industry, Hodges shows that New Deal labor policy did little to improve the lot of southern workers. 252 pages. Illustrations. \$24.95

Guerrilla Minstrels

*John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan
Wayne Hampton*

The author traces the history of protest singing in America from the union hymns of the IWW to folk-rock in the 1960s. Hampton's nostalgic tour of some of America's best-loved music shows how our protest singers have become cultural guerrillas, balladeers for social harmony and camaraderie. 320 pages. Illustrations. \$24.95

The Fund's programs include an intensive script development system involving oral and written criticism of playwrights' work, a developmental reading series, a yearly competition for North Carolina playwrights, and an annual Southeastern Playwrights' Conference — a hands-on workshop. Through TranScript, PFNC distributes new scripts to professional theaters. The scope of this service is unique in the South.

New plays are regularly read at the Best Lunch Theatre Ever and Downtown, Downstairs, another Greenville theater. These readings allow the playwright a chance to see how audiences will respond to the work. The readings are followed by post-performance discussions in which audiences can talk with the play's author.

The Fund is supported by the Theatre Arts Section of the North Carolina Arts Council and the North Carolina Humanities Committee. Other funds come from community and private foundations.

The Playwrights' Fund of North Carolina, Inc., P.O. Box 646, Greenville, North Carolina 27835-0646; (919) 758-3628. □

Beth Howard is a writer in Washington, D.C.

TVA and The Tellico Dam, 1936-1979

*A Bureaucratic Crisis in Post-Industrial America
William Bruce Wheeler and
Michael J. McDonald*

In their history of TVA in the post-industrial era as seen through the prism of the controversial Tellico Dam Project, the authors examine how TVA adopted Tellico as part of a search for a new mission, only to find that the mission was outdated from its inception. 304 pages. Illustrations. \$34.50

**The University of
Tennessee
Press**

Knoxville 37996-0325

Academy Theatre

Lili Baxter
1137 Peachtree Street
Atlanta, GA 30357
404-873-2518 BUDGET \$498,000

A regional playwright's theater with a resident ensemble company providing professional-level training and experience.

Actor's Workshop & Repertory Company

Colleen McGarr
308 S. Dixie Highway/Box 3351
W. Palm Beach, FL 33402
305-655-2122 BUDGET N/A

An alternative theater with original productions. Stages plays, poetry readings, concerts and comedy shows. "Original Material Night" monthly.

Actors Theatre of Louisville

Jenan Dorman
316-320 West Main Street
Louisville, KY 40202
502-584-1265 BUDGET \$3,600,000

Professional regional theater with varied repertory; emphasis on new American playwrights and exploration of the classics.

Andrew Levitt Company

Andrew Levitt
401 Hobbs Road
Greensboro, NC 27403
919-275-4687 BUDGET \$10,000

Solo mime and clown performance for all ages; performs in theaters, clubs, and schools.

Apple Alley Players, Inc.

Kristin Peterson
Box 144
Keyser, WV 26726
788-0788 BUDGET \$25,000

Amateur community theater group. Currently constructing an outdoor amphitheater to produce an original musical based on local events in the Civil War.

Arkansas Repertory Theater Company

Andrew C. Gaupp
712 East 11th Street
Little Rock, AR 72202
501-378-0405 BUDGET \$603,000

Dedicated to the cultural and educational enlightenment of the citizens of Arkansas through the theater arts; mainstage, touring, outreach, education.

Big State Productions

Jim Fritzier
1809 Palma Plaza
Austin, TX 78703
512-474-2035 BUDGET \$40,000

Training and employment of locally based theater artists. Production of classics with relevance to Austin audiences, new plays by area playwrights.

Bread and Circus Theater

Connie Whitt-Lamber
702 Emery
Denton, TX 76201
817-387-2408 BUDGET N/A

Bread and Circus Theater was conceived with the idea of providing a "fun" theatrical experience for all ages through audience participation.

Center Stage

Chuck White

P.O. Box 6151
Gulfport, MS 39506
601-896-6455 BUDGET \$30,000

Produces a mixture of contemporary works, revivals, landmarks, and classics.

Center for Puppetry Arts

Judy Anderson
1404 Spring St. at 18th
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-873-3391 BUDGET \$750,000

Develops the program areas of performance, exhibition, and education to serve both the public and the puppeteer; develops new work for the field.

Children's Theater of Charlotte

Susan Gough
1017 E. Morehead Street
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-376-5745 BUDGET \$250,000

Performing Arts Center for young people using professional directors, actors, and designers; four mainstage and three second-stage productions. Classes, ages 3-18.

Children's Theater of Eden

Susan Pace
P.O. Box 547
Eden, NC 27288
919-342-2536 BUDGET \$8,000

Professional productions for Eden school children, with funding from community and business groups.

Chocolate Bayou Theater Company

John Pearson
P.O. Box 270363
Houston, TX 77277
713-528-0070 BUDGET \$250,000

Professional theater company presenting a repertoire of recent plays by important new writers and significant modern classics.

Chopstick Theater

Robin Heiden
P.O. Box 1625
Charleston, SC 29402
803-577-0057 BUDGET \$103,000

Offers professional repertory theater, workshops and classes; produces adaptations, original, and classic works related to Southeastern artists.

Coconut Grove Playhouse

Iris Ratcliffe
3500 Main Highway
Miami, FL 33133
305-442-2662 BUDGET \$2,764,600

Classics, contemporary, and experimental works using major artists; also bilingual and Hispanic plays, audience discussions, and children's plays.

Columbia Theater Players

Michelle Blanchard
P.O. Box 3091
Hammond, LA 70404
504-345-5760 BUDGET \$23,000

Produces six plays a year by and for its community.

Creative Theater Ensemble

Liz Wolter
Southwest Institute for the Deaf
Avenue C
Big Spring, TX 79720
915-267-2511 BUDGET \$1700

Increases awareness and understanding of the creative process for deaf students at the junior college level.

Dallas Theater Center

Kimberly Cole
3636 Turtlecreek Blvd.
Dallas, TX 75219
214-526-8210 BUDGET \$3,500,000

Regional theater with permanent resident ensemble committed to exploring world classics, American classics and contemporary classics.

Dashiki Project Theater, Inc.

Ted Gilliam
P.O. Box 8323
New Orleans, LA 70182
504-949-0493 BUDGET \$95,000

A permanent resident black company for training and exposure of local and regional talent; encourages new works on the black experience.

Fantasy Theater Factory

Susan Casbarro
P.O. Box 450583
Miami, FL 33145
305-285-1907 BUDGET \$100,000

A vaudeville touring company dedicated to humor, visual wit, and lighthearted fun. Brings vaudeville back to the people.

Festival Theatre at Rock Kiln Ruin

Don Baker
P.O. Box 663
Lexington, VA 24450
703-463-7088 BUDGET \$190,500

Presents professional quality performance of works reflecting the life, history, and heritage of the people rooted in the area.

First for Freedom

James R. Twisdale, Jr.
P.O. Box 21
Halifax, NC 27839
919-583-3011 BUDGET \$28,000

Keeps historical facts alive and enhances cultural and historical values which come alive during the performance.

Florida Studio Theater

Jeff Mousseau
1241 N. Palm Avenue
Sarasota, FL 33577
813-366-9796 BUDGET \$408,000

Five contemporary plays per year combining serious and provocative drama with pertinent comedies. Develops new plays and holds workshops for actors.

Gainesville Children's Theater

Angela A. Stanley
P.O. Box 2267
Gainesville, GA 30503
404-532-9147 BUDGET \$8,000

Produces the finest quality of theater possible for children; community education.

Gold Coast Mime Company

Jude Parry
5151 Adams Road
Delray Beach, FL 33445
305-495-1730 BUDGET \$20,000

A professional theater company presenting mime shows to the public and experimenting with multimedia productions.

Good Neighbor Settlement House

Evelon Dale
1254 East Tyler Street
Brownsville, TX 78520
512-542-2368 BUDGET \$20,000
Provides Hispanic youth the opportunity to express themselves in a creative and artistic fashion.

Great American Mime Experiment

Sandra Hughes
P.O. Box 8062
Atlanta, GA 30306
404-377-5268 BUDGET \$62,000
Original productions based on classic and contemporary mime styles and visual art components.

Guadalupe Theater

George Pina
1301 Guadalupe Street
San Antonio, TX
512-271-3151 BUDGET \$738,646
Productions by Hispanic artists, playwrights, and technicians.

Hands of Delight Puppet Theater

Jody Wren
7107 N. Howard Avenue
Tampa, FL 33604
813-932-9252 BUDGET N/A
Provides puppet shows and puppetry workshops in schools.

Hip Pocket Theater

Diane Simons
1627 Fairmont
Fl. Worth, TX 76104
817-927-2833 BUDGET \$127,000
Showcases and premieres original theatrical works by regional playwrights and composers, and exposes Texas audiences to new and original works.

Hippodrome State Theater

Mary Hausch
25 S.E. 2nd Place
Gainesville, FL 32601
904-373-5968 BUDGET \$1,000,000
Provides inventive and exciting theater that spans contemporary, classic and international boundaries.

Horizon Theatre Company

Lisa Adler
P.O. Box 5376 Station E
Atlanta, GA 30307
404-584-7450 BUDGET \$30,000
Presents both new and rediscovered plays that are seldom seen in the Southeast; develops an on-going ensemble of theater artists.

Horn in the West

Mary C. Smalling
P.O. Box 295
Boone, NC 28607
704-264-2120 BUDGET N/A
Sponsored by the Southern Appalachian Historical Association; outdoor drama about the American Revolution in the Southern Appalachians.

Indian River Players, Inc.

Fran S. Reimer
P.O. Box 1534
Melbourne, FL 32902
305-723-6935 BUDGET \$130,000
A non-profit community theater, founded 1952. Produces six shows per season and a one-act play writing contest.

Jewish Community Center

Mark A. Lit
5601 S. Braeswood
Houston, TX 77096
713-729-3200 BUDGET \$250,000
Produces major musicals, dramas, comedies, and

original works. Classes in drama, music and dance. Performing arts summer camp.

Jomandi Productions, Inc.

Gloria Lockhart
710 Peachtree #229/Box 5
Atlanta, GA 30308
404-876-6346 BUDGET \$180,000
A professional black theater company for the development of new works from the African-American experience.

Just Us Theater Company

Marisa Middlebrook
710 Peachtree NE/
Atlanta, GA 30308
404-876-2350 BUDGET N/A
Presents professional black theater; supports black playwrights, performers, and other theater professionals; develops black audiences.

Kudzu Players, Inc.

Gary N. Carden
118 Cherry Street
Sylva, NC 28779
704-586-2706 BUDGET \$12,000
Fosters performing arts reflecting Appalachian customs, traditions; fosters appreciation of dramatic arts in the schools.

Lafayette Community Theater

John Fiero
704 Lee Avenue
Lafayette, LA 70501
318-234-8210 BUDGET \$30,000
Promotes amateur theater in the Acadiana area; trains young people via special workshops and productions.

Lenny & LaBanana Clown Show

Roger French
124 W. College Avenue
Decatur, GA 30030
404-373-7175 BUDGET \$20,000
Tradition of American vaudeville.

Liberty Cart

Jim Johnson
P.O. Box 470
Kenansville, NC 28349
919-296-0721 BUDGET \$100,000
Presents a historical outdoor drama, now in its 11th season; cast of 65; concerns history of eastern North Carolina and Duplin County from 1760-1865.

Live Oak Productions

Jeanette Brown
311 Nueces
Austin, TX 78701
512-472-5143 BUDGET \$100,000+
Enables Austin artists to make money at their work; showcases Austin playwrights; offers audiences opportunity to see rarely produced plays.

Lost Colony-Waterside Theater

Robert Knowles
P.O. Box 40
Manteo, NC 27954
919-473-2127 BUDGET \$750,000
Produces Paul Green's *The Lost Colony* each summer on the site of the first attempts to locate a colony on Roanoke Island by Sir Walter Raleigh.

Memphis Children's Theater

David Kelling
Memphis Park
2599 Avery
Memphis, TN 38112
901-452-3968 BUDGET N/A
Provides children, ages 5-18 with artistic and technical opportunities through productions and classes; also maintains a resident dance company.

Southern Books for Southern Readers



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Herb Bridges

This is the *Gone with the Wind* book to end all *Gone with the Wind* books! Its publication on 30 June 1986—the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the great novel of the American South—is especially appropriate with celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the filming of the story on the horizon. This book offers more than 650 photographs of *Gone with the Wind* memorabilia from the collection of Herb Bridges, including American and foreign editions, film production and promotional material, sheet music and recordings, magazines and books, and merchandise and toys.

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Cherokee, NC 28719
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Presents *Unto These Hills* each summer session; produced by the Cherokee Historical Association, to preserve the history and traditions of the Cherokee.

New Stage Theater

Lida G. Burris
1100 Carlisle Street
Jackson, MS 39202
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Produces contemporary and classical theater for the community. The first non-segregated major arts institution in the state, founded in 1965.

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Berkeley Springs, WV 25411
304-258-3302 BUDGET N/A

Touring circus dealing with contemporary social and political issues.

North Carolina Black Repertory Company

Larry Leon Hamlin
610 Coliseum Dr/Box 2793
Winston-Salem, NC 27102
919-723-7907 BUDGET \$175,000

Offers professional black theater in areas where such opportunities are not readily available.

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Patricia Crosby
Box 89
Alcorn State University
Lorman, MS 39096
601-877-3846 BUDGET \$2,000

High school students with the aid of a professional director put together a 2-hour show on theme of "Be A Reader" and tours with it to playgrounds and parks within Clayborne County, MS. They rework it annually with folk stories and fairy tales.

Old Colony Players

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P.O. Box 112
Valdese, NC 28690
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From this Day Forward is an authentic outdoor drama about the Waldenses, a religious group who founded Valdese. A blend of drama, dance, and music.

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David Gulick
Art School
Carrboro, NC 27510
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Integrates puppet theater and education.

Purchase Players, Inc.

Jane Brodsky
P.O. Box 173
Mayfield, KY 42066
502-247-8852 BUDGET N/A
Community theater with focus on youth.

Road Company

Bob Leonard
P.O. Box 5278 EKS
Johnson City, TN 37603
615-926-7726 BUDGET \$100,000

Creates, develops, and produces new theater reflecting the interests and culture of the Upper Tennessee Valley; tours with new works in the Southeast.

Roadside Theater

Donna Porterfield
P.O. Box 743
Whitesburg, KY 41858
606-633-0108 BUDGET \$190,000

Ensemble company of actors, storytellers, and musicians from coalfield region of Virginia and Kentucky presenting original plays. Extensive touring.

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Chip Duckett
P.O. Box 13175
St. Petersburg, FL 33733
813-866-1973 BUDGET \$100,000

Provides a diverse season of musicals, comedies, and drama; also youth productions, one-acts, and original plays; community outreach programs.

Seven Stages

Del Hamilton
430 Moreland Avenue NE
Atlanta, GA 30307
404-522-0911 BUDGET \$115,000

Produces issue-oriented plays with an emphasis on new plays; creates opportunities for new and emerging artists.

Southern Appalachian Repertory Theater

James W. Thomas
Box 53/Mars Hill College
Mars Hill, NC 28754
704-689-1203 BUDGET \$100,000

Produces plays which treat the culture of the region in a positive way; provides quality entertainment for a culturally deprived area.

Southern Playwrights' Theater

David W. Gibson
P.O. Box 2054
Asheboro, NC 27204
919-625-6166 BUDGET N/A
Promotes and encourages the talents of North Carolina Southern playwrights by providing a vehicle for premieres and showcases of original works.

Southwest Repertory Organization

Barbara S. Herrick
1301 Texas Avenue
El Paso, TX 79901
915-533-1671 BUDGET \$120,000

A positive multicultural and educational resource to provide high quality theatrical entertainment for the community. Opportunities for developing artists.

Storybook Players

Marion Conner
2255 Oat Street
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Trains young people in speech and acting. Productions in schools and small towns in northeast Florida.

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Alton Duckworth
P.O. Box 535
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919-376-6948 BUDGET \$100,000

Produces an outdoor drama concerning early life in the Cane Creek community; preserves the history of the Quakers in North Carolina.

Teatro Bilingue de Houston

Richard E. Reyes
4401 Lovejoy
Houston, TX 77003
713-921-5093 BUDGET \$60,000

Produces major Hispanic works in Spanish and English. Debuts new Hispanic playwrights and in-house works. Youth theater company. Non-profit.

TEXAS Musical Drama

Raymond Raillard
Palo Duro Park, Mail: Box 268
Canyon, TX 79015
806-655-2181 BUDGET \$850,000

Preserves and presents the history of the area. *Texas* is a musical dramatization of Panhandle history.

Temple Theatre Company

Kathie deNobriga
P.O. Box 1391
Sanford, NC 27330
919-774-4512 BUDGET \$120,000

Serves as center for performing arts for county-wide area; program includes community and children's theater; hosts touring groups.

Theater In The Park

Chris Crew
Box 12151/107 Pullen Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27605
919-755-6936 BUDGET \$250,000

Original works, classics, musicals, and children's theater.

Theater Workshop of Louisville

Donna B. Morton
233 W. Broadway, #404
Louisville, KY 40202
502-585-4733 BUDGET \$33,000

The promotion, presentation and preservation of African and African American history, heritage, culture. Outlet for black actors and writers.

Theatre 'Cadien (Cajun Theater)

Lois Petitjean
P.O. Box 3936

Lafayette, LA 70502
318-233-1020 BUDGET \$2,000
Brings theater to South Louisiana, via productions in the Cajun French language.

Tom Tichenor Marionettes

Glenda Myers
222 8th Ave S.
Nashville, TN 37203
615-244-4700 BUDGET N/A
Attracts children to the library using classical fairy tales and old-world marionettes; inspires reading and artistic expression.

Touch Mime Theater

Sheila Kerrigan
The Art School/Carr Mill
Carrboro, NC 27510
919-968-1721 BUDGET \$70,000
A touring mime theater dedicated to creating and performing contemporary movement theater; tours with 3 mimes, a musician, and a lighting designer.

Transactors Theater Company

Mary Ruth
Art School, Carr Mill
Carrboro, NC 27510
919-942-2041 BUDGET \$25,000
Professional company offering plays and an improvisation show at Art School and on tour; offers workshops in acting and improvisation.

Turk Pipkin's Surplus Circus

Turk Pipkin

1301 W. Lakeland Drive
Austin, TX 78732
512-266-1141 BUDGET N/A

A touring three-person theatrical show about old-timey circus, directed towards audiences of all ages.

Twenty-Fourth Street Experiment

Pam Slocum
411 SW 24th Street
San Antonio, TX 78285
512-435-2103 BUDGET \$80,000
Provides contemporary, experimental or original theater to San Antonio and other Texas towns. Educational program for children and children's theater.

Upstage Company

Claudia M Cleary
USC/P.O.Box 1954
Conway, SC 29526
803-448-1481 BUDGET N/A
Experimental student productions.

Uvalde Grand Opera House

Margaret Smith
100 North St./P.O.Box 1451
Uvalde, TX 78802
512-278-4082 BUDGET \$94,000
Uvalde Area Community Theater produces local and national works. Hosts annual play writing contest.

Vicksburg Little Theater Guild

Cricket Carroll

P.O. Box 1095
Vicksburg, MS 39180
601-636-0471 BUDGET \$80,000

Stimulates interest in original and other dramatic, literary, and musical productions; presents amateur productions.

Wasted Time

D.M. Yeary
1705 W. Knox Street
Durham, NC 27278
919-286-4853 BUDGET N/A
Introduces community to performance as a totally accessible art form through spontaneous interactions in public places.

Yadkin Players Youth Theater

William Casstevens
Route 3, Box 114
Yadkinville, NC 27055
919-679-2941 BUDGET \$5,000
Produces quality theater using local talent. Original children's show tours the schools.

Young People's Performing Company

Jeffryn Stephens
911 Burch Avenue
Durham, NC 27701
919-682-5588 BUDGET \$8,500
Provides classes and performance opportunities for ages 5-18; goal is quality ensemble theater with consideration of individual talents and needs.

BULLETIN BOARD OF THE SOUTH

Announcements

Call for Papers

Callaloo will devote its Summer 1987 issue to Alice Walker. General essays and essays on Alice Walker's novels and poetry are invited, as are essays concerning the novel and film rendition of *The Color Purple*. Double-spaced manuscripts, in duplicate, which conform to the *MLA Style Manual*, should be sent by February 1987 to: Charles H. Rowell, Editor, CALLALOO, University of Virginia, Department of English, Charlottesville, VA 22903

Legal Help Available

Criminal defense against politically motivated charges. Christic Institute — South, (919) 748-1022.

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A Letter to Workers' Art Groups

— by Michael Gold

Although many of the grassroots theaters profiled in this issue were born in the 1960s, the idea of people's drama had surfaced in the 1920s, too. Radical intellectuals then had turned their attention to creating and using popular art forms to capture the imagination of workers and to organize them. In the September 1929 issue of the progressive magazine *New Masses*, editor Michael Gold sounded this appeal to workers' art groups, hoping to unify them into a national league:

Under the surface, in capitalist America, there is quietly growing a Workers' Art movement.

It has no manifestoes, it is not based on theories, it springs from life itself.

It fulfills a need; it has grown out of necessity. It is as much a part of revolutionary history-in-the-making as [the Communist-led] Gastonia [textile strike] or the [Communist Party] *Daily Worker*.

There are at least 50 small workers' theater groups functioning in American cities and towns.

There are over a hundred workers' cinema clubs which produce, in little halls and clubrooms in industrial towns, programs of novel moving pictures with their own cooperative projection machines.

There are at least 25 workers' choral societies meeting several times a week, some of them numbering, like the Freiheit Chorus of New York, a total of 600 members.

I have tried to figure it out; and my conservative conclusion is that 50,000 revolutionary workers in America are connected with some local group for the discovery and practice of Workers' Art.

I know that the bourgeois intellectuals sneer at this spontaneous urge toward workers' culture, and obstruct it wherever they can.

Every week in the office of the *New Masses*, we receive at least a dozen letters asking us to suggest suitable one-act workers' plays, short movies, recitations and choral pieces.

We have been unable to satisfy this demand. The reason is that the field has not been organized. It is a commentary on the situation that the most popular piece that was printed in the *New Masses* during three years was the one-act play by Harbor Allen, named *Mr. God Is Not In*. This play has been presented at least 20 times since its printing.

It is time this work were organized. It is valuable work. It is a way of reaching the youth of America. It is a way of

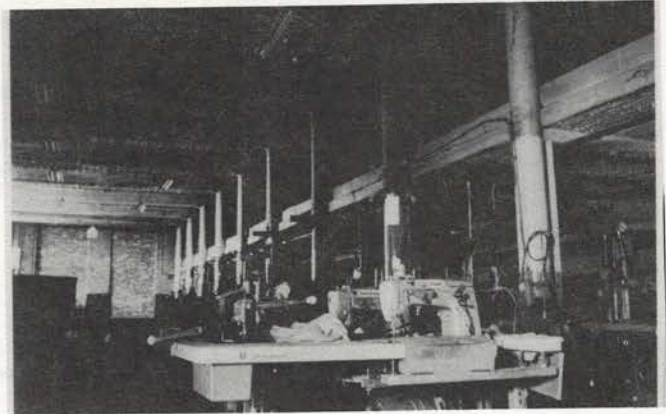


Photo by Oranien E. Carledge

reaching the workers in places where pamphlets and speakers do not penetrate.

It is a way of capturing the mind of hundreds of thousands of workers in a simple, natural way.

The bourgeois little theater movement is already a national force; here we have another, ready to our hand.

One need not wait until the official leaders see the necessity of such organization. They will not do so for a long time.

Let us organize now, despite the novelty of it all. Let every group engaged in workers' cultural activities take this first step:

Send in a brief report of your membership, your recent activities, and your future needs to the *New Masses*.

We think we can help. It is possible we can form a national league to join up with the world organization of workers' art.

We may be able to work out a repertoire of workers' movies. We may be able, if there is enough support, to publish the much-needed book of workers' one-act plays.

There are many other jobs to be done. The first step is for the secretary or most active member in each group to write us a full report. We will be glad to give regularly one or two pages of the magazine to such reports, and to begin planning a national program for the future.

Let us hear from you. Even if there is no group, write us your views as an individual. No theorizing, etc.; we want concrete, practical ideas for work. This is a big thing; Germany has a workers' theater society with a membership of a half-million. Something less gigantic but as useful is possible here. But everyone must write us at once. Let us see first where we stand.

In the months that followed dozens of worker groups responded, especially theater companies. New Masses regularly set aside a page or two for these letters, which came from as far as England as well as from theater groups and workers' clubs in America. □

At *Southern Exposure* we welcome submissions from our readers for this feature. Send ideas to: *Voices From the Past, Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

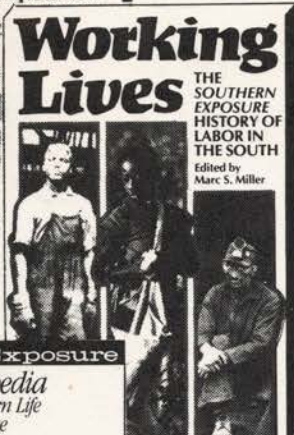
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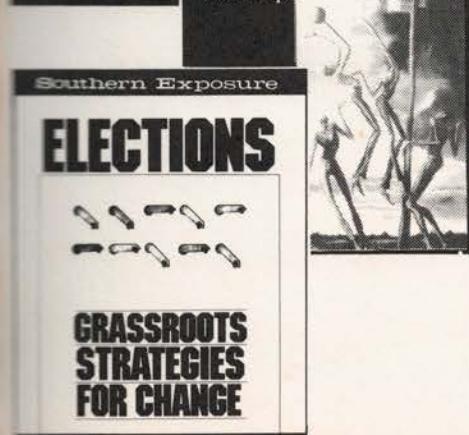
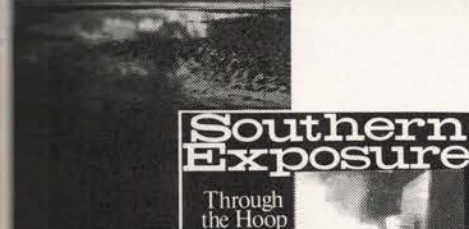
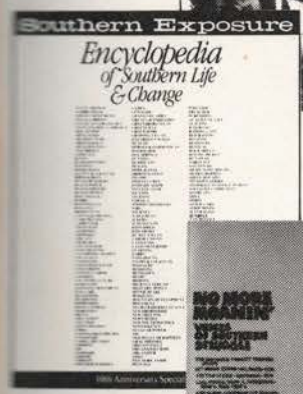
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