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SPECIAL NOTICE

On Monday, December 4, 1967, the USITT Committee on Theatre Administration and the N.Y., N.J. & Conn. Federal Bar Association's Committee on the Law of the Theatre are presenting a joint symposium on INDUSTRIAL SUPPORT FOR THEATRE AND THE ARTS. The meeting starts at 7: 30 p.m. in the Lambs Club, 128 West 44th Street, New York City. Tickets are not required. The symposium will cover the ethics of corporate support, tax problems, methods of approaching industry for grants, unions and leisure time, employment, and self subsidy.

ADMINISTRATION NOTES

Tradition is one of the choice jewels of the theatre. We are proud of our Greek ancestors, of Shakespeare, and of Sheridan, O'Neill and the rest. We study with relish the theatre of the past and use a language passed down to us from generations of stage hands, actors and managers. We examine with care the acting styles of the past, and post the playbills of a hundred years ago on our walls. We are proud of our position in the history of civilization.

Unfortunately we sometimes carry this practice to an extreme. We are so attached to the past, to what worked last year and the year before, that we are reluctant to adopt or even try new methods or new ways of doing things. One of the most sorely afflicted areas in this regard is Theatre Administration. Starting with Broadway and moving throughout the country we find theatres slow to adopt sales procedures found effective by business and industry. Administrators are reluctant to use or are unfamiliar with well known methods of reaching the buying public and expanding buyer appeal.

Many theatres pride themselves on their aloofness from standard business considerations. They reason that if the product is good enough, the public will get to the play regardless of the obstacles involved so there is no need for secondary ticket sales booths, ticket charge services or other promotional devices. And if the public does not come, then the audience is at fault. This latter fault is particularly true of academic theatre. The student doesn't really know what is good for him--he should be required to attend all productions. He should be required to take his cultural pill at regular intervals in the hope that he will somehow become addicted.

Aren't there ways to make theatre attractive? Isn't it possible to sell it as a commodity to be desired and sought rather than a modified castor oil to be taken at regular intervals for the general good? I challenge the theatre administrator to come down from his cultural ivory tower and get to know the businessman, the research technician and the advertising expert. The academic theatre should be leading in this exchange of information, and be experimenting with computers, audience expansion, new advertising techniques, etc., and making the results of such experiments available through publications like this one. The modern university has all of the equipment, faculty and opportunity for vast developments in management and administration, but to date it seems more concerned with copying the sometimes dated practices of Broadway than in attempting to chart new directions that could be taken. I sincerely hope we can improve our record in the future.

Harold R. Oaks
 Chairman, AETA
 Theatre Administration Project

THE PITTSBURGH PLAYHOUSE DILEMMA OR HOW I DISCOVERED THAT CULTURE
COULD EXPLODE IN MORE THAN ONE WAY -- by Richard Hoover

In the days of the community theatre, an era which has been superseded by the day of the resident theatre, the Pittsburgh Playhouse operation was a vibrant, exciting project. Professionally oriented from its inception in 1934, the Playhouse was a leader in conversion from amateur to semi-professional status.

The Playhouse, in a boot-strap operation, grew from a tiny 350 seat theatre operation to a complex of three theatres (350 seats, 550 seats, and 70 seats), a club-restaurant open only to subscribers, excellent shop facilities, comfortable rehearsal halls, and what has been called the world's largest school of performing arts.

The management of the Playhouse took pride in the fact that although numerous, and for that time generous, capital gifts had been received, not a dime had been solicited for operations. The Playhouse resisted subsidy for performances until 1965.

The popularity of the program, the expanding facilities, and the increased number of performances resulted in continuous audience growth year by year until 1956. Subscription that year was at a peak of 8,500 and average attendance was 80% of all plays. In spite of the evidence of success, money was beginning to be a problem. Increasing costs were overtaking income, but the Playhouse was squeaking cashwise. Then audience growth leveled off.

A different pattern of attendance became apparent. In previous years there had been a solid base of attendance for each play. The difference between the worst flop and the biggest hit had not been too critical. Within a few years we were to experience a season in which only two Broadway comedies provided 52% of the total attendance that year. ("Come Blow Your Horn" and "Bye Bye Birdie"). Ten other plays fared dismally.

Styles of theater were changing on Broadway as well as elsewhere. Probably because of the easy availability of entertainment on television the small case, one set, mild comedy no longer had an audience. At the Playhouse we were passing over a number of worthwhile plays that required greater skills than was possible with the actors available to us or especially when the plays required large numbers of competent men. Relatively current items with appeal, i.e. substantial Broadway reputations, were shrinking to two or three plays a year.

Frederick Burleigh had served the Playhouse for over twenty years as artistic director. He is one of the most skilled and talented community theater and stock directors I have ever known. My greatest indictment of Fred and perhaps my only major criticism was his casualness about casting. Fred hired inexperienced, easily available people for the resident players and employed guests, whom he had never auditioned or seen perform, by mail. I was appalled and eventually came reluctantly, because of my past associations with Fred, to agree with the segment of the Board which felt that his leadership no longer was adequate. In the spring of 1965, Fred Burleigh was notified that his contract was not going to be renewed after 28 years of service.

Robert Corrigan, now Dean of the NYU School of Fine Arts, had become the head of Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie-Mellon) Drama Department in 1962. Through a contact that Bob made with the Rockefeller Foundation we learned that the Foundation would be receptive to the idea involving a collaboration between the Tech Drama Department and the Playhouse for a program to train actors for the burgeoning resident companies. Bob and I dreamed of a program under the direction of an outstanding modern theatre man which would provide the Playhouse with at least four vigorously done plays, acted by a young company which had been brought up in their roles by a collaborative effort of a talented director and the teaching capability of the Tech Drama Department. A grant in the amount of \$275,000 was made available early in 1964 subject to the selection of an artistic director who would be mutually agreeable to the Foundation, Carnegie Tech and the Playhouse.

It is significant that it was mutually understood that Fred Burleigh was not acceptable to any of the parties for this project although he had agreed to the injection of the program into the Playhouse season.

Among the directors with whom this program was discussed and who was extremely attractive to all three parties was William Ball. At that time, Ball's commitments were such that he was forced to decline our offer although he was intrigued by the idea.

Shortly after the decision had been reached not to renew Fred Burleigh's contract, Ball notified us that he was available and that he had an idea for a conservatory type theater which he had tried on for size with the Rockefeller Foundation and found that they felt that it fit within the general terms of the original proposal which Bob Corrigan and I had made to the Foundation.

In the first conference with Ball he made it clear that he would be available only from June 1st until December 6th because of an anticipated New York engagement and he proposed that a season be mounted opening on July 15th and running through the first week of December.

What was not understood at the outset either in discussions with Ball or by any reflection of its existence in the budget was that Ball was forming a separate company along the lines of APA. Under the terms of the original discussion he was to provide all of the artistic aspects including directors, designers, actors, stage crew and the physical productions. The Playhouse was to provide all administrative services including bookkeeping, payroll, etc. as an additional contribution.

The program was enthusiastically endorsed both by Tech and by the Playhouse Board of Directors and the wheels were set in motion to get it signed up. Shortly after contractual negotiations began, the true and final structure of the American Conservatory Theater, as a completely separate entity with business staff and all, became apparent.

However, by this time it was too late. The ball, if you will forgive the expression, was rolling. Great interest had been generated although the public announcement had not yet been made.

The contract negotiation was a nightmare. Bill had made a list of every situation he had ever experienced or heard of which he felt would interfere with his exclusive use of the entire facility. The very popular children's theater was out. The School was out. He demanded access to the building at all hours of the day and night. His specifications were stringent and lengthy. After hard bargaining, I was able to preserve some semblance of the Playhouse as an institution. Certain areas were reserved for the school operation and we agreed to open the children's theater season late in November, instead of early in October, after the last play in the repertory season had been mounted.

Bill opened with his magnificent production of "Tartuffe" which had just closed at the ANTA Playhouse in Washington Square and he quickly followed it with his much-praised rendition of "Tiny Alice." I must give him credit for getting nine fine productions into repertory in ten weeks.

Soon after the season opened, Bill found that the expected New York season was not going to be available to him and that he not only would be available with his full company after December 6th, but being under some obligation for a long season to a number of his players he became quite intent on getting his contract extended - but distinctly on his terms.

Riding on a wave of enthusiasm for the early productions in the season and having created a personal cheering section, he attempted to stampede Tech and the Playhouse into a year round extension.

The combination of unsatisfactory financial arrangements with an instinctive desire to preserve the Playhouse as an institution motivated me to take a firm stand against an extension of the contract. It seemed to me that, no matter how worthy the program was, ACT had been set up as a transient company and could depart the Playhouse at any time that a more attractive offer developed, leaving the building an empty shell.

The contract which had been negotiated so laboriously provided specifically for a closing on December 6th with a mutual option to have a second season beginning on or about July 15th of 1966. I took the position that we honorably fulfilled all of the terms of the contract and I was convinced that two separate corporations could not peacefully jockey for space and time in the Playhouse. I believed further that the Playhouse could not conscientiously raise money to develop a transient organization but should use any money available for the development of a company based solely at the Playhouse and under the management of the Playhouse itself.

Only two additional productions were staged in the second ten weeks of the season. The Playhouse embarked on a separate season which turned out to be entirely jobbed in directors and actors. We presented "Rhinoceros", "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?", "The Complaisant Lover", "The Knack", and "The Typist and The Tiger". The spring season was fairly successful.

I was directed by the Board to do the staff work on selection of a new artistic director. The Board felt that the Ball season had served certain important purposes which included demonstrating to the city that the Playhouse had changed its direction in favor of a serious and artistic theatre.

Over 300 directors applied, were suggested, or were considered. Feelers were put out to the top directors in the country and a number of them responded with interest. I spent anywhere from two hours to two or three days with 30 different prospects for the job. By the end of March I had narrowed the field down to three men any one of which would, in my opinion, have done an excellent job and of course I had a favorite candidate. He has since demonstrated in another situation that he was quite capable of handling this job.

The Executive Committee of the Board had been serving as the screening committee and I had been working very closely with a group of five top men. One or another of them had met most of the candidates that I took a serious interest in and all of them had spent considerable time with my final choices and were pretty much in agreement on my favorite of the three.

But I had made a tactical error. I had not kept the Board as a whole informed. It would have been a monumental job but as it turned out it was a mistake not to have attempted it. When I went to the larger Board I found opposition in two important money raising areas. When I presented my candidate we jointly presented a budget which would have required about \$100,000 in subsidy. Two individuals took the position that the man's credits were not known nationally and that they were unwilling to throw their weight behind the raising of \$100,000, whereas they pledged to raise substantially more for the right man. With money talking, the rest of the Board remained silent.

Through corporation channels I was put in touch with a brilliant public relations man who was supposed to have at his finger tips all the talent available in America. Through his offices we were put in touch with five additional people who were willing candidates for the job. One of these, of course, was John Hancock then at the San Francisco Actors' Workshop as successor to Jules Irving and Herbert Blau. His season was closed so

that it was impossible for anyone to see his work but the reviews from the San Francisco papers were enthusiastic and responses from an impressive group of references were encouraging. A confidential report from the West Coast was positive. John is personable and impressive in appearance. The two key individuals were sold on him after one of them had spent a couple of days with him in California.

John was rather high handed in his budgetary demands but quite logically stated that if he needed to work on a restricted budget he would prefer to do so in San Francisco where he had already made a start and that only the pledge of a large subsidy would interest him in changing locations. The influential citizens were satisfied and pledged to raise themselves \$450,000 as a subsidy for the program Hancock proposed.

As an officer remarked later, "The blame for Hancock's selection can be spread over a good number of people" and this writer is certainly among them. It turned out that there was a very small audience for the kind of theater John Hancock had to offer. We opened with Brecht's "A Man's A Man"; were critically blasted for a production of "Street Car"; failed to stir much interest in John's production of "A Midsummer's Night Dream" (which was seen briefly off Broadway late last spring); did so-so with "The Entertainer"; and ground out "The Three Sisters." A small but fervent group including several members of the Board though very highly of the program. It was frankly theater of alienation and in that respect it was highly successful. It alienated an awful lot of people.

Our influential friends did not come up with the \$450,000 as promised. Between them they actually came up with \$170,000 and \$50,000 more arrived from an unexpected source. So we were \$230,000 off target in the money raising and box office was well below the budget estimates. We were in deep trouble.

A series of meetings were held and on the 21st of November we announced that the Playhouse was busted and had only sufficient cash to run for two more weeks. We put the public on notice that we needed \$300,000 to complete the season and that took into account certain cuts in operating expenses which had been agreed upon. In a fantastic "Save the Playhouse" campaign, the public, industries, and foundations rose to the occasion. At the end of two weeks we had \$220,000 in firm pledges and by the end of an additional five day period the goal of \$300,000 had been reached.

John Hancock took the view that the success of this campaign was a great vote of confidence in him and the program he was presenting. This was unrealistic. Some of his small group of followers contributed but he refused to recognize the endless hours that others of us spent convincing the substantial givers that the Playhouse was bigger than the immediate program. Certain portions of the media at first refused to endorse the campaign until we sold them on the idea that it was the school and the children's theater that were worth saving. I am convinced that there was no mandate for Hancock implied by the success of the money raising but I did feel that there was a mandate for the continuance of the Playhouse.

The financial crisis came to an end almost exactly a year after the Ball crisis had been settled. But I saw another crisis looming. It was obvious that there was great dissatisfaction with the Hancock work and John's contract, which was for one year, would soon have to be renewed or terminated. I had concluded that it was in my best interest, as well as that of the Playhouse, for me to resign before we faced up to that crisis. In February I submitted my resignation to be effective at the convenience of the Board but not later than June 30th. The officers of the Board very graciously expressed deep regret and very positively and tangibly cleared the suspicion that I was resigning under fire by electing me as a Trustee of the corporation, an honor which had been formerly reserved for retiring presidents of the Board and other members of the Board who have performed exceptional service to the Playhouse.

Hancock's contract did come up for debate. Eight members of the forty man Board felt so strongly that they resigned en masse when the vote went nine to sixteen against renewing his contract. I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the individuals involved and I think that it is a pity that they did not remain as members of the Board to fight for good theatre still another day.

A presentation of "The Fantasticks" was staged by Word Baker, who had done the original production off-Broadway. Ronald Satlof, who had joined the Playhouse staff in December of 1965 as Production Stage Manager was appointed "Guest Resident Director" for the balance of the season and for the 1967-1968 season. It seemed important to the Board and to me to have in this position someone fully familiar with the situation at the Playhouse. In recognition of the financial condition, Ron decided to produce "Barefoot in the Park" as the final offering of the 1966-1967 season. By many who felt strongly about John Hancock this seemed to be the final indignity. However, money jingled in the box office tills once again and there was some muttering about "crying all the way to the bank".

Ron's rather curious title, "Guest Resident Director" was intended to imply that this was no long term commitment to Ron. Ron, frankly, took the job on speculation and has stated that he hopes that his work will justify his eventual appointment as permanent artistic director. He announced a mixture of classical and modern plays for this season. The playwrights represented are Shakespeare, Brecht, Shaw, Albee, Gilroy, Chekhov, and George M. Cohan among others.

It should be understood that Satlof's appointment was a first choice. Numerous directors including some with exceptionally good credits applied for the post and Ron was given preference over all. The Playhouse survived its trial by fire. No one anticipated that the transition to a fully professional operation would be so difficult but I believe that the Playhouse is now in a position to emerge as a major theatre of great significance and I think that it will succeed.