

1994

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*Northwest*  
**THEATRE**  
REVIEW

Volume 2

1994

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## NORTHWEST THEATRE REVIEW

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## Entertaining Mr. Helms

CHRISTOPHER DURANG

**F**irst a voice addresses the audience.

### PERSON

The following scene is the result of legislation created by Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina. Due to Mr. Helms, recent winners of National Endowment for the Arts grants had to sign a statement promising that they would produce no work that was obscene, including promises to refrain from (quote) "depictions of sado-masochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts."

Although only a maniac would be in favor of sexual exploitation of children, following the other requirements would preclude works like Jean Genet's *The Balcony*, Michaelangelo's statue of David, and the final chapter, at least, of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. However, Mr. Helms undoubtedly knows best, and so this following piece is written to try to please him. It is our hope neither to upset nor to offend anyone. Not any any any any one.

The sceue is the kitchen of an American home at breakfast time. Mother, father, two children of either sex. Sorry—don't say the word "sex." Mother, father, daughter, son.

(MOTHER, FATHER, SON, DAUGHTER.)

### MOTHER

Good morning, John. Good morning, Jane.

---

CHRISTOPHER DURANG is one of America's leading playwrights and currently resides in New York City. He originally read this short play as part of his keynote address at the Northwest Drama Conference, 1993.

All inquiries concerning production or other rights to "Entertaining Mr. Helms" should be addressed in writing to the author's agent, Helen Merrill, Ltd., 435 West 29rd Street, Suite 1A, New York, N. Y. 10011. No amateur performance or reading of the play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of Helen Merrill, Ltd.

SON

Good morning, Mother.

DAUGHTER

Good morning, Mother.

SON & DAUGHTER

Good morning, Father.

FATHER

Good morning. Hands on heart.

ALL OF THEM

I pledge allegiance to the flag  
Of the United States of America  
And to the republic for which it stands  
One nation, under God,  
Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

FATHER

Amen. Note, if you will, it says "one nation, under God." It doesn't say under Satan; it doesn't say under agnostic. It says under *God*.

SON

Yes, Father.

DAUGHTER

Yes, Father.

MOTHER

Now here's your delicious breakfast—breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

DAUGHTER

Why doesn't Daddy ever make breakfast?

MOTHER

Daddy makes the money to pay for the breakfast, and Mommy cooks it. That's how every single family in the United States is, and that's how the men and women were in the Bible also. And please don't ask that question again.

DAUGHTER

Alright, Mommy.

FATHER

What are you learning in your public schools that my tax money pays for, I'd like to know, John?

SON

Well, in science class we're learning that it took God six days to make the world, and on the seventh day He rested. And we're learning that disease came about because Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

FATHER

I'm happy to hear this. This science teacher sounds much better than your previous one, who I got fired.

MOTHER

"Whom" I got fired, dear.

FATHER

Oh, you're right. Thank you, darling. Children, listen to your Mother when she speaks about grammar or cooking

MOTHER

The trick to making a 3 minute egg is to cook it for 2 minutes and 45 seconds.

FATHER

Ask me about arithmetic, however. And about morals. And about sports. John, how is gym class going?

SON

Great, Dad. We played basketball yesterday, and one team was shirts, and the other team was skins, and I was on the skins team, and we. . .

MOTHER

John, dear, don't talk about young men with their shirts off please, dear. We don't want to give the audience homoerotic ideas. Just say team A and team B.

SON

Oh. Okay. Team A and team B; and then team B won.

FATHER

Well, that's splendid.

SON

Then we took our clothes off in the locker room, and we took showers.

**MOTHER**

John!

**SON**

Well, we were sweaty.

**MOTHER**

John, go to your room.

**SON**

What did I say?

**FATHER**

John, you heard your mother.

**SON**

Alright.  
(exits)

**MOTHER**

I hope there's nothing wrong with him. You know, Freud said there was a latency period.

**FATHER**

Elizabeth, my God, don't talk about Freud. I'm sure John is fine. If he's not fine, we'll put him through aversion therapy. And if that doesn't work, we'll disown him.

**DAUGHTER**

What are you two talking about? All he said was his team won at basketball.

**MOTHER**

It was how he said it, darling. And don't call your parents "you two." Say Mother and Father. Or Mater and Pater.

**DAUGHTER**

Yes, Mater and Pater.

**FATHER**

Well, Jane, how is home economics going?

**DAUGHTER**

Fine, except that Amy was hemorrhaging the other day.

**MOTHER**

Really? Was it part of a class project?

**DAUGHTER**

No, Mom, she had a homemade abortion, because she was afraid to talk to her parents to get their permission for a regular one.

**FATHER**

What's being said? I don't like this.

**DAUGHTER**

Don't worry, Daddy, it'll never happen to me. Amy's a regular slut, because she's such an emotional mess, she keeps looking for love from boys, and she doesn't know about contraception, because you got our health teacher fired.

**FATHER**

That woman was giving students a blueprint for prostitution.

**DAUGHTER**

But that's just Amy; it won't happen to me. And you know why?

**MOTHER**

Why, dear?

**DAUGHTER**

Because I love you and Daddy, and I will always obey you, and I will never give the preciousness of my body to any boy until we're married and ready and capable of having a baby. I am a good girl, and I am pure. And I'm against abortion, and if only it was against the law, I would gladly turn my friend Amy into the authorities, so she'd be put in jail if she wasn't already dead.

**MOTHER**

Oh, we have raised a wonderful daughter.

**FATHER**

We certainly have. I thank God for her. Thank you, Jesus.

**MOTHER**

Jesus? Darling, I thought we were Jewish.

**FATHER**

We were. But I've been thinking about Jesus a lot lately, and so many people I admire believe in him — Oliver North, John Poindexter, John Cardinal O'Connor. And I think it's time we converted. Enough of this chosen people business. The true chosen people are the Christians! Tomorrow morning after we say the Pledge of Allegiance, I want you all to have memorized the "Our Father."

MOTHER

Oh. Well, this is a bit of a shift for me. And I think it will upset my parents. But you're my husband, and I love to obey you, and you know best in everything.

(MOTHER and FATHER kiss.)

FATHER

I certainly do. I don't understand why everyone doesn't agree with me all the time. I think all this disparity of opinion in our country is confusing to our children, and a great big waste of time. America works for me perfectly—I believe in God, I believe in prayer, I believe in military preparedness, I believe in heterosexuality, I believe in the authority of parents over their children, I believe in putting your toys away when you're done with them, I believe in knowing what's right, and doing what's right, and making sure everyone else knows and does what's right. To me, there is no room for difference of opinion when you're *right*. Am I right?

MOTHER

You're right, darling. When you're right, you're right.

DAUGHTER

You're right, Dad. You're far right! And I'm proud of you for it. Oh, how I love my parents and my country.

(Enter SON.)

SON

Father, Mother, I've come to apologize for what I said before about shirts and skins and taking a sweaty shower with young teenage men. I realize that even though I meant it innocently, it might mislead other who heard me speak. And so, I promise not to do it again. And if it'll make Dad happy, I promise to join the military tomorrow morning. I want to be like Oliver North!

MOTHER

John, what a lovely thing to say.

FATHER

Very nice, John. Very good thought.

MOTHER

But, darling, finish high school first, and then you can join the army.

FATHER

Listen to your mother, son. She's the education mother . . . she knows all about education.

MOTHER

Oh, this is a happy day! We've become Christians, our daughter has told us she'll save her body until marriage, and now our son wants to join the military after he finishes high school. To live in America is perfection!

FATHER

Good-bye, my wonderful wife.

MOTHER

Good-bye, my wonder husband.

SON & DAUGHTER

Good-bye, Pater and Mater.

(And they go off to have a wonderful life in America.)

## The Training of the Apprentices in Shakespeare's Company

DAVID EDGECOMBE

**A**lthough many Elizabethan actors achieved fame during their lifetimes, we know relatively little about the lives of the apprentices. In most cases, we know them by name only.

Most frustrating is our almost complete ignorance of the boys who played the roles that have since tested, and often defeated, the abilities of famous actresses.<sup>1</sup>

The young actors rarely became famous "start" performers. Often their names would not even appear on the playbills. No portrait exists of any apprentice, and we have no reason to believe that many were even painted.<sup>2</sup>

The reason for keeping these young artists in obscurity is complex. The Puritans viewed theatrical performances with disdain. Actors were thought to be aligned with the devil.

To demand reward for this idle way of living was to be guilty of a kind of dishonesty, cheating or filching money gained by the labor of others. Acting was not recognized as a commodity, entertainments should be free and spontaneous; so players were freely compared both with thieves and with whores.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the Puritans vehement denunciations of the actor's craft, London theatre was extremely popular, particularly with the young apprentices from the professional guilds. They came by the hundreds for the afternoon performances and paid a penny to stand in the pit.<sup>4</sup> Although a law was passed in 1542 forbidding all apprentices and journeymen from attending any public entertainment, it seems not to have been enforced.<sup>5</sup> Some years later the Puritan ministers were to attack this practice from the pulpit. On August 24, 1578, J. Stockwood preached in a sermon on:

Flocks of wild youths of both sexes, resorting to interludes, where both by lively gesture and voices there are allurements unto whoredom.<sup>6</sup>

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The rising influence of religious conservatism, however, could not quell the interest of the youth. Nor did it discourage young actors from seeking apprenticeships with the professional performers. There was a long history of training young boys in the dramatic arts which extends far back into the middle ages. Itinerant minstrels and traveling troupes usually had at least one apprentice who played the women's roles and probably acted as a servant.<sup>7</sup>

The apprentices were generally respected by most of London society. They were often the sons of landed gentlemen from estates throughout England, and they had been sent to the city to learn a trade. In the ranks of these apprentices were future mayors and judges.<sup>8</sup> They were usually well-educated, and their education often continued through their apprenticeship. The arrangement between master and apprentice was more than monetary. The student would live for many years with his employer's family.

It was an essential feature of the medieval system that the apprentice should reside with the master, whose duty it was to instill social virtues into the boy as well as to teach him knowledge of the craft.<sup>9</sup>

(Only after the Eighteenth Century did a wage/work arrangement become part of the apprentice contract.)

The master became the boy's adopted parents, in a manner of speaking. In return for his work, the apprentice was given food and shelter. The theatrical apprentices shared the same system as their peers in other guilds. One critic, Stephen Gosson, wrote unfavorably about the training of actors (1582).

Most of the players have been either men of occupations which they have forsaken to live by playing, or common minstrels, or trained up from childhood to this abominable exercise, and have no other way to get their living.<sup>10</sup>

Most boys would start their apprenticeship between the ages of ten and sixteen. Their training would continue until they were well into their early twenties. Most young men had completed their contracts by the time they were twenty-four.<sup>11</sup> Although we have no evidence that he was an apprentice, Richard Burbage started acting at the age of thirteen. We know that some of the young actors continued to play women's roles well into their twenties.<sup>12</sup>

The apprentices were at the bottom of the organizational ladder at the Globe Theatre. The housekeepers were at the top. They owned the theatre building and received most of the profits from the daily performances. The thirty-two shares of theatre stock were divided between the housekeepers and the principle actors in the company. During the reign of Elizabeth I, Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, John Heminges and Henry Condell each owned four shares for a total of sixteen, or half.<sup>13</sup> The remaining sixteen were distributed among the other actors. Only stockholders could share in the cash receipts from the ticket sales. Journeymen



who played the smaller parts were hired specifically for a role and, their contract usually expired when the production closed. The only unpaid workers at the theatre were the apprentices. Sometimes the boys did receive money from their master for the purchase of clothing. There is a notation in the Henslowe diary which complains about the exorbitant cost of keeping the boys dressed.<sup>14</sup> The apprentices were not the responsibility of the Company, as they were in the professional boy troupes; they were wards of individual actors.<sup>15</sup> They were literally considered "property" and had no rights outside of those given to them by their masters. Once they entered into an indentureship, there was seldom an escape for unhappy apprentices. A touching account of an apprentice crime is found in the Folger Library. Supposedly, this tract was written by a young apprentice, one Peter Moore, on the eve of his execution for murdering his master, Humphrey Bidgood. In this paper Moore confesses that he poisoned the man with white lead to escape his contract of indenture. The pamphlet takes the form of a lecture to all the apprentices of London. It warns them to obey and respect their masters, or else the same fate would befall them.<sup>16</sup>

Apprentices often resisted the control of their masters. Riots by gangs of these young wards were common in Elizabethan England, and on at least one occasion the participants received capital punishment for their offenses. An excellent account of such a riot is found in the Folger Library. It was published by William Blackwall in 1595 and ends with a stern admonition to apprentices in general.

Be thee ashamed you neglectful young men, I am ashamed to call you prentices: for how can I call you by that name which you despite. For prentices indeed are those, that betray your practises: such, as being servants know how to obey, that being masters they may be obeyed: for it is as great praise for a subject to obey dutifully, as a Governour to rule well.<sup>17</sup>

Often an actor would solicit for an apprentice. Henslowe wrote that he had bought a boy named James Bristo to act in his company.<sup>18</sup> Actors sometimes acquired several boys at a time. In spite of the financial aspect of this exchange, boys were usually treated as members of the family. They slept in the same rooms as the master's own children and shared the same food. Needless to say, an affection was often kindled between the family and their boarder. Nicholas Tooley, an apprentice who lodged with the Burbages for many years, left the following to his master's wife:

I do give unto Mrs. Burbage the wife of my good friend Mr. Cuthbert Burbage (in whose house I now lodge) as a remembrance of my love in respect of her motherly care over me, the sum of ten pounds. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Such testimonials are commonly found among the possessions of the actors during this period. Samuel Gilburne, an actor in Shakespeare's company, remembered his apprentice Augustine Phillips in his will. He left the boy some of his most valuable stage properties. These included his "mouse-colored velvet hose, a white taffeta doublet, a black taffeta suit, a purple cloak, the sword, dagger and bass viol." Since an actor of the day was partially judged by his wardrobe, these must have been

especially welcomed by the young actor.<sup>20</sup> At least once the apprentice married into the family of his master. After the death of Richard Burbage, the great actor's apprentice, Dicky Robinson, married his wife, Winfred Burbage. There would have been at least a sixteen year difference in their ages, but the union must have been very practical for both parties. By marrying Master Robinson, Mrs. Burbage was assured of keeping her husband's shares in the company, and the union represented a sizable financial gain for the young actor.<sup>21</sup>

We can say with some certainty that Shakespeare never had an apprentice. It was necessary that a man have a wife and family before an apprentice was invited into his house. Appearances were important to the Elizabethans, and it would hardly become the reputation of a single man to be living with a young boy. Shakespeare also did not have the space to lodge an apprentice. He was himself a boarder while living in London, and he even may have been an apprentice during his early years in that city.

Of course, Shakespeare must have been above the regular age for apprentice when he came to London; but in the trades at least it was so much a custom to take grown men as apprentices that regulations had to be made against doing so, especially if the man was married. That there would be nothing peculiar in Shakespeare's becoming an apprentice in the company is shown by the early career of another dramatist, Anthony Munday, which in many respects furnishes a close parallel to that we have supposed for Shakespeare. Munday was apprenticed to John Allide, Stationer, August 24, 1576, for eight years, he being at the time twenty-two or twenty-three. Under our supposition, Shakespeare would have become an apprentice at latest by May, 1587, at the age of twenty-three, for at least the minimum of seven years.<sup>22</sup>

Within the structure of the professional company, Shakespeare could have entered as either an apprentice or as a journeyman. There is some conjecture that his first job may have been to act as a prompter's attendant.<sup>23</sup> It is unlikely that he would have entered the company as an actor unless he had some experience acting in touring companies away from London. Shakespeare encountered a rigid chain of command in the Burbage company; it is safe to say that he started as a journeyman near the bottom of the organizational structure. This novice from Stratford was not about to act with the finest performers of that time until he had undergone some sort of apprenticeship program. Apprentice systems were not only a matter of convenience, they were written into the law.

Even if Richard Burbage probably was not formally apprenticed, still he had received the regular training, and had fulfilled the law concerning apprentices. Also, unless Shakespeare be an exception; no member was drawn from another company before 1603. The presumption from this custom is thus strong that William Shakespeare had gone through the necessary period of training in the company as an actor either as an apprentice or a hired man. . . . In any case, they had served an apprenticeship. This was not only the custom; it was the law.<sup>24</sup>

As previously noted, Richard Burbage, as revealed by his brother, started acting at age thirteen. This was the usual age to begin apprenticeship. He acted under his father at the Theatre, London's first professional playhouse. James Burbage also worked his way up to a management position. His son, Cuthbert, spoke of his father as "the first builder of

playhouses, and was himself in his younger years a player."<sup>25</sup> Ten years after his arrival in London, Shakespeare is listed as one of the principle shareholders With Kempe and Burbage. This kind of progression was not unusual. Richard Burbage's apprentice, Nicholas Tooley, eventually became a shareholder, and finally a housekeeper of the Globe.<sup>26</sup>

A letter exists from one Paster Pyk to his master Edward Alleyn. The writer seems to be a man of good schooling, and he expresses an extreme fondness for the older actor. This is probably the John Pyk who was later to become a shareholder with the Admiral's men. In this letter he refers to himself by what seems to be a household nickname, "yor petty prety pratlyng parlyng pgy." He was later to use the name John Pig on stage.<sup>27</sup>

The ascension of individual actors up the ranks was an established part of the organization in Elizabethan theatres. In many ways this could be considered a closed system. Rarely did actors from one company cross over to another troupe. Once established the system was self-contained and built a tight ensemble within the ranks of the theatres. Competition among companies was fierce; the apprenticeship program stimulated great loyalty among the individual company members. Since the Theatre started producing plays in 1576, it took about twenty years for the apprentices to become housekeepers: "But the later group, (apprentices) for which we can reasonably assume careful training, does not supply actors to the professional company before 1600."<sup>28</sup> But from the time the boys entered the company they were conscious that perseverance could bring them to a position of housekeeper.

The apprenticeship program may have had a chain of progression. As an individual grew older and more experienced he would be cast in more challenging roles and thus take a more prominent position in the company.

It appears then that each apprentice also had a distinct line, to which he had been specially trained. At graduation of one apprentice, a second was already trained to take his place, and a third was articulated to begin his training. This system made it necessary to keep several apprentices.<sup>29</sup>

If Baldwin's conjecture is accurate, boys were sought to fulfill certain needs of the company. A new apprentice would be trained to play a specific type of female character.

A boy was taken by the member whose duty it was to train a particular line, this line being usually in a general way the female counterpart of his own line as a man. He took the boy of ten and broke him in on minor parts supplied by the dramatist. As the boy grew older, his parts became more difficult til a few years before graduation his master brought in another boy to go through the same process.<sup>30</sup>

If the apprenticeship structure was as elaborate as suggested, Shakespeare as playwright for the company would have been under pressure to supply these young actors with parts equivalent to their ability.

This system of training necessitated the closed cooperation on the part of the dramatist also. It was his business in cooperation with the master to supply proper parts for each youngster to begin with and develop in. He had also to be careful not to create any female

part for which there was not a properly trained actor. How intimate this cooperation was may be seen from the fact that in nearly every one of the many specific allusions to the ages of the women, the ages given are not ideal ages but those of the boys who were to perform the parts.<sup>31</sup>

Shakespeare's plays were the textbooks for the young actors. That they were certainly written with specific actors in mind for the major parts cannot be denied, but in all likelihood he wrote incidental parts for educational purposes.

Beckerman agrees that major actors most likely chose boys who fit their image of themselves, and who could play the type of roles that they had been trained to play:

Since each of these boys was apprenticed to one of the members of the company, his training and performances would probably have harmonized with adult acting.<sup>32</sup>

What better coach could a young actor have in a specific role than to be tutored by a man who in his younger years had played that same type of character? (Making a boy the ward of a musician would not serve the needs of the company, unless he were to become a musician.) Baldwin takes this conjecture a step further:

This principle applies not merely to successions among the major members but also the apprentices from whom the successors to members were to be recruited. These apprentices formed the second most permanent element of the company for long terms, usually about eleven years. It would be natural but not necessary for an apprentice to be trained up in the line of his master as his possible successor. Thus Pollard, the apprentice to the clown Shank, became himself a clown.<sup>33</sup>

Obviously, there were numerous variables which could affect the apprentice order of graduation. Although the maturation process may seem to be beyond the control of the company, the roles of the young actors were not always changed by the onset of puberty.

The natural transition from playing women to playing men is at the breaking of the voice, but boys' voices broke later in Shakespeare's time than now, and a trained voice not only tends to break later than an untrained one, but its alto tone may be prolonged even into its late teens.<sup>34</sup>

This organization probably changed when the companies left London during a plague year; this may have been one of the incentives for the troupes to tour the provinces at the onset of the "black death." There may have been some flexibility in this system:

The "lead" of the future must be given opportunity to develop as the "juvenile lead" of the present. If the "juvenile lead" does not develop sufficient dash and adaptability for a "lead," he may still serve a useful function as the important "old man" of the company. The "heavy" of the future must be developed from the "second villain" of the present, and so through the successions.<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not this system was strictly adhered to is subject to debate. It does seem reasonable that a permanent company might gravitate to such a structure after only a few years. Theatrical presentation was viewed by the company members as a skill and a trade. Acting techniques had to be passed on to the succeeding generation in order to

perpetuate the existence of the professional organization. The personal contact between the master and his apprentice was the foundation of Elizabethan theatre. The apprentices received an education which was perfectly suited to their individual needs. If they acquired the skill and had sufficient perseverance within the system, their rewards were great. William Shakespeare, who left Stratford with very little except possibly a couple of poems in his saddlebag, would return a landed gentleman of considerable wealth.

Students were trained in many disciplines, and the specific studies may have been formalized by their masters. In 1616 a book entitled *The Rich Cabinet* enumerated the skills which were taught to the apprentices. The list included dancing, singing, music, elocution, a good memory, skill in handling weapons, and "pregnancy of wit." One man probably could not have instructed in all of these skills; various other company members may have conducted classes in their precise field of expertise. Such lessons may have been part of the preparation for a production, but I believe that regular rehearsals precluded the chance of extra classes. The heavy production schedule must have necessitated that company energy be directed toward mounting the play at hand. T.G., the writer of *Rich Cabinet*, notes the importance of practice and rehearsal in order to perfect the talents of the young performer:

... in all of which he resembleth an excellent spring of water, which grows the more sweeter and the more plentiful by the often drawing out of it: so are all these the more perfect and plausible by the more often practice.<sup>36</sup>

The rehearsal and production schedule must have been grueling. Practice began in the early morning and performances were in the afternoon. Special shows in small indoor theatres like Blackfriars were often requested by the nobility who patronized the professional companies. There was little time for outside education. Plays were given in repertory with new works continually added to the production schedule. As was the case with the adult performer, each boy would have to assume several roles in a single production. Because there are fewer female roles in Shakespeare's plays, the apprentices were not as taxed as the major actors.<sup>37</sup> The rehearsals, by necessity, became the primary instructional periods for the apprentices. Shakespeare himself may have played an active role in the training of the young actors. There is evidence that the great playwright may have acted as director for the company. A foreigner visiting England during that period commented that the dramatist played an integral part in the staging of the plays. Johannes Rhenamus wrote:

... actors are daily instructed, as it were in school, so that even the most eminent actors have to allow themselves to be taught their places by the dramatists.<sup>38</sup>

This man had obviously witnessed a rehearsal and, if his description is correct, Shakespeare may have been a director in the modern sense. The dramatist may well have blocked the plays and assisted actors with line interpretations. Shakespeare probably had an open script before him

and may have made cuttings and corrections during the rehearsal period. Each apprentice would receive coaching on his characterization from the man who wrote the script. One would be hard pressed to imagine a more capable instructor.

Whether the Elizabethan acting style was naturalistic or artificially oratorical is still the subject of much debate. When it came to the education of the apprentices, the tenets of oratory would have been easier for the boys to acquire.<sup>39</sup> Though indication of emotion could mean the success or failure of an actor's portrayal, the boys must have received more instruction in the mechanics of delivery: "... their was not so much in pure acting practice as of rhetoric, specifically pronunciation and gesture."<sup>40</sup> Even if the boys lacked the ability to clarify motivation, the clarity of their delivery would express the important ideas. Instruction in voice and enunciation were started as soon as the apprentice joined the company. This training must have continued until graduation.

The Elizabethan actors probably were concerned with breath control. The delivery of the lines was fairly fast, and this necessitated regularity or breathing. Before the time of Shakespeare, lines were always written with heavy end stops. This enabled the actors to place their breaths at exactly the same place in each line. Lines were delivered fast with plenty of breath to sustain the projection. The effect was, of course, highly artificial. Shakespeare broke away from the regular line scan and heavy end stops, but his blank verse demanded even more breath control from the young actors. Lines were longer and punctuation did not always indicate a breathing point for the actors. The placing of breaths in Shakespearean blank verse is difficult for even the experienced actor; young boys probably required hours of coaching in order to master this difficult art.<sup>41</sup> We must remember, however, that the actors were working with more vocally skilled students to begin with. Elizabethan educational systems developed oral proficiency even before writing. By the time an apprentice joined the company, he had as many as ten years experience in memorization and recitation. The lack of printed materials and the stress on oral skills in public schools may have encouraged the average Elizabethan to be more vocally proficient than those of us who live in the twentieth century. Having worked with children as old as the youngest apprentices, I wonder how the company members found the time to mount an ambitious performance schedule and coach the young actors in voice.

Nearly all English students of the period were schooled in music as well as oratory. Both public and private schools offered their students instruction in singing, and many schools introduced instrumental training at an early age. Even the charity schools, like those located in the London slums of Bridewell, had music classes. Knowledge of music, both theory and practice, would be considered normal for that day. Many of the actors in the company started their careers as itinerant minstrels. Both Kempe and Allyn were accomplished singers and experts at playing

the lute.<sup>42</sup> The apprentices were schooled in these skills by some of the finest English performers of that day. Musical instruments were highly valued by the company members, and their wills show that they were very happy to leave them to their apprentices.<sup>43</sup>

The apprentices were also taught the dances of the period. Almost all of Shakespeare's comedies include dance. The traditional English dances of the day take great skill and rehearsal in order to perfect their choreography. The boys probably learned such dances as the "galliard" with its intricate footwork, the "capriole" which required leaping between the steps, and the "volte" which involve "violently hurling your partner about the floor."<sup>44</sup> Although most of the dances would have been performed by the adult members of the company, the boys were often called upon to execute elaborate choreography. The dance sequence in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II.ii. 1) is a perfect example:

The fairies were all played by children, and their rigid training as dancers must have been useful to them; but Puck, who was not technically a fairy, was played by a grown man.<sup>45</sup>

This dance must have been choreographed by another member of the company; Kempe might have been responsible since he was famous for his dancing. Even if there were no specific dance classes offered by the company, the apprentices would acquire considerable experience during the rehearsals.

More time was spent drilling the positions used in fencing than any other physical activity. From early in the boy's education, use of weapons and self defense was taught daily. Skill at sword play was a matter of honor for an Elizabethan gentleman. The audience expected realistic depictions of violence on stage, and the apprentices were carefully trained:

He had to learn the ruthless technique of Elizabethan fencing. He had to learn how to handle a long, heavy rapier in one hand, with a dagger for parrying in the other, and to make a series of savage, calculated thrusts at close quarters from the wrist and forearm, aiming either at his opponents eyes or below the ribs. The actor had to achieve the brutal reality of an actual Elizabethan duel without injuring himself or his opponent, a problem that required a high degree of training and of physical coordination.<sup>46</sup>

There are records to evidence that the actors in Shakespeare's company were excellent swordsmen. The comic actor, Richard Tarleton, received the "Master of Fence," the highest award given by the English fencing schools.<sup>47</sup> It is safe to assume that he passed on his skill to the apprentices under his tutelage.

From all reports the young actors were very successful acting in feminine roles. It may be hard for us to imagine that boys could play the great heroines of Shakespeare's plays as effectively as our modern actresses.<sup>48</sup> Juliet Dusinberre reminds us that we have the opposite problem when we are asked to believe that a girl is masquerading as a boy: "Boys make bewitching girls, where women make lumbering youths."<sup>49</sup> We know that the English apprentices spent much time learning how to handle and maintain the elaborate wigs they wore during performance.<sup>50</sup> Elizabethan

audiences seemed to accept boys' impersonations completely. The writer Coryate noted in his *Cruities* (1611) how surprised he was to see women on the stage when he visited the continent:

I saw women act, a thing that I never saw before . . . and they performed it with as good a grace, action and gesture, and whatsoever convenient for a player, as I ever saw any masculine actor.<sup>51</sup>

Ben Jonson wrote about a famous child star of the day in his play, *The Devil is an Ass*. One of his characters comments on one Dicky Robinson's masquerades by calling him "a very pretty fellow," and "he dresses himself the best, beyond forty of your ladies."<sup>52</sup> Ben Jonson also related an anecdote about that young performer. One night, as a practical joke, he appeared at a "gossip's feast . . . dressed like a lawyer's wife." He managed to fool the assembly. Finally, his true identity was revealed to the great amusement of all present. The only comments the ladies could make were to note the taste of the young man's fashions.<sup>53</sup> Another apprentice appeared with the great Richard Burbage on stage in a private performance. John Rice was favorably reviewed: ". . . two absolute actors, even the verie best our instant time can yield" and was called a "verie fayre and beautiful nymph."<sup>54</sup> This same writer witnessed a production of *Macbeth* which featured John Rice as Lady Macbeth: "A very proper Child well spoken, being clothed like an angel of gladness with a taper of frankincense burning in his hand."<sup>55</sup>

The difference between the apprentices of the professional company and the boy actors in the all-boy companies was one of vocational goals. The apprentices had a stake in the success of their company. Each boy could advance eventually to become housekeeper. In the boy companies, a student would remain a student no matter how hard he worked. When he reached the age of sixteen he graduated, leaving his masters and his peers. Having no guarantee of employment, he would be forced to seek out a professional apprenticeship—something the apprentices in the adult theatres had secured many years before. Boy company members rarely became adult actors.

Distinction must be made between the boys who played women's parts in the men's companies and the boys who played all the parts at Blackfriars. The former were apprenticed to, and trained by, the men; chosen for their acting ability, although it was an advantage to sing tolerably well, they generally became professional actors when their voices broke. The others were choirboys whose acting might be indifferent, but as singers they were the pick of the country and trained by accomplished musicians.<sup>56</sup>

The boy company members were educated in music and not trained to become professional actors. The goal of one day being a shareholder gave the apprentice, as well as the adult actor, an incentive for achievement. The boys' association with Shakespeare's troupe made them more than students; it made them professionals.<sup>57</sup>

The organization of the Globe came not from the English academies, but from the crafts guilds. The theatre was founded and supervised not by the "university wits," but by men who had been laborers and guild

members themselves. These actors had worked through the system as apprentices, shareholders and housekeepers. Elizabethan theatre was a plebeian enterprise supplying popular drama to the growing ranks of the English middle class who were themselves guild members. Patronage by the nobility merely sanctified their existence, but Shakespeare and his troupe were dependent on the common people for their livelihood. His plays were written for the "great unwashed" as Edmund Burke would later call them. Their children, and not the children of the nobility, became the acting apprentices. The organization of the English theatre evolved from the medieval tradition of the guild; from this system of instruction it drew its strength.

It was with this apprentice element that the playwright would have the most serious problems. He was obliged by dramatic custom to use these apprentices to represent women, and he must have some principal women in his play, "For what's a play without a woman in it?" But these boys, like all others, had the disconcerting habit of growing up, changing in physical and mental characteristics and capabilities even from play to play. It was almost as if a dramatist had to provide a simple part to begin with and gradually to increase the part in difficulty till the pupil was finally the master in his art and quality. Then the apprentice graduated and the playwright-school teacher had the whole process to repeat with the next pupil.<sup>54</sup>

We must remember that Shakespeare's company often repeated his more popular plays. Baldwin's notion that the writing of scripts was systematized to accommodate the educational needs of the apprentices is exaggerated at best. It is highly improbable that Shakespeare developed a whole net set of plays for each group of apprentices. I can only suggest that the needs of the young actors probably affected the writing of scripts during his nineteen or twenty year theatrical career. Since we know that he wrote major parts with Burbage in mine, it is safe to infer that he created individual women's roles for the apprentices.

Shakespeare's company was a small and closely knit unit in a plutocratic society. His plays were constructed expressly for his troupe. He knew the talents and limitations of each apprentice and penned the characters accordingly: "These parts were written to be acted by boys, . . ." <sup>55</sup> At first glance, the structure of the troupe might seem to be a limiting force on the artistic expression of the playwright. Surely, he was forced to keep the physical expression of love to a minimum.<sup>60</sup> But in his writing of the female roles, the poetry expresses all the character innuendo the young actors might only be able to indicate; ". . . the dominating characteristic of them all is their superabundant femininity. . . ." <sup>61</sup> Shakespeare created boyish heroines for many of his comedies. His girls could slip into a doublet and hose as easily as they could don a farthingale.

The boy actors prompted the creation of boyish heroines,

Disguise freed the dramatist to explore . . . More would have approved of Shakespeare's suggestion that the masculine spirit makes a woman not less but more feminine.<sup>62</sup>

Were the great female roles out of the apprentices' range? Critics have debated this point for centuries. It has been noted that many of the

characters seem to be written for one taller and more mature boy with a younger boy usually playing that character's confidant. (Desdemona and Emilia are exceptions to this.) We can easily imagine these light comic parts played by young men.<sup>63</sup> How could a mere child play Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra? John Rice played the first role with considerable success. He was certainly no child when he acted this mature queen. He may have been in his early twenties, but he helped the considerable run at the Globe. Cleopatra, the aging Queen, appears beyond the abilities of even an older apprentice. She has more lines than any other female character and is judged by many to be Shakespeare's most complex heroine. Davies decided that this could be played by a sixteen-year old apprentice. He maintains that the part would be approached from a station of aloof dignity and that her less than regal moments would be suggested by the lines.<sup>64</sup> Brown argues this point. He believes the part too great for any boy actor. As proof, he cites its apparent failure on the Elizabethan stage. Little evidence of production exists today. If it ever became part of the repertory, it was dropped quickly. Dryden's popular play on the same subject may have kept it off the boards. Not until the nineteenth century was it produced with any regularity. Brown blames the young actor for the failure of ambitious work.<sup>65</sup>

The fact remains, Shakespeare wrote for these apprentices, and his comedies exploit the potential of the young actors. "The boy actor is an instrument, and Shakespeare uses him with the sense of his possibilities and limits. . . ." <sup>66</sup> The apprentices gave Shakespeare the freedom to express women in all their possibilities. These boys were not limited by the Elizabethan notions of how a woman must act; they expressed femininity in a naive and completely human way. "Disguise draws men and women together in the comedies through their discovery of the artifice of difference which social custom sustains."<sup>67</sup> With this confusion of sexual identities, Shakespeare exposes one of his primary themes: "Shakespeare believed that for a man to be more than a boy, as for a woman to be more than a child, the masculine and feminine must marry in spirit."<sup>68</sup> His characters were written to emphasize their humanity, not their sexuality. Some of the mature female such as Cleopatra and Cressida are obvious exceptions to this contention. Writing for boy actors permitted the Bard more freedom of expression. These boys were allowed to do what Elizabethan women could not. Their characters emerged as freer, more independent women released from their societal expectations. If Shakespeare was a "liberated man," he acquired a vehicle for expression through the use of the boy actors. Perhaps, as the foremost teacher of the apprentices, Shakespeare felt a social responsibility to educate them morally as well as professionally. His scripts were their textbooks, and his love of life and humanity became their most important lesson.

## Notes

1. Clifford Leech, *The Revels History of Drama in English*, 3 vols., (London: Methuen and Company, 1957), II, 108.
2. Ivor Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1970), p. 97.
3. M.C. Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player: A Study of Actor and Society in Shakespeare's England*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 47.
4. Marchette Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1949), p. 38.
5. Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player*, p. 44.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, p. 39.
9. L.C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, (London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd., 1937), p. 42.
10. Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe: 1599-1609*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), p. 122.
11. C. Walter Hodges, *Shakespeare and the Players*, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1970), p. 43.
12. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574 to 1642*, (London: The Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 69.
13. Felix Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama: 1558-1642*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935; reprint ed. 1959), p. 183.
14. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 50.
15. T.W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 226.
16. Peter More, *The Apprentice Warningpiece*, (London: 1641), pp. 2-7.
17. "A Student's Lamentation that hath sometime been in London an apprentice, for tumblts lately in the city happening; for which flue suffered on Thursday the 24 of July last." (London: William Blackwall, 1595), pp. 11-12.
18. Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, pp. 116-119.
19. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, p. 161.
20. Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p. 115.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
22. Baldwin, *The Organization of Personnel*, p. 287. There is some discussion of this point among critics. Bradbrook, among others, states that neither Burbage or Shakespere ever acted as apprentices to any other actor. See: Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player*, p. 207.
23. Baldwin, *The Organization of Personnel*, p. 289.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.
25. Edwin Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors Before 1642*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1929), p. 67.
26. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 26.
27. Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p. 114.
28. Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe*, p. 122.
29. Baldwin, *The Organization of Personnel*, p. 196.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.
32. Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe*, p. 184.
33. Baldwin, *Organization of Personnel*, pp. 308-309.
34. Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, (London: The MacMillan Press, 1975), p. 253. Davies also makes this same point. He maintains that the natural change of the voice can be delayed until the age of seventeen. Davies, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, p. 35.
35. Baldwin, *Organization of Personnel*, p. 308.
36. Ivor Brown, *How Shakespeare Spent the Day*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 119.
37. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, pp. 89-92.
38. Leech, *The Revels History*, p. 113.
39. Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe*, p. 110.
40. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 70.
41. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, p. 90.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
43. Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p. 115.
44. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, p. 88.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
48. Margaret Webster writes about seeing the boy actors in China portray women. Mei-Lan-Fang, a famous performer of the 1950's, was an extremely graceful and convincing woman. He acted his characters with thoughtful simplicity, and he was especially noted for his seductive roles. The training of Mei-Lan-Fang was done, according to Chinese tradition, exclusively by men. He studied with several elderly actors who had also played women in their younger years. Margaret Webster, *Shakespeare Today*, (London: Dent Publishers, 1957), pp. 20-28.
49. Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, p. 253.
50. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel*, p. 278.
51. Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Sidney Lee, and Charles Talbot Onions, eds., *Shakespeare's England: An Account of Life and Manners*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 246. Clifford Leech also reports this counter: "The general quality of the boy actors is suggested by the reaction of an English traveller who saw in Venice women playing the parts of women; he remarked in pleased surprise, that they were as good as the boys." Leech, *The Revels History of Drama in English*, p. 108.
52. Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p. 80.
53. Raleigh, *Shakespeare's England*, p. 246.
54. Dennis Bartholomeusz, *MacBeth and the Players*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 11.
55. *Ibid.*
56. F.E. Halliday, *Shakespeare and His Age*, (New York: Thomas Yoeseloff, 1956), p. 77.
57. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 69.
58. Baldwin is guilty of forcing his research to corroborate his thesis. Although his conclusions are conjectures and often inaccurate, his book remains one of the few works which attempts to match individual actors with major roles. His study is outdated, and further research must be made into this controversial area. Computers might assist academicians in matching characters to actors, and thus more accurately evaluate the educational processes associated with the apprentices.
59. Davies, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, p. 3.
60. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, p. 160.
61. Davies, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, p. 1.
62. Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, p. 271.
63. Leech, *The Revels History*, p. 108.
64. Davies, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, pp. 132, 133.
65. Brown, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p. 109.
66. Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, p. 269.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

## A Partial History of the Northwest Drama Conference, 1948-1970: "Early Years"

HORACE W. ROBINSON

The Northwest Drama Conference (NWDC) developed as a normal part of the growth of the academic theatre in America, a phenomenon of the Twentieth Century. During the first decade of the century there were occasional course offerings of a theatrical nature under such headings as rhetoric, oratory, elocution and interpretation. They were usually to be found in the English Departments of progressive colleges and universities, the theatrical nature of such courses was verified by the turn of the century description: "both classic and modern drama will be studied, details of interpretation carefully worked out, and at least one play presented." (*University of Oregon Catalogue 1900-1901*, p. 127)

By the 1920's some of these courses had been clearly identified by title as theatre. Play production, drama and acting were taught by theatre trained or theatre influenced personnel from the Modern Language Association (MLA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) or the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking (NAATPS). During this period, however, such activity was usually considered extra-curricular or as an elective and not equivalent to other "content" courses such as history, mathematics, science, etc. Teachers in the new discipline were still members of the English Department or, in some cases, the newly developing Departments of Speech. Only occasionally did theatre instruction achieve departmental status, and rarely was it granted degree privileges.

In the early 1930's theatre educators were still generally considered second class citizens in the academic world. As a result they began to confer with each other in order to develop some collective plan by which the theatre as a discipline might gain new dignity and respect. They were interested primarily in such benefits as increased staff, adequate budgets, appropriate and adequate physical plants, degree granting status and professional outlets for their students. In 1927 George Pierce Baker, a leader in the movement, said in an open letter:

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American drama in general is . . . to be likened to the pre-Shakespearean period, with its seeds of commanding growth. If American academic and civic playhouses would achieve something comparable to the European repertory theatre, and they could do so by uniting, the result might well be a theatre and a drama unsurpassed in history. (quoted in *History of the National Theatre Conference* by Lee Norvelle and Tino Balio, p. 15)

A number of organizations came into being to further that objective including the National Theatre Conference (NTC) in 1931 and the American Educational Theatre Association (AETA) in 1936 (to become the American Theatre Association [ATA] in 1972). Regional activity also increased as geographical areas sought communication within their boundaries with theatre teachers having kindred problems. In this period of frustration and deprivation it was a kind of ego trip for participants who could for a few days be in a theatre oriented society which presented a united front against the anti-theatre academia. The stage was set.

In the mid-30's Glenn Hughes of the University of Washington, Seattle, having met with considerable success in developing at that institution a highly respected academic unit known as the School of Drama, decided to initiate an annual conference which would play host to the theatre educators of the Pacific Northwest. There was some emphasis on college and university personnel with most of the participants coming from Oregon and Washington institutions. Representatives from community and civic theatres, high school teachers and children's theatre directors were also welcome. Some students attended, but the costs of travel, local academic demands and the scholarly level of the programs interested only the select. It is to be assumed that Glenn Hughes, as well as most of the subsequent hosts of the NWDC, were interested in displaying an admirable academic theatre organization, an excellent staff and a newly enlarged physical plant.

Each of these early conferences convened on the second weekend in February for all day sessions on Friday and Saturday. Most of the participants could return home on Sunday, having missed only a part of Thursday and all of Friday from their academic week. The two days were filled with seminars and presentations of special interest to areas such as secondary schools and community theatres. Two general sessions would often feature as speaker a well-known national figure or someone of regional prominence. The entertainment usually consisted of two University of Washington productions and an outside production from the early Seattle Repertory Theatre under the direction of Burton James and/or The Cornish School of Fine Arts. Children's Theatre productions, University of Washington or otherwise, were featured in the afternoons. As all questions of governance, finance, program and future meetings were in the hands of Professor Hughes, there were no business meetings. A nominal registration fee was required of each delegate, and this provided admission to all sessions and to the entertainments. A banquet was available for a separate and additional charge.

Glenn Hughes and the University of Washington School of Drama continued to serve as annual host of the NWDC with mounting success

until 1941. The conference was then discontinued due to restrictions associated with the World War II effort.

Professor Horace W. Robinson, Director of the University Theatre at the University of Oregon, Eugene, attended and participated in the Seattle sessions and, along with the other Northwest theatre people, looked forward to the renewal of the conference when the war ended in 1945. When there was no indication of a resumption of the former NWDC by the University of Washington, Professor Robinson contacted Glenn Hughes and asked about any future plans. Professor Hughes said that for a number of reasons he had decided not to reactivate the conference, and Robinson inquired if there would be any objection to the University of Oregon starting such a conference in Eugene. Hughes said he had no objections and that the University of Washington would be pleased to cooperate and would be glad to participate. The curtain opens.

### The New Northwest Drama Conference

Professor Robinson announced that the first new NWDC would be held in Eugene, Oregon at the University of Oregon on February 13 and 14, 1948. As host, Professor Robinson assumed full responsibility for the program, promotion, financing and entertainment. It was agreed that this new conference would have no administrative, financial or traditional program ties with the earlier Seattle NWDC. However, when the new conference started the similarities were obvious: the format was basically unchanged through 1952 with subsequent changes as hereinafter noted; the time and place were the second weekend of February at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon; the program was developed by Professor Robinson and sub-chairpersons appointed by him; the featured speakers were financed and selected by the host institution and designed to enhance the registration appeal to theatre people of the Northwest; and, finally, the entertainment consisted of one mainstage attraction from the University Theatre, University of Oregon (the UT moved into a new physical plant in 1949, later to be named the Robinson Theatre in 1975). Additionally, one arena theatre production from the UT was presented as well as a mainstage or arena attraction from a visiting company, either volunteer or invited. Often there was a local company performance in their own theatre, such as the Very Little Theatre of Eugene. In later years the Lane Community College also gave presentations. On occasion there was the happy coincidence of a professional/commercial company performance in the area.

There was no organizational structure for this early NDWC nor were there any officers. Professor Robinson utilized the title of Executive Secretary as a convenience for outside contacts. The registration fee was a modest \$1.00 for all delegates. In this conference, as in most that followed, any profit or loss was assumed by the host institution. The convention featured exhibits and commercial displays of theatre-related products

such as books, plays, scenery, lighting and lighting controls, makeup, seating, and tickets. The exhibits from participating schools included photographs, costumes and costume designs, and scenic designs.

As early as the 1952 NWDC in Eugene some participants indicated the conference would be of greater service and interest if it changed location from year to year to ease the travel demands and to give other institutions the opportunity to serve as host. The idea was adopted and a pattern of conference sites approved with Eugene as the central location and, in alternate years, moving north to Washington and south to California (Eugene-Washington-Eugene-California-Eugene, etc.). At a later date other Oregon institutions were substituted for Eugene as hosts, which included Portland State University and Reed College.

Since there were growing options to be examined and evaluated, a loose organizational structure had to be developed. During the following years an administrative board was established which usually consisted of seven members elected at an annual business meeting with a predominant pattern comprised of the following members: the past host, the present host (who serve as chair), future host, and a representative of each of the performance areas, including children's theatre, community theatre, secondary school theatre, and college and university theatre. The next host was usually determined through casual inquiry during the previous year, resulting in a formal invitation. In developing their programs, new hosts typically consulted with the existing administrative board for details and personnel but approval was presumed. The membership of the Board ranged from as small as three and as large as eight (1959). This pattern continued with minor variations until 1970 and the resignation of Professor Robinson as Executive Secretary. After that time only one NWDC, in 1975, was held in Eugene.

The new NWDC announced as its territory Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, Nevada, Western Montana and Northern California. Southern California had been a regular participant, but no attempt was made to include it, since it was in the process of being reorganized as the Southern California Region (Section) of AETA. Most of the regular participants in the NWDC were also members of AETA. When the latter organization established its own regional structure, some pressure was exerted to make NWDC the official Region IX of AETA. There was some NWDC opposition to the proposal:

The region would be defined geographically by AETA in a different configuration and some of the former NWDC territory would be assigned elsewhere. The administrative and operational structure of NWDC would be terminated and new forms imposed by AETA. Participants in NWDC would have to become dues-paying members of AETA to participate in AETA Region IX activities.

The overwhelming sentiment expressed at NWDC meetings was opposed to this affiliation, and the invitation was rejected.

The two organizations, NWDC and Region IX of AETA, later developed a friendly co-existence. The NWDC encouraged membership in



national AETA, and frequently registration fees were reduced or waived for those who would take out membership in AETA for the first time. At one time the State of Oregon had the highest *per capita* registration in AETA of any state in the Union. There were further indications of cordiality. Professor Robinson was national president of AETA and Executive Secretary of NWDC simultaneously (1954). The national convention of AETA was held in Eugene, Oregon in 1962. AETA decided to experiment with a contributory national convention to be held in an opposite geographical section of the country. Portland was selected and NWDC personnel were the major organizers (1979). The cover of the program for this event read, "*Focus Northwest*, the Northwest Drama Conference presented by Region Nine American Theatre Association and its Divisions: the American Community Theatre Association, the Children's Theatre Association of America, the Secondary School Theatre Association, the University and College Theatre Association, the American College Theatre, the Washington Association of Theatre Artists with the Thespians." The first conference of the new NWDC was also billed as a "Regional Meet of the American Educational Theatre Association (1948)."

In this early period it was decided that NWDC would function only as an annual convention. It would have no officers, no dues, no publications and no external alliances. At this time it was probably the strongest regional theatre organization in the United States, frequently having more than 600 registered delegates at a single convention and sometimes in excess of the number at a national AETA convention.

Those who made significant and continuing contributions to the early development of NWDC are too numerous to mention, but the more prominent people were:

Glenn Hughes, University of Washington  
 Harold Crain, San Jose State University, California  
 Helen Weed, Tacoma Little Theatre, Washington  
 George Andreini, Santa Rosa Junior College, California  
 Agnes Haaga, University of Washington  
 Faber DeChaine, University of Oregon  
 Asher Wilson, Portland State University, Oregon  
 Hal Todd, San Jose State University, California  
 Jack Morrison, University of California at Los Angeles  
 Milo Smith, Central Washington State University  
 Kent Gallagher, Washington State University  
 Rod Alexander, Whitman College, Washington  
 Julio Francescutti, Santa Rosa Junior College, California  
 Mrs. Robert C. Finley, Junior Programs, Olympia, Washington  
 Norman Philbrick, Stanford University, California  
 Edward Ragozzino, South Eugene High School, Oregon  
 Gregory Falls, University of Washington

Most of the meetings of the NWDC during the early period had stated themes such as:

"Modern Theatre: Profile in Action," U of O, 1966  
 "The Theatre: Then and Now," U of O, 1966  
 "Theatre Potential," UW, 1967  
 "Theatrical Controversy," U of O, 1949  
 "Art and the Business of the Theatre," U of O, 1950  
 "International Theatre," UW, 1959  
 "The Literature, Business and Artistry of the Theatre," U of O, 1967  
 "The Working Theatre," U of O, 1960  
 "American Theatre: The Challenge of the Surging Sixties," Stanford, 1961  
 "The New Drama—The New Play," U of O, 1962  
 "The University and the Creative Arts," UW, 1963  
 "Disestablishmenttheatrism," U of O, 1970  
 "Creativity and the Theatre," San Jose State College, 1965  
 "Focus Northwest," Portland, 1979

Among the celebrated guest speakers during the early period were Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson, Sawyer Falk, Clarence Derwent, Samuel Selden, Morris Carnovsky, Wayne Morse, Kenneth Macgowan, Theodore Hoffman, Angus Bowmer, Robert Quentin, William Saroyan, Frances Reid, Eric Salmon, Barrie Stavis, Barrett H. Clark, Jack Lemon, William Ball, Agnes Morehead and Edward Albee.

Although the responsibility for the program was traditionally the task of the host institution, there was a somewhat consistent pattern in all of the early conventions. There were always programs of interest to the four levels of production as well as programs on acting, directing, scene design and construction, costume design and construction, stage lighting and effects, playwriting and theatre business. Less frequently, there were sessions on special interests such as puppetry, theatre architecture, reader's theatre, government grants, creative dramatics, criticism, makeup, opera, authors, religious drama, styles and nationalities. There were some innovative approaches employed during the early period, but it cannot be assumed they were always successful—at least they were not repeated.

In 1950 reporters were assigned to each session. Their reports were edited by a convention editor, and the resulting document was published and mailed to all participants and to those of known interest who could not or did not attend. As an experiment, a monthly newsletter was sent to all amateur theatre personnel in Oregon who published news items of general theatre interest as well as calendars of current theatre productions.

In 1975 the entire program was developed and directed by students, including the selection of topic, symposium members, scheduling and principal speakers.

Although it would be possible to compile an almost complete list of the plays presented at the NWDC, it will not be attempted here. A rough

estimate would indicate from 1948 to the present at least 250 full length productions (excluding American College Theatre Festival entries) have been presented. Surprisingly, there has been very little duplication from year to year, and the list encompasses excellent diversity in type, style, period and content, including Shakespeare, classic theatre, original manuscripts, musical theatre, foreign plays, experimental theatre, improvisational theatre, dance theatre, spectacle, fantasy and a generous list of "isms." Some of the more memorable productions include *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *An Italian Straw Hat*, *Waltz of the Toreadors*, *All the King's Men*, *The Rimers of Eldritch*, *Misalliance*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Lady's Not For Burning*, *The Disenchanted*, *The Trickeries of Scapino*, and *The Visit*.

Apparently, the only feature of the early conventions not consistently employed was that of the annual banquet. The cost of the banquet in 1957 was \$1.75 per person. The banquet practice was discontinued sometime in the 1970's, probably owing to increased expense.

In 1970 Professor Robinson resigned his position as Director of the University Theatre at the University of Oregon. No longer in a position to guarantee the support of the University of Oregon in terms of personnel, space or funds, he wrote a letter to the members of the Board of Directors of NWDC resigning his position as Executive Secretary. He suggested that the Board should consider alternative solutions to its earlier practice of operating without a constitution, a budget or elected officers. (The only constant and continuing factor of the NWDC being the slowly enlarging mailing list of participants which was faithfully supplied by the retiring host to the prospective host.)

On January 28, 1970 a letter was sent by Robinson to Greg Falls, Ed Ragozzino, James Dunn, Hall Todd and George Andreini inviting them to a no-host dinner on the evening of the first day of the forthcoming conference on February 12, 1970 in Eugene. Some doubt had been expressed as to the desirability of continuing the NWDC. By intervening correspondence and deliberations at that meeting, Professor Robinson's resignation was accepted, and it was decided to continue the NWDC with some modification of procedure not spelled out at that time. This action in 1970 ended the "early period" of NWDC, which, by coincidence, represents exactly half of its history.

#### Northwest Drama Conference

- 1948, Eugene, Oregon, (University of Oregon), February 13 & 14.
- \*1949, Eugene, Oregon, (University of Oregon), February 10-12.
- \*1950, Eugene, Oregon, (University of Oregon), February 9-11.
- \*1951, Eugene, Oregon, (University of Oregon), February 8-10.
- 1952, Eugene, Oregon, (University of Oregon), February 7-9.
- \*1953, Seattle, Washington (University of Washington).
- 1954, Portland, Oregon (Portland State University), February 11-13.
- 1955, Santa Rosa, California ( Santa Rosa Junior College), February 10-12.

- 1956, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 9-11.
- 1957, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 7-9.
- 1958, Santa Rosa, California (Santa Rosa Junior College), February 6-8.
- 1959, Seattle, Washington (University of Washington), February 12-14.
- 1960, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 11-13.
- 1961, Stanford, California (Stanford University), February 9-11.
- 1962, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 8-10.
- 1963, Seattle, Washington (University of Washington), February 7-9.
- 1964, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 6-8.
- 1965, San Jose, California (San Jose State University), February 4 - 6.
- 1966, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 10-12.
- 1967, Seattle, Washington (University of Washington), February 9-11.
- 1968, Kentfield, California, (College of Marin), January 25-27.
- 1969, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 13-15.
- \*1970, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 12-14.
- \*1971, Arcata, California (Humbolt State College).
- 1972, San Jose, California (San Jose State University), January 27, 28, 29.
- \*1973, Seattle, Washington (University of Washington).
- 1974, Pullman, Washington (Washington State University), February 13-16.
- 1975, Eugene, Oregon (University of Oregon), February 13-15.
- 1976, Seattle, Washington (Seattle University), February 11-14.
- 1977, Portland, Oregon (Reed College), January 12-15.
- 1978, Spokane, Washington (Gonzaga University), February 8-11.
- 1979, Portland, Oregon (Portland State University), January 31-February 3.
- 1980, Bellevue, Washington (Bellevue Community College), February 5-10.
- 1981, Monmouth, Oregon (Oregon College of Education), February 3-7.
- 1982, Ellensburg, Washington (Central Washington State University), February 2-6.
- 1983, Gresham, Oregon (Mt. Hood Community College), February 1-5.
- 1984, Pullman, Washington (Washington State University), January 31-February 4.
- \*1985, Monmouth, Oregon (Western Oregon State College), January 29-February 1.
- 1986, Ellensburg, Washington (Central Washington State University), February 4-9.
- \*1987, Gresham, Oregon (Mt. Hood Community College), February 10-14.
- 1988, Pullman, Washington (Washington State University), February 2-6.
- 1989, Anchorage, Alaska (University of Alaska, Anchorage), February 1-4.
- 1990, Bellingham, Washington (Western Washington State University), February 6-10.
- 1991, La Grande, Oregon (Eastern Oregon State College), February 7-10.
- 1992, Pullman, Washington and Moscow, Idaho (Washington State University and University of Idaho), February 4-8.
- 1993, Monmouth and Corvallis, Oregon (Western Oregon State College and Oregon State University), February 2-6.

\* Program copies not available in Robinson files.

## Hopffgarten Scenic Studio of Boise

JEANETTE ROSS

When Harry Hopffgarten and his bride, Anna May Williams, stepped off the train one October afternoon in 1904, Boise was still benefitting from mining activities in nearby Boise Basin, Silver City and Warren. Strolling through bustling streets (the train depot was then on 10th Street, downtown), it was clear that although businesses were thriving, the town lacked the benefit of a sign painter. The morning after they arrived, according to Harry's son, Bill, they walked into Eiler's Piano House at 9th and Bannock, and while Anna May played a showroom piano, Harry spoke to the owner.

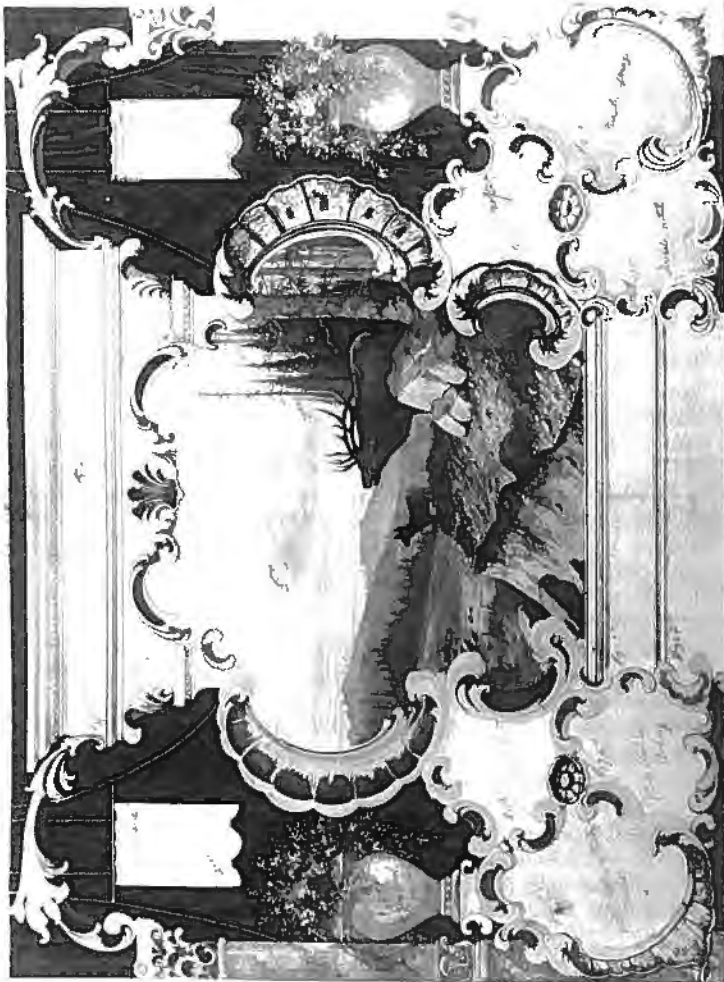
"I notice you don't have a sign in your window. Would you like one?"

"Lord, yes," said Eiler, the owner.

"Dad got out his painting kit; he had it with him. He didn't have to advertise that he was in business; people came to see the gold leaf window sign." Bill Hopffgarten adds that his father was convinced to stay by the weather, still shirtsleeve-warm in December. A November 4, 1962 *Idaho Statesman* story reported that Harry was further attracted to Boise "because of its minor league baseball team, which won the pennant in a four-team league that season." Harry Hopffgarten was 21 years old at the time. The newspaper story also stated that the piano shop owner was a slight acquaintance and met Harry in a cafe the first morning Harry was in town. Both versions suggest the ease with which Harry Hopffgarten established what became a 70 year business.

According to his son, Bill, and several biographers, J. Harry Hopffgarten was already a professional painter when he arrived in Boise. Born in Augusta, Georgia, May 1, 1883, Harry was obliged to take a trade early in life as the result of his father's death in 1892. He first sold papers on the street to buy crackers, says Bill, but by age 14 was working at Atlanta Brass Works etching brass signs.

The official biographies (Hawley, p. 578; *Capital Who's Who for Idaho*, p. 108) place Harry in Spokane, Washington, as a sign painter in a partnership known as "Jay and Hopffgarten" from 1902 until he left for Boise in 1904. Official reports make much of Harry's southern Idaho advertising business, with his "bulletins, wall signs, bill posting, distributing, wood letters and brass, electric and glass signs and . . . everything in the way



Advertising curtain design by Harry Hopffgarten, with salesman's notations. Reproduced with permission from the Boise State University Library manuscript collections.

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of outdoor advertising," including ". . . a system of bulletin boards of steel and galvanized iron construction which covers all of Boise and surrounding territory." (Hawley, 1920) Bill states that gold leaf application was his father's specialty, and that Harry was responsible for gilding the statue of George Washington which still stands in its glass case inside the state capitol building rotunda. The elegant gold leaf and mother of pearl-overlaid doors from the first building housing Hopffgarten Advertising Sign Company, 1007 Idaho Street, now hang inside Bill and Betty Hopffgarten's home in north Boise. "Lemon gold, old gold and Roman gold. Not many people around who know the technique anymore," says Bill.

A significant part of the Hopffgarten Advertising business was its theatrical design work. "Another allied line of work in which Hopffgarten specialized in the early years of this century was painting theatrical scenery—he worked with a touring theatrical troupe for a time—and in designing and creating the scenic and often ornate curtains which screened the stages of large and small theaters in towns and cities throughout the country," says the November 4, 1962 *Idaho Statesman* news story by an unnamed reporter. Although the beginnings of this work are not clear, in 1913 Harry was ready to move out of his rented quarters the alley between Idaho and Jefferson, off 9th Street. Leo F. Falk, a prominent Boisean, offered to construct a building to specifications, the new building was designed to accommodate the painting of his theatrical curtains. Theatrical groups touring the country during the era made regular stops in towns like Boise, and there was regular demand for inexpensive canvas stage curtains. According to Bill, Harry Hopffgarten's new building had windows that provided ". . . high northerly light," and included a 10 inch space between wall and floor that allowed 12 by 50 foot sheets of canvas to be designed and painted. Canvas curtains were rolled from the ceiling to the basement, tacked on a frame close to the wall. The bottoms of the curtains were painted in the basement, Bill recalls. A photograph on file in the Idaho Historical Library shows a typical advertising curtain in production.

A salesman's sample box inherited by Bill Hopffgarten (now in the BSU special collections) suggests the range of Harry's theatrical interests and his considerable skill. The box contains supply order forms for Hopffgarten Scenic Studio, 1007 Idaho Street, Boise, along with numerous samples of full stage curtains and advertising curtains.

Three full curtain sets depict one pastoral scene, an outdoor country estate scene and one "palace" interior. Lithographs and photographs in the bottom of the sample box suggest Harry's source materials; they include a Bisbee photo of Shoshone falls (an unusual photograph taken from below the falls) and a conventional scenic lithograph, "Majestic Heights #68-18" with mountain peaks bathed in the livid oranges, reds and purples popular at the time. "He didn't try to copy any one scene," observes Bill, and indeed, the pastorals, with their stone walls, palm, pine, elm and their various elegant mansions in the distance, were artistically rather than botanically related. "Dad would lay it out and do the centers,

with calcimine dry colors. He had a bench 25 feet long with cutouts for breadpans, each with a different color. He'd use dry colors, keep them wet. He'd first lay a curtain out, then his employees would run it up and down as he painted."

Each complete stage curtain set consisted of a grand curtain (with voluptuously painted velvet swags, gold rope and tassel), a teaser, tormentors and flats leading up to a large back curtain.

A number of the cardboard samples in the box were designs for olio curtains. "It's a stand-by, a drop for a special act that just has to be let down," notes Bill, who assisted in the painting for his father. These designs inevitably had a marble floor and either a fancy interior (a photograph of a fairly contemporary wood-paneled wall is similar to the wall of a 'castle' olio design), a palatial patio/garden, or a garden gate for an informal garden scene.

To judge by the number of sample cards in the salesman's kit, most of the scenic design business consisted of advertising curtains. Hopffgarten had one salesman, a Mr. Morrison, who went around the country selling ad curtains, Bill recalls. Morrison would first approach a theater owner and would suggest the type of design and possible advertising purchasers. "At the Strand or the Pinney they'd say, 25 feet wide, stay up off the floor because the orchestra is there; . . . they would be made to order," Bill remembers. Morrison would bring back the orders; Harry Hopffgarten would then paint a sample curtain on a sheet of poster board, leaving blank spaces for ads. A typical ad curtain was 25 feet across and had a artistic scene at the center (with teaser-type drapery at the top) plus ornately framed boxes for 20 ads. "Center ads were more valuable," says Bill, with a typical cost of \$1.75 per month on a one year contract. The salesman would first get approval for the design from the theater owner/manager. He would then carry the poster to local businesses, until the curtain ads were completely subscribed. The theater would pay for the ad curtain, then collect from businesses for the advertising signs. These elaborate and often elegant designs were all executed in water-base colors and were only meant to last for a year, the life of the contract.

Bill currently has several curtain samples with mountain scenes as center paintings, including some designed for the Rialto and Majestic theaters of Boise. A similar advertising curtain, for the Pinney theater of Boise, is recorded in a 1918 photograph in the Idaho Historical Society collection. Historian Arthur Hart noted, in an August 31, 1981 *Idaho Statesman* article, that one of Harry Hopffgarten's curtains, originally from the Majestic theater, is still being used during silent movie revivals at Boise's Egyptian Theater. Another advertising curtain has a Statue of Liberty in the center, with eagles on each side and at the bottom, a patriotic message, "America First, Last and Always," which hints at a time during the First World War. (*Idaho Statesman* news stories of 1927 describe a Statue of Liberty advertising curtain for the new Egyptian Theater but do not name the designer). Other theaters identified on the sample boards include the American Theater of Weiser. Advertising was purchased by

companies serving everyday needs—Sampson's Music, Compton's (Moving and Transfer) Company, Central Coal and Seed, Goodman Oil, Day Realty, among others. Of incidental note, Bill remarks that his father's salesman was also an inventor, credited with the "Mechanacafe Mechanical Cafeteria."

A June 8, 1980 *Statesman* column by longtime Boise writer, Betty Penson (a childhood friend and former neighbor the Hopffgarten family), noted:

The Pinney Theater had a huge asbestos curtain all painted with commercial signs. "If you want a fire, call (some certain) coal company, maybe McGuffins," and "if you are afraid of fire call Stein insurance". . . Harry Hopffgarten painted all those signs. People said he could have been a great artist but he was afraid of being poor.

No records remain to suggest the number of full theatrical curtain sets designed and painted by Hopffgarten Scenic Studios. The last known examples still in use are located at El Korah Temple and are included as part of the spring installation of new members. Over 30 drops, with pastoral scenes, castle and other fancy interiors, views of mosques and such, were created by Harry as gifts to the Shriners and Scottish Rite bodies. According to Bill, one sample card intended for the Shriners has a street scene of vaguely continental demeanor with a building in the distance which strongly resembles the Idaho State Capitol. Harry's eclecticism, and his sense of humor, are clearly in evidence.

Harry was an active clubman and began a family tradition of theatrical design and construction for fraternal organizations and community theater. Boise's 1924 production of the Idaho pageant, *The Light Upon the Mountains*, lists Harry Hopffgarten and Mr. C.S. Fleishman as Construction of Set, a complete western street scene. (Gibbs, *Beacon For Mountain and Plain*) Bill recalls that the year Harry was installed as potentate of El Korah Shrine, 1921, he decided on the spur of the moment to decorate the main hall with murals. In one week he painted a ballroom with murals, 15 by 6 feet each, using oil paints on plaster walls. These paintings, a little faded now, so charmed the Shriners that they have never been removed. The scenes, dignified and mysterious, combined desert palm and lakeside with Greek columns, ancient Egyptian ruins, a Sphinx, camels, draped Arabian travelers and Asiatic boats, with an occasional lone woman carrying water and a mosque for background romance. Harry also toned up the room itself by giving a balcony and upper room a marbled paint treatment which has also been retained.

Harry and his son, Bill, were part of the El Korah Temple players from the start. Bill is a charter member from the formation of the players in 1947, and all stage sets and properties have been created by Bill and Harry, according to theater manager, Bob Julian. El Korah players produced their 29th melodrama in the spring of 1992, with Bill, as usual, responsible for designing the handbill and posters. The centerpiece of each production is one of Harry's advertising curtains, touched up and brought up to date by Bill. The curtain, with an English country mill in its center, is a composite of Harry's signature work—green and gold drapery,

teaser above, marble columns and urns holding flowers at each side, a marble floor and center palace gate awaiting the olio, then, looking down the palace steps, an English country mill and millstream. Boxes advertise "Shavers Hick Stores," "West One Bank," and "Get Stoned at Lee Reid's" (jewelers), all prominent Boise businesses in 1992.

El Korah productions of melodrama have maintained a remnant of the tradition Harry Hopffgarten's art once helped support. One intermission consists of a sing-along, complete with words to "A Shanty in Old Shanty Town" and 22 more songs of the same vintage handed out to audiences. The other intermission is typically an olio, or rather a travesty of an olio. For example, in the spring of 1992, four men billed as the "Whistlers," stomped to music and were costumed as dancing peanuts with enormous hats that covered their heads and peanut-man "faces" painted in greaspaint on their substantial bellies (the development of which reflected their only obvious talent). Bill's paper murals created especially for the melodrama productions, with Flora Dora girls and sample period scenes, first painted in 1949, have been mounted on sign cloth so they can be re-hung each production and carefully taped over the Shriner murals created by his father. "I can copy anything but I can't invent like my father," says Bill, modestly. "He was an original." Bill did continue the family tradition with his own Boise business, Hopffgarten Sign Company.

Harry died in 1974, twelve years after telling a *Statesman* reporter that he likes the people, the atmosphere, climate, and other features of Boise. Bill Hopffgarten, now 80 years himself, is still on the stage crew for El Korah players and still creating the posters for Boise's active Little Theater. Oil paintings by Harry, many similar to the mountain scenes found in the center of his ad curtains, fill his home and his cabin at McCall. "He must have painted thousands. He gave most of them away," says Bill.

"Harry didn't sit down and try to create a particular scene. He painted from feeling," adds Bill's wife, Betty.

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## Historical Background of the Teatro all'Antica in Sabbioneta, Italy

GEORGE CALDWELL



Detail of the loggia of the Teatro all'Antica with frescoes, statues, and busts.

In the middle of the placid fields of northern Italy, exactly midway between Parma and Mantua, lies the walled city of Sabbioneta. It was founded, in the truest sense of the word, by its first Duke, Vespasiano Gonzaga Colonna (1532-1591). In 1562 he began to expand and rebuild the small village into a model city of the Renaissance, based on the ideal neoclassical principles of urban planning. With an emphasis on harmonious unity, Vespasiano included in his communal scheme summer and winter palaces, two large plazas, at least two Catholic churches, a synagog, a mint, a monastery, a hospital, several administrative buildings, numerous community dwellings, a school, an armory, a variety of fortifications, a print shop and press, an art gallery and a theatre. Indeed, the opening of the theatre, designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi, apparently marked the completion of Vespasiano's grand project.

The Teatro all'Antica (the Antique Theatre), the Teatro Olimpico (the Olympic Theatre), or simply the Theatre of Sabbioneta, was completed in 1590 and is chronologically the second of three theatres of its kind built in Italy. The first, of course, was the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, designed by Andrea Palladio with perspective scenery by Vincenzo Scamozzi. It was given its inaugural performance in 1585. The third theatre was the Farnese in Parma, built thirty years after the Sabbioneta theatre. However, the Teatro all'Antica was the first building intended for dramatic performances from its very inception.

Yet, of the three theatres, the Teatro all'Antica remains the most obscure and ignored. As recently as the early part of this century many scholars were not aware that the facility still survived. An unnamed translator stated in *The Mask* in 1923, "Scamozzi, Palladio's pupil who completed the Teatro Olimpico (Vicenza) built another classical theatre in 1588 at Sabbioneta for the duke Vespasiano Gonzago [sic] but this does not now exist." (*The Mask*, p.24) Currently, there are virtually no detailed

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descriptions of the theatre available in English. The American scholar, Kurt W. Forster, said of the city:

Sabbioneta is probably the most complete and best preserved example of 16th Century urbanism in Italy. Its geographic isolation in the middle of the Po Valley (12 miles South-West of Mantua) is mirrored in scholarly neglect. Barely mentioned in general histories of urbanism and known at best through local historians, Sabbioneta usually only provides a background for the life of its somber Duke, twisted into what could provide the macabre libretto for an opera by Donizetti. (Forster, p. 5)

Perhaps overshadowed by the ornamental richness of its predecessor, the Teatro Olimpico, and the ostentatious grandeur of its successor, the Farnese, the Teatro all'Antica by comparison suffers in academic oblivion even in its native country. Authors Mazzoni and Guaita open their recent book, *Il Teatro di Sabbioneta*, with the statement, "It is not for us to say why the city of Sabbioneta and its theatre have not attracted critical and public attention." (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 9) Indeed, Sabbioneta itself cannot be found on most Italian maps, and few Italians can recall ever hearing of the city. But the city and its theatre are, indeed, still there.

Although the Sabbioneta theatre is most frequently associated with its designer, Vincenzo Scamozzi, the real force behind the edifice was its benefactor, Vespasiano Gonzaga. In keeping with the concept of the Renaissance man, he was a trained mason as well as a duke and possessed a practitioner's understanding of the structural and aesthetic needs of the facility.

The location of the theatre was set by Vespasiano according to the ideals of the neoclassical urban plan. The layout of the city was arranged in three overlapping elliptical units with each zone serving its proper urban function. The first zone was designated as the private sphere, which included the Duke's fortress and villa. The second zone was public, encompassing the Duke's palace, ministers houses, the mausoleum and a library, and the third unit was given to communal habitation and production. (Forster, p. 25) The overlapping area in the center became the sphere of civil life, including interactions of law, economy, religion and culture. The Teatro all'Antica is located in the overlap between the private and public zones, exactly between the two large community plazas. (Forster, p. 27)

The exterior of the theatre is one hundred twenty-five feet long, forty-two feet wide and forty-nine feet high. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 144) The building is adjacent on three sides to the city streets with the facades designed in striking architectural simplicity. The frieze above has been executed in a Doric style, and placed periodically along the upper story are niches that once held statues and busts. The windows have been treated with cornice, entablature and pediment but vary in style according to their placement. The ground level the walls have been decorated with stucco reliefs. Although doors have been placed at the center of each of the three exterior walls, the actual entrance to the odeum is located at the west end.

The interior of the theatre is one hundred twenty feet long and thirty-seven feet wide, but two internal walls divide the facility into three partially enclosed spaces: the odeum with lobby, ticket office and, recently, restrooms; the theatre with the loggia, audience seating and the raised stage; and, changing rooms behind the stage. Within the theatre space itself only the walls, murals, peristyle and statues are original. The raked seating, stage, stage structure, floor and ceiling have been gradually replaced. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 144) The walls are cracked in several places throughout the theatre owing not only to disuse and water damage but also an inadequate base. In later years the soil proved too weak to support the theatre's foundation and walls. During the 19th Century a curved ceiling with painted sky and clouds was added, but it has since been dismantled and replaced with a more functional beam structure and ceiling.

Just as the original, the forestage consists of a level platform used for performances, while the rear three quarters of the stage is angled up to attain the effect gained with perspective scenery. Some conjecture exists that a permanent proscenium arch was originally located near the front of the stage, but the evidence is slight.



View of the performance area, showing the raked stage and fragments of frescoes thought to be background scenery.



View of the loggia from the stage during partial renovation.

The semielliptical seating is made up of five rows, each approximately one and one half feet high. An entrance at floor level is located at the center.

Behind the seating in a perfect semicircle is the loggia with its balustrade and twelve Corinthian columns. They support an entablature above which serves as the base for twelve classical deities, including Hercules, Neptune, Diana and Venus. (Buzzi, p. 508) Below the entablature and between the columns right and left are two niches on each side. They contain the busts of Roman emperors Alesandro Magno, Seleuco I Nicatore and Traiano and the bust of Cibebe di Donna Coronati. (*Sabbioneta*, pp. 128-29) The Duke's chair in the middle of the loggia, quite actually Vespasiano's position, is half the height of the theatre and in direct line with the central vanishing point of Scamozzi's apparent perspectives. Along the wall behind and at the sides of the loggia are frescoes of Vespasiano's most favored emperors which include Aulo Vitellio, Servio Sulpicio Galba, Marco Salvio Ottone and Tito Flavio Vespasiano. (*Sabbioneta*,

pp. 122-25) And surrounding the audience area on the upper portions of the side walls are frescoes of spectators watching the performances below. True to Vespasiano's ideology, the painted viewers are neither Roman emperors nor even royalty; they are depicted as the citizens of the day. The creation of the frescoes and statuary are most frequently credited to Bernardino of Venice and students from the school of Paolo Veronese.

The Teatro all'Antica is unique in its age, intimacy and extant condition. It stands as an integral part of a gem of a community in northern Italy. Yet, nothing of the theatre that we can see today is quite so fascinating as its historical development.

As Vespasiano planned his city the theatre was the last edifice to be constructed. He commissioned Vincenzo Scamozzi to design the theatre and its scenery based on his accomplishments in Vicenza. On May 1, 1588 Scamozzi left Vicenza for Sabbioneta. He arrived three days later to a glorious welcome provided by the ministers of the city; Vespasiano had yet to arrive from his own journey. (*The Mask*, p. 24) Scamozzi viewed the site and in eight days designed the famous ground plan and cross section that now resides in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

During November and December of 1588 Scamozzi built the permanent perspective scenery which represented a great plaza with the diminishing street in the background. The scenery was unfortunately destroyed at the beginning of the 18th century. Only two side view sketches remain. However, in the Duke's Garden Palace in Sabbioneta a fresco of a perspective street scene looks strikingly similar to Serlio's 1545 perspective of the tragic scene. Some scholars believe the fresco to be a depiction of the ideal plaza, but others see it as an accurate representation of Scamozzi's original setting. (Forster, p. 27)

Some disagreement also persists regarding the degree of Scamozzi's actual involvement in the construction of the theatre, but regardless the end product seemed to correspond with his design. (*The Mask*, p. 24) Also, considerable confusion has continued over the name of the theatre. Legend has it that Scamozzi insisted it be called the Teatro Olimpico, after the theatre in Vicenza. Vespasiano wished to call the theatre the Teatro all'Antica, in keeping with his original neoclassical intent. (Maffezzoli) Today the theatre's managing body, the Community Administration, officially calls the theatre the Teatro Olimpico.

In February of 1590 the completed theatre was inaugurated during a fifteen day carnival. The company of Silvio di Gambi, Ferrese, performed comedies of the period and were received so successfully that Vespasiano contracted for their return each year both for the carnival and their Easter festival. He allowed them to assume the name of the court company and display the ducal coat of arms wherever they performed. (*The Mask*, p. 24)

Finally, with the opening of the Teatro all'Antica Vespasiano's city of dreams was complete and his theatre a grand achievement. However,



during the year he became gravely ill and on February 27, 1591—prior to the next series performances in his theatre—Vespasiano Gonzaga died. With his death turned the fate of the city.

Following the death of the duke, ownership of the city passed to his only child, Isabella, and her husband Luigi Carafa, Prince of Stigliano. During the course of the next year the royal family experienced severe financial difficulties and the community began a socio-economic decline. In April of 1592 Isabella and Luigi left Sabbioneta for Naples, and the presiding Duke of Mantua was forced to send a governor to manage the city in the family's absence. (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 96) Since the inaugural performances, the theatre remained empty. Even in 1593 when the city celebrated a return visit by Isabella and Luigi, the festival was held in the large outdoor plazas.

Then, in November of 1595 the first serious damage to the theatre occurred. An extensive flood covered the floor of the theatre with water. One hundred sixty other buildings in the city collapsed. Just a few months later, in February of 1596, a visit by the Marquis of Montenegro was used as an opportunity to revitalize the city with a grand festival involving guests from Rome and Naples. But again, there is no evidence that the theatre was utilized in any way. (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 97.) Despite the effort, the city continued its decline, and Isabella faced worsening economic problems. By 1606 Isabella was said to have sold some of the family jewelry to pay her debts. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 152) Well into the 1620's the theatre stood as a useless edifice.

On November 2 of 1629 the first plague victim was reported in Sabbioneta. Within a year 2,404 citizens were affected by the pestilence and nearly half died. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 152) It was during 1630 that the theatre was turned into an infirmary for the plague victims, and the fresco walls were whitewashed. (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 98) It is entirely conceivable that the seating was removed during this period as well.

In 1637 Isabella died, and the following year Luigi passed away. Their only son had earlier disappeared, leaving a destitute city to Isabella's only daughter, Anna, and her husband, Ramiro Filippo de Guzman. However, Guzman did not reside in Sabbioneta, so control of the city gradually shifted toward a municipal administration. For the rest of the century the community experienced further decay and nonproductivity as Spanish and French troops periodically occupied the region, skirmishing with each other and the community's citizens. All the while, since its inauguration, the theatre stood without a performance, and Scamozzi's stucco and wood perspective scenery progressively deteriorated. (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 102)

By century's end, 1693, the last surviving daughter of Anna and Ramiro died, and the governor of Milan took absolute control of the city. However, it was quickly sold to Francesco Maria Spinola, who was merely interested in the territory as a profit venture. No development of the city took place as a result, including its stagnant theatre. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 153)

It was most likely during the 17th century, however, that the Teatro all'Antica was used, but as a local storage house for corn.

Francesco Maria Spinola abandoned the city in 1703 and three and a half decades of feuds ensued over control of Sabbioneta between the Duke of Mantua and Gonzaga family members. The dispute was finally settled with the occupation of northern Italy by Austria as the governorship of the territory passed to Maria Teresa. It was with the occupation that the city experienced its first period of revitalization in one hundred fifty years. Rebuilding of the community began, and in 1771 an autumn festival was initiated, but apparently the theatre was not included in the celebrations. In fact, to the disappointment of the town citizenry, in 1774 the statues on the exterior of the theatre building were removed and sent to a museum in Mantua. But by 1780 the community expressed a desire for an active theatre. Nearly two hundred years had passed since its one and only series of performances. Scamozzi's original scenery was destroyed, and the way was made for a more contemporary setting. The governing body in Mantua showed some interest in a few performances during the period of the carnival, but Sabbioneta simply lacked the political influence to attain approval for any significant support, and nothing further occurred. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 155)

Then, in 1796 the Austrian occupation ended but only to be replaced with the rule of France. However, under the French occupation a municipal commission was formed in 1798 to study and discuss a plan for a fully operational theatre. In 1799 the Teatro all'Antica was given the name of the National Theatre of Sabbioneta and designated to perform *Commedia dell'Arte*. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 155) But as fortune would have it, the same year the roof was discovered to be too weak and dangerous, so through fear of a disastrous collapse, the theatre was closed shortly after its reopening. (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 103)

In June of 1802 the community asked officials of the French occupation permission to manage the theatre themselves, and in August they were granted the right to keep the theatre from falling apart. The roof was still weak, and water was leaking over the frescoes. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 157) Additionally, in 1805 and later in 1839, serious floods covered the floor of the theatre and deteriorated the frescoes from the bottom. (Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 104)

By August of 1809 and again in 1811 apparently enough repairs had been done on the roof that two performances by local artists with musical instruments were given as part of the celebrations in honor of Napoleon. In 1814 the city purchased the theatre from the occupying French government. During the 19th Century several renovations took place under the guidance of Domenico Marchelli and Carlo D'Arco. The stage was rebuilt and raised, a set of movable scenery was created and a ticket booth was added. However, despite the improvements the theatre was not used enough, and in 1858 the city attempted to auction it off. The lowest selling price acceptable to the city was 9,262 lire, but no one bid.

Records indicate that in 1876 Angelo Corradi rented the space for two years, but nothing is available regarding the performances. Finally, during the latter part of the 19th Century the community embarked on a lengthy and relatively costly series of repairs. The entrance door was enlarged for the public, the scenic machinery was modified and the roof fixed again. By 1898 a few, small performances of *Commedia dell'Arte* were presented on a regular basis, but in 1902 the theatre was abandoned again and left in very bad condition, with occasional uses by Vittorio Matteucci as a puppet theatre. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 159; Mazzoni and Guaita, p. 106-9)

The Teatro all'Antica served as a cinema for the military from March of 1919 to 1947 with only slight modifications to its physical state.

In February of 1957, after three hundred and fifty years, a serious program was begun by the city to return the Teatro all' Antica to its original condition. Gradually, the stage was returned to its proper shape and height, the odeum was remodeled, new removable scenery designed, and in 1968 the first theatrically correct performance since 1591 was presented. One hundred sixty audience members in the seats and seventy in the orchestra watched the inaugural performance of *Il Ballo Delle Ingrate* by Claudio Monteverdi. (*Sabbioneta*, p. 161)

Although interest in the theatre waned for a short time, a regular summer season of theatrical performances has since become a tradition in Sabbioneta. And renovation continues. In 1980 a completely new roof was added to the theatre at a cost of sixty million lire, and restoration of the frescoes is an ongoing effort.

Recently, Sabbioneta celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of its theatre with the presentation of *Hernani* by Hugo and Verdi, spiritual music by Verdi and a vocal recital entitled, "La Magia Della Voce." Perhaps after centuries of waste and neglect, of serving as infirmary for plague victims, storage for corn and movie house for fascist troops, Vespasiano's dream theatre has finally been realized.

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