

2004

# The Western States Theatre Review, Volume 10, 2004

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**THEATRE**  
REVIEW

Volume 10

2004

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## NORTHWEST THEATRE REVIEW

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## A City Apart Post-Soviet Russian Theatre

A brief look at the physical state  
of theatres in Saratov

LARRY W. HAZLETT



Fig.1-*Behind the Mirror*, Academic Theatre of Drama

Whenever I used to hear the words "Russian theatre or ballet," almost invariably a mysterious, imagined vision of the grand Russian theatres, the Bolshoi or the Maryinsky theatres came to mind and with these the almost mythological names of Chaliapin, Nijinsky, Pavlova, Nureyev, Marakova.

More recently, after the break up of the Soviet Union, as more light was shed on the "new" Russia and its theatres I learned a little more of the wonders of its art and artists. Theatres, such as the Moscow Art Theatre and the Kamerny, were new additions to my Russian theatre repertoire. These additions, however, were associated with the dominant cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. After visiting Moscow during the spring of 1998, I learned that there were many smaller, thriving theatres that

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were, for the most part, unknown in the west. It begged the question: "What about the rest of the enormous country? Where is the theatre of this land?" Who, of the general populace of American theatrical designers, knows of even one? Ekaterininberg? Volgograd? Perm? Irkutsk? Cities whose populations are in the millions yet their theatres and artisans are virtually unknown in the United States and most of Western Europe.

Since 1991, our university has had a very strong relationship with one particular Russian city, Saratov. An enduring relationship between the city of Saratov, Saratov State University and the University of Wyoming began with the vision of Professor and Director of International Programs Dr. Lew Bagby, whose specialty is Russian literature, more specifically, Pushkin. Dr. Bagby established the Saratov Initiative. The impetus of this initiative proposed to assist the Saratov municipal government and Saratov State University in whatever way our university could, but primarily in establishing the foundations of a more progressive Western approach to business and law.

Lew and I have been friends for a number of years and had occasionally discussed the possibility of introducing an artistic aspect into the Saratov Initiative. He mentioned that the theatre life of Saratov was, indeed, vital but similar to the greater number of theatres in Russia, except the Bolshoi and Maryinsky. They were mired in ancient technology, most of which had survived for over 50 years only because of the resourcefulness of the theatre's electronic engineers.

Lew thought that I might be able to demonstrate some of our new technology, learn how the current systems function and perhaps create some new ideas for introducing the new technology into the old Russian theatre structure. As a result, in February of 1999, I traveled to Russia and spent the next two months researching the theatres and production techniques of the theatres in the city of Saratov.

I had wanted to study the techniques and philosophies of designers from other countries for many years and, finally, here was an opportunity. A trip to Russia would offer me an opportunity to discover and compare as much as I could about Russian lighting techniques; how they differed from American techniques; and observe the Russian approach to style and production documentation.



Fig.2 Saratov from the Bank of the Volga

Saratov, a city of one million people, is located on the western bank of the Volga approximately 450 miles southeast of Moscow. It was founded in the 1500's primarily as a trading and shipping center for goods from the northern cities of Russia and Eastern Europe. Its history and geographic association with the Volga, though significantly older, is similar to St. Louis and the Mississippi. It also has a very strong German influence, due largely to Catherine the Great. Saratov boasts three main state supported theatres, the Saratov Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the Saratov Academy of Dramatic Theatre and the Theatre for Young Spectators. The latter is acclaimed as the first theatre in the world specifically created and dedicated to performances for youth audiences.

My initial contacts in Saratov came through Saratov State University and its Office for International Education headed by Ludmilla Strahova. Ms. Strahova and her staff coordinated the arrangements for me to meet with the directors of each theatre and subsequently the designers and technicians. Through her knowledge of the theatres and her established connections I was treated as an honored guest in all the theatres. Tickets, at no cost, to any performance were available, and I was permitted and even encouraged to tour every nook and cranny.

The first theatre I visited was the **Saratov Academic Theatre for Opera and Ballet**. Built in the 1860's and refurbished in the 1970's, it is a grand hall in the classical tradition of Western European theatre.

The artisans in Saratov say that their city's theatres rank third in artistic prominence behind only the Bolshoi of Moscow and St. Petersburg's Maryinski. Their season's (October through July) productions include traditional operas and ballets such as *Boris Goudonov*, *Kovanschina*, "Don Quichotte," "Giselle," "The Nutcracker" and "Swan Lake."



Fig.3 Interior of the Academic Theatre for Opera and Ballet

Only dark one night of the week and low on state funding, the equipment and facilities show years of hard use and lack of maintenance. The lighting system is vintage 1950's. The lighting control is an enormous four scene preset board. Each scene controlled 250 dimmers. None of the productions I witnessed seemed complicated by American standards. In fact, the cues were stored in a "cue book" which resembled an

old tome (seen in Figure 4) from the medieval period and had all the cues for each year's shows written in it, using general descriptions with large groups of dimmers dedicated to large or, more or less specific stage



Fig.4 Nikolai at the 4 scene preset board and his open cue book, Opera-Ballet Theatre

washes. Many of the over-the-stage electrics were not fully functional, meaning that many circuits simply did not operate. I asked Nikolai, "How do you work on or focus the lights which are on those pipes?" He said that, usually, they didn't try to use them too often, because many circuits didn't work. They had to fly them (the pipes) in and out till they got the focus where they wanted it. They had no ladder or lift to get them to the pipes when they were at trim and time was of the essence since they run a new opera or ballet every night. Most of the lighting was handled by large wattage Fresnels, PARs and Pani projectors. I didn't see an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight in their inventory.

Regardless, of the lack of advanced technology and regular maintenance, the performance quality is quite good. The Russian artists, in all the theatres I visited, are amazingly gifted and extremely dedicated to their craft. From my point of view, their lack of technical sophistication had not had a significantly negative impact on their creativity, although I felt that they didn't quite agree with my assessment.

My most rewarding theatrical relationship in Russia has come from my association with the **Academic Theatre for Drama**. As one could surmise from the name, the Academic Theatre for Drama produces traditional plays, usually in a modern or contemporary style. Built in the 1970's the theatre has seen many seasons of wealth and excellence. More recently, the theatre has been enduring a lengthy time of overuse and neglect. The stage floor and turntable are a mass of splinters and nails. The fabrics are in tatters. The technical equipment is archaic and only functions because it is held together with tape, wire, and whatever else it takes to keep it working. It, much like the famous *Mir* (meaning peace or hope) space station, endures, largely due to the overworked, underpaid (sometimes, not paid) staff of directors, artisans, technicians and lifelong families of stage-



Fig.5 *Na Dne*, Academic Theatre of Drama

hands, whose dedication to their craft is remarkable. The gallery catwalk is a maze of tin cans tops (covering holes in the floor), wire ropes, dust and disasters waiting to happen. The theatre would be condemned in a heart-beat if an OSHA inspector walked backstage. The lighting console looks like something out of *Flash Gordon*. When a preset button is depressed, a clunk so loud that its resounding metal clang can be heard in the front row of the house. It works, though just barely. In the hallway leading to the designer's office ghetto, in a dark, cloistered, remote upper wing of the theatre, standing pools of water keep the air nicely humidified though not by design but because of major leaks in the roof. Yet, despite these hardships, the artists, actors and director manage to produce some wonderfully innovative theatre and stunning scenic images! Dmitri Krylov, the theatre's chief electrician and lighting designer, has free rein to adapt and fit the equipment to the needs of modern theatre as best as he can. Scavenging is something we are all familiar with, but I find it hard to believe that many of us in America could truly fathom the scale of jerry-rigging that Dmitri handles on a daily basis. The director, Mr. Felix Arons, has somehow managed to keep his beleaguered family together and functioning through a very difficult time of insufficient funding and staffing.

The **Theatre for Young Spectators**, founded in 1918, is known in Russia as the first theatre whose performances were specifically designed for the young audience. Its existing theatre is the smallest of the three theatres discussed although, at this time, a new building is being constructed. I first saw the new building, in progress, in May 1998, and when I visited this last summer, it was much the same condition as when I first saw it. As with the other two theatres, funding is slim and they must deal with an enormous repertory season with little resources. The lighting system is minimal in scale and in quantity of instrumentation, dimmer and control capacity. The stage is small, 25' wide at the proscenium, looking more like a small school auditorium than a theatre producing an amazing 250 performances yearly. Giggling, squealing, rosy-cheeked school children fill the building daily, except Mondays, for the morning or afternoon performances, later, an older audience comes through the doors at 6 p.m. for the evening performance. The cast, crew and technicians work all the shows.



Fig.6 Front of House position, Academic Theatre for Drama

As in the other theatres in Saratov they earn, maybe, \$15- \$50 dollars a month! However, the design quality is superb and all the design artisans come from superior training and are deeply dedicated to their craft.

I asked the lighting designers of all three theatres if I could study any of the paper work used or created for their productions. I was rather amazed when they responded that they didn't understand what I meant. They would be very happy to give me an architectural floor plan, but they weren't sure what a lighting plot was or how it could be helpful. They almost invariably work from a basic repertory hang and merely re-aim groups of instruments show to show, make a few subtle color changes, quickly re-focus a special or two and were ready to go.

In the opera/ballet theatre, if there was specific character or solo action it usually occurred downstage and then was lit with their standard follow spots located in the second tier boxes next to the stage. The follow spots were merely Plano-convex or similar projector-like instruments in a spot location, usually a box adjacent to the stage. "Dowsing" was handled by the operators using a card larger than the lens and placing it in front of the lens until the dimmer was faded. Another option was to cover the lens as before when the character moved offstage or out of range and then removing the card, after panning the instrument to the appropriate location, when another actor entered or came back into range without ever dimming the channel. The two most common colors for the spots were a Russian version of Roscolux 14 or 15, or for night a color resembling Lee 161. The operators wore no headsets and seemed not to be in contact with anyone, stage manager or board operator. Their jobs, cues, colors and movement were memorized. They knew when to follow, what color to use, and where the action was going. It would seem normal then that instrument schedules, magic or cheat sheets also did not exist. Cues are handed down, memorized or inherited from designer to designer/technician, year to year, in the same form. Typically, this means that specific cues are identified by name or location. Dimmer/group levels, specials and fade times are controlled manually during the performance according to the dynamics of the show.

Generally, this is the style of lighting control in all the theatres of Saratov. Advanced theatre technology for the most part has not arrived there yet,



Fig.7 Costume and rendering by Irina Yurasova, Theatre for Young Spectators

so there is no impetus to change styles or alter what has obviously worked well for 50 or more years. Russians tend to be proud of their country, history and artistic legacy and will defend it, even as it dissolves around them. Yet, I still sensed a note of envy for Western technology.

I observed production control style while seated in the control booths of all the theatres during a production. I realized that, except for major production moments such as the beginning of a show, i.e. house out, or lights up on stage, there was almost no communication from the stage to the booth between production staff. Once the show had begun, the sound operator and lighting operator ran cues on their own based on the action.

I was allowed to be in the wings for several different ballets and learned some interesting facts, one of which was particularly enlightening as a lighting designer with a special love for dance lighting. I have designed lighting for several ballet pieces for the Colorado Ballet. The Colorado Ballet has a substantial number of Russian dancers from the major schools or companies in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In several of our technical rehearsals the Russians frequently complained about the brightness of the boom lights (shin-busters and head-highs) shining directly into their eyes. It was suggested that I ignore their complaints. I would think to myself "What's wrong with these dancers? Haven't they ever danced with sidelight before? This is how it is done in America." Standing backstage in Saratov at the Opera/Ballet theatre, there were no boom stands for side lighting. On their stage the side-light came from lights positioned on traveling ladders (low gallery positions) which were usually suspended on tracks allowing them to be positioned at any location up and down stage. The lowest light was trimmed at about seven feet above the stage; therefore, all the side-light actually was aimed slightly down and no light (shins, waist highs or head highs) was directly in the dancers' eyes as they moved off stage.

I was very impressed with the fact that the dancers, especially the principles, never seemed to have a problem with the floor. It was even more remarkable after watching the performance from backstage and inspecting the actual surface. They still dance on boards there, and the boards are not in good condition. I was easily able to feel the rounded surface of the floor through my street shoes. It was very uneven, much like corrugated steel without the trough. I can't imagine any American dancers not complaining about or not refusing to dance on such a floor; yet, these dancers do it day in and day out complete with amazing lifts, leaps, and balancing on pointe in attitude. Observing this floor reminded me of the time I worked with Dame Margot Fonteyn as technical director and lighting designer for a workshop and master class she held at the University of Virginia. I asked her, during a brief technical meeting

(another amazing story), what type of dance surface she preferred and suggested a Marley floor. She briskly reported that I should not go to any trouble on her behalf as she was used to dancing on wooden floors with knotholes this big. She held up her hand with the tip of her index finger touching her thumb indicating the size of the knotholes. I put the Marley down. The Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet does have an old marley-type floor. They use it, sparingly, for modern ballets or concert pieces. It looks more like horse stall matting than a dance surface. It is stored in a stair well in a mangled heap. I am currently working with them to purchase a new floor, but funding is prohibitive for such a luxury.

Through all the recent political turmoil, theatre in Saratov remains a vital and integral element of the daily lives of the people who live there. The vitality of the Russian theatres is not suffering as much as we, in the West, might have imagined. Unfortunately, though, they remain locked in the technology of the 1950's and 1960's. There is not much hope of moving into the ultra-sophisticated level of show control we enjoy in the west unless major assistance is provided through donations or culmral grants from Western Europe, Asia, Australia or America. State support remains the dominant source of funding for all the major theatres in Saratov with the majority of the monies used to pay paltry salaries to hundreds of employees. Very little ever goes to maintenance or technological upgrades. It is my hope that an ever-increasing understanding, collaboration, cultural exchange and elemental exposure to the art and artists of Russia by their Western counterparts will begin to take place at a greater pace than at the present. As we learn more of Russia's theatres, outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, our efforts will be to foster their technical growth. Their artistic brilliance is still healthily intact.



Fig.8 Snow removal Nutcracker-style, Opera-Ballet Theatre. Note the side lighting positions.

## A Brief History of Golf in Relation to Man's Connection to the Natural World

a Ten-Minute Play

BRYAN WILLIS & YOSHIYUKI NISHIKAWA

### CAST

NARRATOR	CADDIE
SCOTTISH GENTLEMAN	DEVELOPER 1
GOLFER 1	DEVELOPER 2
GOLFER 2	INFANT PRODIGY
PRO GOLFER	INFANT PRODIGY'S FATHER

*(Fade up on a distinguished NARRATOR sitting in an elegant chair. He [or she] smokes a pipe. SFX throughout—self-important, projectile puffing.)*

NARRATOR: "A Brief History of Golf in Relation to Man's Connection to the Natural World." Scene One: The Scottish Highlands.

*(Fade up on SCOTTISH GENTLEMAN preparing to putt.)*

NARRATOR: *(Hushed announcer tone)* A lone Scottish gentleman surveys the shot. He grips a crude yet effective wooden club, wipes his hands on his kilt, readies himself for the ten meter putt. What's this? He pauses a moment, he's closing his eyes—apparently he's taking a moment to savor the fine highland air. He opens his eyes and—

SCOTTISH GENTLEMAN: Ahhhhhh! Isn't it grand?

*(He putts. SFX of a ball rolling into the hole. Fade out SCOTTISH GENTLEMAN.)*

Bryan Willis is a freelance playwright who lives in Olympia, WA.

Yoshiyuki Nishikawa graduated from St. Martin's College in 2002 and has returned to Japan to live and work.

All inquiries regarding production and other rights to this play should be addressed to: Bryan Willis, P.O. Box 1088, McCleary, WA 98557; willis@olynet.com; (360) 754-2818.



NARRATOR: (*Attempting to hide the fact (s)he created the previous SFX with a golfball and an oatmeal box.*) Scene Two: Golf and the Fashionable Wardrobe.

(*Fade up on two 1920s GOLFERS.*)

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) If you've just joined us, we're exploring Man's Relationship to the Natural World in Connection to a Brief History of Golf. The year is 1923; we're on the 14<sup>th</sup> green of a beautiful course where two golfers are removing putters from their bag. Both gentlemen are dressed in the traditional garb. Very smart. The first gentleman prepares to putt and—Wait, the other fellow is holding out his hand.

GOLFER #1: Did you feel that?

GOLFER #2: I'm sorry?

GOLFER #1: The sprinkles.

GOLFER #2: Good Lord, you're right.

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) I'm afraid he's correct. It is beginning to sprinkle. The one gentleman bags his putter. It's clear he's going to brave the storm from the comfort of the club house.

GOLFER #1: That's it then, you're going in?

GOLFER #2: Heavens yes. My trousers, my cap.

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) He's moving toward the clubhouse.

GOLFER #2: Shall we?

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) The other gentleman is—is, why I believe he's, yes, he's holding out his arms. He's breathing the air, feeling the rain.

GOLFER #2: Frank?

GOLFER #1: Damn the sprinkles. I'm putting!

(*GOLFER #1 putts. SFX of a successful putt.*)

NARRATOR: (*Hiding the oatmeal box.*) Astounding. What you're hearing, by the way, is the actual sound of a golf ball falling in the cup. It is not, I assure you, the sound of a golf ball falling into a common oatmeal box. Right. Scene Three: "The Swoosh."

(*CADDIE enters. He wears a hat adorned with the Nike logo. He reaches into the Nike gold bag and removes a putter shaped like a giant Swoosh.*)

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) Here's Cougar's caddie. He reaches into the golf bag and removes the renowned putter shaped like a giant

Swoosh, registered trademark of Nike International. He's holding the putter out to, by golly, it's Cougar Forest!

(*SFX: Applause from GOLF PRO's fans.*)

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) The caddie holds out the putter.

CADDIE: Here, sir.

GOLF PRO: (*Swooshes in—Nike Swooshes on all parts of his body and clothing. He takes the giant Swoosh-shaped putter.*) Excellent.

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) This is a deceptively difficult two inch putt. Cougar is down on his knees, sizing up the slope. He's—he's snapping his fingers.

(*SFX: snapping.*)

CADDIE: Your putter, sir.

GOLF PRO: Mm-hmn.

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) That was Cougar saying, "Mm-hmn." He removes his hat, wipes the perspiration off his forehead, which, coincidentally is adorned with a new Nike tattoo. The caddie is about to speak again—

CADDIE: Sir, if I may suggest—

GOLF PRO: Hey! I can handle this.

CADDIE: Sorry sir, it's just—

GOLF PRO: WHAT?

CADDIE: The air, sir. There's a breeze.

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) Heated words in a situation dripping with pressure. Is Cougar too big, too legendary to heed the wise counsel of his caddie? Will he, can he, incorporate the caddie's sage words to sink this deceptively difficult two inch putt? And—and, Yes. He's taking an incredibly brief moment to FEEL THE AIR. He adjusts his stance and—

(*SFX of ball rolling into a hole.*)

GOLF PRO: YESSSSSSSS!

(*What follows is the Mother of all Victory Dances: a humorless, clenched-fist-pumping whoop of epic proportions. The CADDIE stands by. SFX of GOLF PRO grunting—applause from his many fans.*)

NARRATOR: Ladies and gentlemen—he's done it. Fantastic. Cougar is celebrating this glorious moment with a fist-pumping celebration, perhaps thanking the gods who gave him this tremendous talent.

CADDIE: Sir?

GOLF PRO: What-what is it?!

CADDIE: The second hole, sir—it's this way.

NARRATOR: Scene Four—

GOLF PRO: I haven't finished my Victory Dance—

NARRATOR: SCENE FOUR. Wildwood International Golf Course.

*(GOLF PRO and CADDIE exit. Fade up on two DEVELOPERS unrolling a large blueprint. This scene may be delivered in another language, real or imagined, as long as the underlined words are clearly English.)*

NARRATOR: *(Hushed announcer tone.)* We're in a rain forest, located somewhere in the Western Hemisphere.

*(SFX: rain forest, bird calls, etc.)*

NARRATOR: A pleasant enough scene—

*(SFX: car stopping. Two doors open and close.)*

NARRATOR: *(Hushed announce tone.)* What you're hearing is a late model SUV stopping. Two developers are stepping out. One of them has a set of blueprints.

DEVELOPER 1: So. What do you think?

DEVELOPER 2: *(Looks around.)* Too many trees.

DEVELOPER 1: Well of course there are too many trees. It's a "rain forest." Use your imagination.

DEVELOPER 2: I don't see where the clubhouse goes.

DEVELOPER 1: Beside the casino. Next to the Marriott. *(Points.)* "Putt-Putt." Baskin-Robbins—sports bar. Pro-shop, gift shop, mini-mall. Driving range.

DEVELOPER 2: What if we put the mini-mall there?

DEVELOPER 1: No, no. The mini-mall should face the gift shop.

DEVELOPER 2: The mini-mall should face the "putt-putt."

DEVELOPER 1: No, no-

DEVELOPER 2: That's the logical progression: "putt-putt," mini-mall, Marriott.

DEVELOPER 1: Fine. You want the mini-mall by the "Putt-Putt," we'll put the mini-mall by the "Putt-Putt."

DEVELOPER 2: Fine.

DEVELOPER 1: Fine.

DEVELOPER 1 & DEVELOPER 2: Fine.

NARRATOR: *(Hushed announcer tone.)* It seems as if they've reached an impasse in the discussion. They're turned away from one another—perhaps seeking inspiration from the landscape?

DEVELOPER 2: We still need a tag line for the marketing campaign.

DEVELOPER 1: I'm fully aware of that.

DEVELOPER 2: And I appreciate that awareness.

DEVELOPER 1: Don't rush me.

DEVELOPER 2: Rush? Who's rushing? You think I'm rushing? Far be it from me to—

DEVELOPER 1: "Wildwood—It's Where You Want to Be."

DEVELOPER 2: ...lacks passion. Boring.

DEVELOPER 1: OK.

DEVELOPER 2: Yeah.

DEVELOPER 1: All Right. How about..."Wildwood—WU-HOOOO!"

*(An awkward moment.)*

DEVELOPER 2: I'm not sure that translates.

DEVELOPER 1: Unless you hear it.

DEVELOPER 2: Yeah. That's a limit.

DEVELOPER 1: Hmm.

DEVELOPER 2: Wait. Wait.

DEVELOPER 1: What.

DEVELOPER 2: I've got it.

DEVELOPER 1: What?

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) (S)he's pausing. (S)he's taking a deep breath as if—ah, I believe (s)he's communing with nature.

DEVELOPER 2: "Wildwood—Feel the Green!"

DEVELOPER 1: ...I like it...I like it a lot!

(*A communal laugh. Exit DEVELOPERS.*)

NARRATOR: And now, the conclusion of "A Brief History or Golf in Relation to Man's Connection to the Natural World." Scene Five: "Wildwood—Feel the Green."

(*Fade up on DAD on his hands and knees. He's coaxing his INFANT SON—who's wearing a large diaper—to sink a short putt.*)

DAD: This way son!

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) We're at the newly opened world-class golf course, Wildwood, where a proud father has brought his infant son to learn what we in the business call: The Game. How wise of him to give the lad and early start.

DAD: It's just you and the ball and the hole. The putter is a part of you, an extension of your arm. The golf ball is a part of you, the grass, the hole; it's all you; it's in your control.

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) The infant is looking at the ball, carefully weighing his father's every syllable.

DAD: Don't think, just feel it, breathe it, go with your instincts, just—Focus. Clear out the past, the future, any preconceived notions of stardom or fame or amassing the type of fortune only made possible by the sponsorship of a multi-national corporation. Forget all that. It's just you and the ball...Just-Just Do It! PUTT THE BALL...Son?

NARRATOR: (*Hushed announcer tone.*) The lad is—he's—closing his eyes, he smiles—apparently he's taking a moment to savor the great outdoors. He opens his eyes and—

INFANT SON: Ahhhhhhh.

(*SFX: Ball rolling into the hole.*)

(*SFX: Pipe puffing.*)

(*NARRATOR points his [or her] learned finger and is about to explain something and then doesn't.*)

(*Fade to black.*)

The End

## Hopi Ritual Performances: A Comparison with the Rites and Practices of Ancient Greek Theatre

DAVID EDGECOMBE

This paper will focus on one of the oldest surviving religions in North America: the stories, rituals and performances of the Hopi. Similarities will be noted by comparing their performance practices with the dramatic presentations of the Ancient Greeks. First, it is important to begin with a social and historical overview of these indigenous Americans.

The Hopi Indian Reservation was founded in 1882. It is unique among Indian preserves, because it is surrounded on all sides by the larger Navajo Reservation. This has been the cause of many conflicts over the years concerning property rights and land use. Grazing rights and overuse have been the principal reason for the friction between the two tribes. The climate is one of the most arid in the Southwest, and this fragile ecology severely limits the amount of produce which can be taken from these lands. This reservation was assigned by the government as nearly a perfect square of 2,500,000 acres with another 1,800,000 acres as joint use area. Hopi territory extends from the Painted Desert in the south to the high pinyon forests of the north. It is an eerily beautiful land of sand, buttes, mesas, canyons and dotted with forest covered mountains. The elevations of this high desert region are between 5,000 and 6,000 feet and although the land receives only 10 inches of rain a year, the months of the summer monsoons, July through August, can be quite wet. The Hopis joke that they chose their land, because nobody else would want it. Indeed, the isolation and the arid conditions have probably saved these communities from exploitation by both the Spanish and the Americans.

The twelve villages of the Hopis are located on or near three mesas that stick out like fingers from the larger Black Mesa. These are called First, Second and Third Mesas. Most of the people live in traditional

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pueblos constructed of mud and logs, some of which are hundreds of years old. Those communities situated at the foot of these mesas are newer and here the people live in more modern cement block houses. Arizona highway 264 runs through the middle of Hopi land, and the mesas and communities are clearly visible from this road. Nine of the twelve villages are represented on a tribal council, though each community has its own method of governance. Some have elected councils, and others have traditional tribal chiefs. There are many clans in the Hopi nation, the major being the clans of Eagle, Bear, Parrot and Badger. These totemic animals played a part in the creation stories and are represented by *hachinas* in the ritual dances. The Hopi are quiet and private people. In the past they have been exploited by tourists, and several communities are closed to the public.

The Hopi trace their tribal origins back more than 2,000 years, and the history of their ancestry goes back tens of thousands of years. They are not nomadic and have lived in the same communities for generations. The Hopi are considered to be Pueblo people; this label came from the Spanish name which describes their dwellings. The Hopi say that they are born of the earth, and it is often hard to tell where their pueblos end and the earth begins. Their ancestors may have been part of the land bridge migration from Asia which occurred about 30,000 years ago. Other anthropologists assert that they sailed to the North America across the Bering Strait and arrived in the Southwest as late as 700AD. Hopi legend tells of a period of wandering for the people, which may have its origins in these pre-historical migrations. Many believe the Hopi are direct descendants of the Anasazi, the ancient people who lived in the American Southwest approximately 500 to 1300AD and occupied what is today called the "Four Corners" area.

Archeologist John Ware took me to an Anasazi site in New Mexico where he hypothesized on what may have been a worship area. The region once supported populations in the tens of thousands as evidenced by massive dumps of pottery shards. The configuration is open to many interpretations, he told me, but he carefully constructed a probable hypothesis. The approach to the area was a long open space about as wide as a modern highway. Along the sides were carved stones placed at regular intervals, and near the end of this runway was a perpendicular shaft carved about 25 feet deep into the bed rock. At the bottom of this excavated shaft was a diagonal tunnel which emptied out on to the ceremonial highway. He explained that dancers and holy men probably chanted and proceeded up the highway until they reached the tunnel exit where masked performers representing Anasazi gods abruptly appeared as if born from the earth. This ceremonial performance was probably the culmination of days of religious rituals. Dr. Ware said that the proof of his conjecture was that

while excavating the shaft and tunnel they discovered a pair of well preserved masks. Before this discovery, there had been no empirical evidence on Anasazi masks, and these are the only examples yet to be uncovered. He feels that the position of the shaft, the tunnel and the runway indicate that performance ritual is the only possible explanation he can offer for the intensive labor required to build these constructions.

About 1200 AD the Anasazi encountered a series of catastrophic climate changes and disappeared. Tribal historians date the establishment of some of the Hopi villages from about the time of this mysterious exodus. Old Oraibi, on Third Mesa, is the oldest continuously inhabited community in the United States. Hopi records report other drastic fluctuations in population. In 1643 there were 14,000 Hopi living in the area which is now the reservation. By 1781 the people had been affected by diseases introduced by European explorers, especially small pox, and their numbers dropped to less than 900. Today more than 10,000 Hopis live in the area and their numbers are slowly increasing.

The Hopi are world famous for their traditional crafts including the making of pottery, baskets, Kachina dolls and jewelry. These arts are sold through the Southwest and supplement their incomes. The Hopi use a method of "dry farming" to raise corn, beans, melons, squash and other traditional crops in this very arid area. Elders say that being a good Hopi means being a good farmer, and indeed, they are agricultural wizards. Corn remains their principal crop. The Hopi word for "corn" is the same word for "ancient." They are taught to treat the corn plants as children, and the very act of planting is a kind of worship. In the same way that children are a continuation of the life force, corn sustains the life of the individual and the community. As late as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, ninety percent of the tribe's vegetable diet was corn. It is grown in many colors: red, blue, yellow and black, and the strains have been handed down for generations. The Hopi say that the grain was given to them by the gods for their travels through the "first world." The sight of these small plots nestled between rock walls in barren canyons does not seem to bode well for a rich harvest, but the Hopi have perfected this method of farming and successfully gather truckloads of corn year after year. Their traditional varieties of corn develop extensive root systems to make use of all available water, and their ritual dances all focus on prayers for rain to sustain their crops.

Today, the Hopi live in a clan system and are a deeply religious people. Their use of the land and physical environment influences their religious views. Their faith teaches peace, goodwill and acceptance, and they seem to live according to these doctrines. Even the few who have been converted to Christianity also practice the ways of their ancestors and worship according to ancient methods.

The creation allegories are central to the Hopi religion, and these stories may be the oldest surviving Native American religious tales. These narratives speak of a central God who created all. In this way their religion can be considered monotheistic, but the creator "Taiowa" manifested himself in many forms and deities. He created beings that divided the infinite into the finite. These "worlds" are what the Hopi ancestors traveled through to arrive in the present. There are parallels to the narratives of the Old Testament; one is the story of the flood. In the third world a great wash of water was sent to destroy the inhabitants because they had wandered from "the way." The Hopi have a very holistic view of healing. They believe that there are vibration centers throughout the body which control health. As in Eastern religions these centers control physical, mental and spiritual well-being. The point at the top of the head is called the "open door," and this is where the life force enters and leaves the body. The Hopi religion is based on the idea that nature and God are one. Every animal and inanimate object are manifestations of God. Through the elements of this world, a person can communicate with the supernatural.

The rituals of the Hopi and the ancient Greeks have their roots in religious dogma. The Greeks used the performance as part of a larger festival, and attendance was expected at the services. Public feasting accompanied the ritual celebrations. The Hopis frequently open their homes to strangers, inviting them in as a part of the communication and exchange on these days of celebration. Large community dinners are prepared and many people contribute to the bounty. Everyone in the pueblo and from neighboring towns attends dances, and the religious significance is clearly evident to outsiders.

Both performance rituals centered on myths which dealt with fertility, loss and renewal. Rituals were always an element of seasonal festivals which were connected to planting and harvest. Greek and Hopi lands are markedly different in the topography and climate, but both cultures are concerned with the propagation of food crops. Their lives are bound to the changing seasonal cycles and the importance of timing in the planting of grain. For the Greeks Dionysus was both mortal and god and, for that reason, he could communicate directly to the gods on behalf of the people. The *kachinas* are also viewed as messengers, and their missives to the gods control the weather and crop fertility. Aristotle explained in *The Poetics* that the origins of drama could be traced to the *dythrambic* choruses which, like the Hopi chants, form the principle elements of the worship ceremonies.

Forces in nature are given living forms in the *kachinas*. When Hopi men wear the *kachina* masks and costumes, they become the human conduit for the deities, and through their song/prayers they can produce tangible results. Today there are more than 300 different Kachina figures.

Although the costumes and names vary between villages, the basic belief system is still the same.

Although there are significant differences in the design of the costumes, both Greek and Hopi dances feature costumes which could be altered for the individual rituals or characters. The *kachinas* imitate the features of specific animals: bear, badger, eagle, etc. As indicated in their vase paintings, the Greeks often included choruses of animals, which incorporated the use of feathers and furs. The Greeks imitated the sounds of the animals they were playing as do the *kachinas*. The mixture of the animal and human qualities occurs in both cultures. The costumes of the satyrs parallel the animal personifications of the *kachinas*.

The masks of both cultures cover the heads of the performers and rest on their shoulders. They often imitate the features of the animals they represent, although the Hopi masks are much more abstract and symbolic. Hopi masks are brightly painted, and we have some evidence that the Greek masks were also very colorful. Greek masks were made of various materials including bone, leather, wood and fabric, as are the Hopi masks. Character differences allowed a great deal of artistic latitude for the Greek mask makers. Hopi masks vary from community to community and reflect the maker's inspirations. Greek masks were worn to make the wearers more anonymous and expressive, but for the Hopi, the mask transforms the human wearer into the living presence of the *kachina*. As the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss explained: "Imbued with life by the wearer, the mask brings the god on earth, it establishes his reality, mingles him with the society of men; inversely, by making the mask himself, man testifies



Fig. 1. The Clown Kachina



Fig. 2. The Corn Kachina

to his own social existence, manifests it, classifies it with the aid of symbols. The mask is both the man and something other than the man: it is the mediator par excellence between society, on one hand, and Nature, usually merged with the Supernatural, on the other." (Levi-Strauss, 18)

The Hopi believe that deities from another sphere determine much of what happens in our world. During the winter these deities live in another dimension, at the beginning of the growing season they return

to the land of the Hopi. The communication of the essential stories, known to the people as "The Hopi Way," must occur in a prescribed manner. Certain stories must be told during a specific season. The telling of the story is a form of prayer and must not be taken lightly. To tell a story or do a dance out of season is to risk personal harm. The Hopi believe that a snake will bite anyone who breaks this code. The Hopi stories are based on the personification of animals, and these animals are part of the god-cycle of life. Their interaction with the gods is vitally important to the survival of the Hopi. Death is a transitional phase between worlds, for the Hopi the death of an elder is part of the pilgrimage of life. If life has been lived according to the Hopi Way, the people may move to another plane of existence.

According to tradition, corn is the mother of the people; therefore, without corn there is no food. Since the land is arid, the Hopi have felt that they must secure the assistance of the gods to bring a suitable amount of rain to grow the corn. The prayers and rituals are amazingly complex, and no individual member knows everything. Worship is a communal event. Each family has its own religious traditions, as does each village. Although based on similar myths and dogma, the rituals can vary greatly. Hopi ceremonies encompass all major events in human development from birth to death; from adolescence to marriage. Rites of passage are commemorated by the performance of rituals. There has never been a Hopi written language; therefore, rituals are recorded through the teaching of chants, songs and dances. Many of the rituals take place in underground meeting halls called "*kivas*." Being subterranean the *kivas* are therefore closer to the heartbeat of the earth. These low circular buildings are the center for religious activities and rites of passage. The *kiva* has been referred to as "the navel of navels," and it is an entryway into the spiritual world. Only men are allowed into the *kivas*. Through these performances the stories of the Hopi are communicated to the subsequent generations. *Kivas* are the places for the oral transmission of the intricacies of Hopi wisdom. The public dances occur in the village's central plaza.

The Hopi and Greek performance spaces share remarkable similarities. The orchestra of the Greek theatre is circular as is the *kiva*. Both spaces share common purposes. It has been suggested that the origins of the circular orchestra of the Greeks could be traced to a sacrificial altar or "threshing place" which became associated with fertility ceremonies and symbolic sacrifices. The Greeks sacrificed bulls and goats to the god Dionysus. The Hopi begin ceremonies with purifying the performance place by sprinkling corn meal on the dancers and the ground. Both cultures take advantage of daylight hours, with outdoor dances in close proximity to temples or places of worship. For the Greeks the *skene*, or changing house, was invariably built near a temple; the Hopi perform in village

plazas which are always near the *kivas*. Processionals signal the start of a dance, and the *parados*, or the entry way of the Greek Theatre, corresponds to the runway from the *kiva* to the plaza.

There is no word in the Hopi language for "religion," even when translated the worship ceremonies are called "Indian doings." Life and religion become one with the Hopi. The performances usually occur on weekends and are open to the entire community and frequently non-Hopi visitors are permitted to attend. The themes of many of the rituals entail seeking a unity with nature. This insures that rain will come and that crops will grow and be harvested. The exact starting times of the dances are difficult to predict. The timing for these rituals is determined by many factors which are read by the Hopi elders. The position of planetary bodies often governs the selection of dates. Schedules cannot be printed, and visitors must often rely on chance or word of mouth. When I asked a Hopi carver when the next dance would be held, he responded, "We only know about one week ahead of time. The Mudheads come and tell us; they determine the time." Dances commence at dawn, with frequent rest periods occurring throughout the day, and the public ceremonies usually end at dusk.

The yearly cycle is divided into halves: one ending in December and the other in June. The most important dances start in the spring and continue through mid-summer. The Hopi say that these dances are not just for their community, but for the whole universe. In the same way cloistered Christian communities of nuns and monks give their prayers as gifts to all humanity. These religious rituals are called the "*Kachina* Dances." "Social Dances" are also held throughout the year, but the remainder of this paper will focus on the religious ceremonies.

Elaborate costumes and masks are worn during the dances. These costumes are heavy and during the summer, wearing them can be hot and exhausting. The Hopi feel that this physical commitment brings them closer to the spiritual realm. The dancers are actually thought to embody the *kachinas*, becoming the messengers from the gods. This belief is firmly held by all members of the community. While attending a dance I innocently asked a question which demonstrated my ignorance. "What do the dancers represent?" A formerly cordial woman became visibly disapproving. "The dancers do not represent anything. They are the *kachinas*!" Clowns are an important component of most dances. Like the satyrs in the Greek Dionysic procession, the Hopi clowns may tease community members about sexuality and other things rarely spoken about in public. The Hopi clown prayer says that "With one smile there may be knowledge." Again like the Greeks, the performers who engage in the rituals for these cultures are exclusively male. Greek women were prohibited from participating as dancers and actors. The Hopi involve young

women in some rituals, but they are initiates and not truly ceremonial performers. Music is an important element of these rituals. Percussion and various stringed instruments accompanied Greek performances. The Hopi rely primarily on drums and rattles with an occasional flute.

The Bean Dance is the first of the Kachina Dances and one of the most elaborate. Part of the Bean Dance involves the discipline of Hopi children, and behavior lessons are part of the performances. During the season boys are asked to kill small animals, and the Hopi girls are asked to grind corn to appease the "Ogres." The Ogres appear during the Bean Dance and ask the parent to bring out their children. The boys relinquish to the Ogres animals they have hunted and killed. The parents have given reports to the dancers about the conduct of their children during the year. The ogres tell the children that they have not been good enough and that their offerings are not adequate. They threaten to take the children away and eat them. The mothers struggle with the Ogres to keep their children. Of course, the children protest and promise to be better in the year to come. The parents win and lessons are learned. It is obvious to all but the young children that these dramas are prearranged, nearly scripted. The Ogres usually are played by an uncle or relative of the family. These rituals are part socialization and worship, though the process seems to be quite traumatic for some, the demonstration of familial love triumphs.

The most famous of the Hopi ritual dances is the Snake Dance which is usually held in the third week of August. The purpose is to secure rain for the coming season. Hundreds of snakes are used in the ceremonies and are messengers to the gods. Because of the spectacle of handling live snakes, including rattlesnakes, the dance has received much media attention. The Hopi do not want their religious ceremonies thought of as sideshows and have closed this ritual to visitors.

"The Velvet Shirt Dance" takes place in early to mid-March and is called this because the *kachinas* wear velvet tunics of various colors. The dances started about 10:00AM, although they can occur any time from dawn through early afternoon. There were perhaps fourteen non-native visitors and about 200 people sitting in the central plaza of Hotevilla, when I attended this dance in March of 2002. As the drum began to beat people came from their houses to view and participate in the dances. People sat in chairs which had been arranged in a circle around the sides of the plaza, while others stood on roof tops and quietly observed. There was no accommodation for the tourists, this is a religious service for the Hopi. I stood quietly on the perimeter of the chairs to watch the proceedings. The dance I witnessed involved about fifty male dancers, one masked drummer in a black and white costume, one non-costumed caller who seemed to be interpreting the dance to the community and a masked

leader *Kachina* in the center of the performance circle. Elder women walked about the periphery of the group sprinkling the dancers with ground white corn. A chant was accompanied by a regular drum beat, that periodically changed the rhythm by adding several beats at seemingly unpredictable times. The rhythms of these chants changed and repeated phrases were sung by the *kachinas* in hauntingly beautiful melodies. The *kachinas* performed about three chant cycles and then returned to the *kiva* for a period of about thirty minutes. The performers moved in a spiral configuration, and it seemed important not to make a complete circle. They danced in regular rhythms always stepping on the drum beat. Some dancers carried rattles and all had turtle shells tied over stones on their right legs. Each step rattled the shells punctuating the chants. If any part of the costume came undone, a member of the audience would stand to adjust and secure the garment. Periodically the entire spiral of dancers would turn. These turns seemed random and could start anywhere in the formation. In the center was a male dancer who moved in more elaborate spontaneous movements. He would periodically adjust the line, frequently moving the *kachinas* into place. Early in each set the *kachinas* would present the audience, particularly the elders, the children and the women with gifts, such as roasted corn, "piki bread," (paper thin rolled blue corn bread) and other food. The *kachinas* silently presented their gifts which were then accepted by the audience. The children were not allowed to beg for the gifts, and if they did they were ignored by the dancers. During the chant the edible gifts were consumed. At the end of the dance the *kachinas* made some animal noises, which sounded like the high calls of owls or coyotes. The attitude of the spectators and the *kachinas* was always serious and respectful. When a couple of young girls giggled during the dance, they were abruptly silenced by members of the audience.

The costumes were beautifully constructed. I heard a Hopi comment to a native visitor that he thought the masks were particularly beautiful. Each mask was very detailed and painted with care. The snout of each *kachina* mask was cylindrical in shape, and the masks were painted in primary colors, black and white. Each dancer wore a woven "kilt" in a shade of off-white. Many wore bells on their legs and arms, and all had a tanned fox or coyote pelt hanging down from their back so that the tail was visible. They held small bows in their left hands and carried gourd rattles in their right. The



Fig. 3. The Three Horned *Kachina*

dancers wore collars of fresh juniper fronds. Some wore turquoise jewelry which featured different animal representations in the designs.

The Hopi children learn the stories through these dances. At the end of the summer cycle the *kachinas* go "home" to the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff, Arizona. This "Home Dance" gives the community an opportunity to bid the gods goodbye, and in appreciation, the *kachinas* furnish gifts to the Hopi people. Young women are initiated into womanhood and are presented to the community. The Hopi women accepted baskets of food presented by the *kachinas*, while the children received beautiful *kachina* dolls carved of cottonwood. The cottonwood tree searches for water, and this reflects the importance of water in the rituals. These carvings have become a popular Indian art sold in tourist shops through out the Southwest, although at one time only the young received these dolls.

We know that Sophocles won awards for the choreography associated with his plays. The chanting and dancing choruses were a visual spectacle for the audiences. Oscar Brockett theorizes about the nature of Greek dance: "In tragedy, gesture and movement appear to have been simplified and broadened; in comedy, everyday actions—running the gamut from the commonplace to the bizarre—were exaggerated in the direction of the farcical and ludicrous. It is sometimes suggested that movement tended toward a set of conventionalized, stylized, or symbolic gestures like those in mimetic dance." (Brockett, 25) The Greek word *cheironomia* meant the mimetic performance which is a word by word visualization of emotion and meaning through the movements and gestures. The repetitious cadences of the Hopis have an almost hypnotic effect on the viewers. The Hopi dances are highly symbolic; most movements have a specific meaning. Some are very mimetic, like the movements indicating rain, and others are can be interpreted only by those well-versed in the myths.

Greek performances could be individualized in order to point up social problems or make fun of local personalities. Aristophanes often ridiculed political figures and even was taken to trial for lampooning the general Cleon. The *kachinas* make allusions to members of the tribe and the behavior of children by their relatives. The sexual high jinks of the Greek phallic dances were similar to the bawdy comedy in the Hopi clowns. The Hopi are an intensely private people, but the "mudheads" and other clowns frequently parody and saurize individuals of the community. The masked dancers are allowed anonymity, and therefore, more freedom of expression than unadorned community members. The Greek word *didaskalos* was used to describe the playwright who also served as the director. The literal translation for the word was "teacher," and indeed the art of direction often requires a great deal of teaching. The Hopi also have group leaders who monitor the rituals and focus the worship.

The performance rituals of both communities involve educational, social and religious expression. These rituals embrace the entire community and reinforce approved social behavior, the education of the young and the communication of myth. The combination of chants, narrative, dance and music create a memorable spectacle for communication. They are at once religious and secular, these rituals encourage response and engage the audience with humor and controversy. Joseph Campbell has written that a culture's rituals are ways of recording myth, and the ritual performances of the ancient Greeks and the Hopi are remarkably similar and share many commonalities.

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It is strictly forbidden to take photographs or make sketches of the dances. The Hopi have been the victims of the white world's exploitation. The experiences reported in this paper were observed with full respect of the sacredness of the Hopi services. No photographs were taken and no notes recorded during the process of the rituals. I would like to recognize the assistance of John Ware, Director of the Amerind Foundation Museum in Dagoon, Arizona. My sincere thanks to the Hopi people for their kindness in allowing my family to witness their ritual performances, and also to Elizabeth Ware for her editorial suggestions and support.

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## Premiere and Finale: Dryden's *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* at Western Oregon University

RICHARD A. DAVIS

In 1970, when I was searching for a dissertation topic at the University of Washington School of Drama, I read all thirty-six of John Dryden's plays before I eventually decided to write about the four plays of William Wycherley. But out of all of those plays, I always remembered Dryden's *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* and placed it on the list of plays I would like to do someday. Something about the eternal battle of good and evil and the story of Adam and Eve as archetypal human ancestors seemed to call out for doing!

### *The State of Innocence...*

Winter term of 2003 finally seemed to be the right time to do this play. We worked on it from January to March, and our performances were given Wednesday through Saturday, March 5, 6, 7, 8 at Rice Auditorium on the campus of Western Oregon University.

Dryden, in an essay preface to his play, states that it "was never acted." (Summers 416) And aside from several performances of the work done by Robert Powell's marionettes at Punch's Theatre in the Little Piazza, Covent Garden in 1712 (Summers 410), critical history seems to bear out that fact. (Winn 262-269) So our production was a premiere performance of the play. And because it was the last play that I directed at Western Oregon University, it was, ironically, a first and last performance all in one.

Dryden wrote the play around 1674 for the King's Company in London whose rivals, the Duke's Company, were pulling London audiences in to their theatre by presenting spectacular productions with the then popular Italian movable scenery. Dryden regarded Milton's *Paradise Lost* as one of the "greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems" ever written (Summers 417), so he used it as the basis for his play, condensing it

and changing its blank verse to neatly rhyming heroic couplets. He even went to see Milton, the old, blind, Commonwealth poet he had once worked for, to get his permission to use his poem. The play was written in a month's time; but the King's Company could not afford to mount it, settling instead for the French opera, *Ariane*, which had already been performed at court and whose dancers and singers and—most importantly—whose set pieces were still available. Since the company did not perform Dryden's play, no music was ever written for it, although Dryden wrote it to be an opera. (Winn 262-269)

### The Scene Design

In our earliest deliberations about the script, Scott Grim, the Technical Director/Scenic Designer and I grappled with the problems of turning what would have been a fantastic spectacle of 17<sup>th</sup> Century staging into an equally spectacular contemporary production, rather than a wing and drop period piece. In order to achieve the sense of universal vastness in which the story is set, I wanted to use the entire auditorium as our acting area; and Scott was willing to work with that concept. Consequently, we placed the Garden of Eden in the center of the audience seating area. We built a walkway from the orchestra pit to the Garden and extending beyond it to the back wall of the auditorium. On either side of our proscenium we have small side stages. On the upper level of these stages, we built platforms to hold the entrances and exits of "place bound" but major angel characters. The platform on stage left extended farther out from the wall and over the heads of the audience. This platform was occupied by the Angel Raphael, who, from time to time, came out to speak directly to Adam and could get closer to him and Eden because of the extension. The Angel Gabriel entered on the smaller upper stage right platform.

To use further the entire auditorium, the Angel Ithuriel was positioned in the stage right light rail balcony at the back of the auditorium. The Angel Uriel was placed in the stage left light rail balcony. When not "on stage" the actresses who played these roles could wait in the light booth itself for their entrances.

The stage was backed with black drapes. Near its front were arranged three levels of pyramiding scaffolding made from galvanized schedule 40 steel pipe and wrapped in plastic with tissue paper patches. This scaffolding served as a palace for the devils or fallen angels, and the tissue paper formed a kind of screen upon which could be projected computerized images significant to the play. The orchestra pit in front of the scaffolding was opened in various trap spaces so that actors could enter and exit from below the stage. The openings were also partially covered in plastic and, lit by wavering red lights from below, became a lake of fire and entrance to Hell at various points of the play.

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Perhaps the most charming part of the set was the Garden of Eden which contained a beautiful tall wire and plastic tree with a huge mushroom like top covered in plastic and colored tissue paper. Below and around it were wire flowers with plastic film and tissue papered petals which, like the tree, lit up to create a kind of fantasy atmosphere.

### The Music

Because Dryden's play was originally to have been an opera, music became a major problem for the production. Early in the summer of 2002, I made contact with our university Music Department which suggested the name of a student who would be suitable to compose music for the production. The student, Todd Adylott, was given a script marked where music would be needed. We talked about the fact that I did not want period music, and that I did not mind a mix of Eastern and Western world music that would be suitably weird, unusual, exotic, and exciting. By fall of 2002, Todd was mid-way into the opening sequence of music for the show—perhaps the longest piece—which was to suggest the war in Heaven between the angels of Lucifer and God. He had divided the other pieces amongst some of his student composer friends, and they were to have them completed by January. Later, however, I learned that most of these students were not working on the music. Todd was set to graduate at the end of Fall term and would be going to Korea. When Christmas break came, I contacted our Music Department again. This time, Professor Arnold Friedman, Todd's instructor, agreed to oversee the composing of the necessary music. Todd saw to the completion of the first piece before he left for the Far East, and a new student, David Lux, began the slow process of completing the other four major pieces and other incidental music. He was helped by our sound designer, Scott Kingston. Scott composed the music that was to be used for the serpent appearance and some other sounds. A portion of Richard Wagner's "Twilight of the Gods" was chosen for the exit of Adam and Eve from the garden at the end of the play, and Krzysztof Penderecki's "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima" was used as background for a segment of video involving war scenes. David Lux completed the piece of music for the athletic sequence in which the fallen devils entertain themselves in physical contests and exercises, the music for the dream sequence and all other music.

### The Choreography

Darryl Thomas, Professor of Dance, was our choreographer. Since the dream sequence, the athletic sequence and the serpent sequence were all



Fig. 1. Michael Lewsler and Becky Martin embrace as Adam and Eve

considered dances to be choreographed, the fact that actual music would not be completed until late in the rehearsal process necessitated that choreography for these pieces be developed without music. A time length was assigned to each piece so that the composers could write the music and the choreographer and his dancers could create movement within separate frameworks. As music was ready, the dance movement and the music were both combined and adjusted until a satisfactory blend was accomplished.

### The Costume Design

Over the years, I had often used this play as a project for advanced costuming students, since it involves clothing fallen angels, dancing devils, a serpent, four distinctive archangels, a host of ordinary angels, Lucifer, and Adam and Eve. Should Adam and Eve be nude until they eat the fruit? Should they be in leotards? Some kind of modern costume? Leaves? Should the devils and angels be stereotypical, stylized, or contemporary? Should the whole show be costumed in what a 17<sup>th</sup> Century mind would imagine? what a contemporary person would imagine? or in some fantasy style?

When I cast the show, students were asked amongst other things whether they would be willing to play the role of Adam, Eve, and at least one scene for Lucifer, in the nude. At least two men and one woman checked that they would; but I also indicated that checking "yes" to this question would not necessarily determine who would receive the part, and it did not. The woman chosen to play Eve had not checked "yes" to this question. And since Eve was not to be nude, I decided that I would not have Adam or Lucifer nude either. I dressed Adam and Eve in leaf covered briefs and gave Eve a leaf covered bra. The archangels, Raphael, Ithuriel, and Uriel all wore distinctive robes; but Gabriel wore a cloth version of 17<sup>th</sup> Century classical armor, a blond 17<sup>th</sup> Century man's wig, puffy breeches and a broad brimmed steeple hat. She was the token nod to the era of the play's creation. Raphael was dressed in pale blue, purple, and silver. Her wings were huge and towered behind and above her glistening silver and blue in the bright lights. Uriel was dressed in gold. An elaborate wooden and plastic headdress surrounded her head and face, and her wings, in gold and red, were cut like flames behind her. Her robe hung over the lighting balcony and almost down to the heads of the back row of audience members. Ithuriel was also dressed in gold, with a more conservative headdress and large horizontally extended wings.

Lucifer, the major devil in this play, wore a loose fish net top, low slung red ragged trousers and a black jagged cape. His cohorts were a ragged lot of ruffians dressed in combinations of red, black, gray, and brown. Their capes, briefs, and robes were all cut and torn. Beïtal, another nod to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, wore the remains of a torn white seventeenth century shirt and a black ratted wig. The more warlike Moloch carried a huge and elaborate sword.

The dancing devils wore wine colored jump suits with horned hoods. The regular angels wore simple white robes with buckram wings, a silver star crown, and an *himation* of glittery colored fabric.

Much time was spent with the serpent costume. Professor Thomas chose the smallest person he could to be the serpent. She was unable to move her legs except to undulate, and six dancing devils supported her in these undulations. She was enclosed in a green body suit which continued on to a long tail which was stuffed and padded. The snake head was a large green mask that covered all of the woman's head except for her face.



Fig. 2. Ivan Zizek surveys his new home as Lucifer in Hell

### The Makeup Design

Makeup for the play was designed by John Christiansen. Grotesque, clown-like shapes decorated the major devil faces, and the major angels made use of circles and spots of gold, blue, and silver to match their various costumes. Adam and Eve wore no body make up and only general face make up. Lucifer wore little make up, but arranged his short hair into two points on either side of the top of his head.

### The Lighting Design

Scott Grim, the Scenic Designer, felt that the production was designed to emphasize light rather than setting. Our Lighting Designer, student Brent Sullivan, lived up to that statement. The plastic and tissue covered scaffolding glistened when the light hit it. Beams of light criss-crossed the auditorium as angels entered and exited from their positions around the audience, and the fantasy tree of knowledge with its mushroom like top glowed a bright patchwork of color in the center of the dark auditorium. At the end of the play when the plastic covered scaffolding was used for computerized video clips of 20th Century wars, the effect was striking indeed!

### The Play

The play follows the basic plot of *Paradise Lost*. Lucifer and his devil friends, having lost the battle with God, fall from Heaven into the Lake of Fire. There they create a palace and debate what to do. Should they be content with their current situation (Belial), continue open warfare (Moloch), or as Asmodey (a character added to the story by Dryden) suggests to Lucifer, explore God's new creation Earth and see if there is a way to seduce Man? Lucifer immediately asserts himself. He will go to earth, seduce mankind and return victorious. Adam and Eve are intro-

duced. Lucifer, in disguise, makes his way to Eden, overhears Adam and Eve and arranges for Eve to have a dream in which she is encouraged to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and enjoy its blessings.

After a brief intermission, Raphael and the heavenly host of angels arrive to warn Adam that Lucifer is in the area and that Adam must assert his free will to avoid becoming Lucifer's victim. Eve insists that they work separately on this day and Adam reluctantly agrees. While Adam works, she explores the tree and sees a serpent arrive, pick and eat the fruit, disappear, then reappear as a man similar to Adam in appearance. This man is, of course, Lucifer, who proceeds to persuade Eve that if he—a serpent before—could eat of the fruit and become a human, then she, already a human, could eat of the fruit and become like God. She picks the fruit, determines to tempt Adam and succeeds in getting him to eat the fruit. Adam and Eve quarrel with each other then forgive each other. Raphael and the other angels arrive and banish them from Eden after showing them what the results of their misbehavior will be for the future of mankind—unfortunate at first: war and death—but eventually—fortunate: a future in Heaven.

Although Dryden wrote in an age that wished to streamline poetry from the complex exaggeration and figurative language of the Elizabethan era, his poetry was often a struggle for the students playing these roles. Complex concepts are frequently tightly packed into few words and passed over quickly in delivery. In the scene just after our intermission (Act IV in the original script), when Raphael and Gabriel arrive to warn Adam, a very complex discussion of predestination and free will is had. In my early readings of the script, I worried about this dialogue and considered cutting it as being too difficult for the audience to grasp. Fortunately, I left this ten minute section in the play. It is in fact the thematic core of the play, because it leaves Adam perplexed about his God given ability to make good or bad choices.

In this scene, Adam, unintentionally, disturbs the angels by asking questions and presenting arguments which he states are only asked so he can "be better taught." To Adam, it appears God has put him in a predicament that forces him to fall. Raphael replies to the cause and effect argument with this difficult speech:

When we see causes join'd t'effects at last,  
The chain but shews necessity that's past  
That what's done, is: (ridiculous proof of fate!)  
Tell me which part it does necessitate?  
I'll chuse the other; there I'll link th'effect,  
O chain, which fools, to catch themselves project!  
Act IV, scene I  
(Summers 445-446)

Then, seemingly exasperated with Adam's arguments, Raphael cuts the discussion short: "Our task is done: obey; and in that choice,/Thou shalt be blest, and angels shall rejoyce." (ACT IV, Scene I; Summers 446) After the angels have gone, Adam shares his frustration with the audience:

Hard state of life! Since Heav'n fore-knows my will,  
Why am I not ty'd up from doing ill?  
Why am I trusted with my self at large,  
When hee's more able to sustain the charge?  
Since Angels fell, whose strength was more than mine,  
T'would show more grace my frailty to confine.  
Fore-knowing the success, to leave me free,  
Excuses him, and yet supports not me.

ACT IV, Scene 1  
(Summers 446)

Having provided this long discussion of man's ability to choose correctly, in the very center of the play, Dryden is better able to place Adam in the ultimate position to choose to fall.

When Eve has been persuaded to pick the fruit and offers it to Adam at what is the climactic moment of the play, Adam uses his God given ability to choose and chooses to eat the fruit out of love for Eve.

Cheat not your self, with dreams of Deity,  
Too well, but yet too late, your crime I see:  
Nor think the fruit your knowledge does improve;  
But you have beauty still, and I have love.  
Not cozen'd, I; with choice, my life resign:  
Imprudence was your fault, but love is mine.

ACT V, Scene 1  
(Summers 454)

In spite of their fall and their name calling afterwards, their love brings ultimate forgiveness and, indeed, forgiveness from God as well. God chooses to delay death. Adam and Eve are banished to a harsh life, but not without a final promise of Heavenly love in the end. Without the long discussion of free will and predestination, the play would not have this strong thematic structure which links Adam's choice to love and forgive Eve with God's choice to love and forgive mankind.

The emphasis on giving up all for love is in keeping with the Restoration view expressed in other plays of the era by Dryden and other significant playwrights. Adam and Eve as characters are sometimes like the lovers of Restoration comedies in the male's sexual aggressiveness and the woman's coy virtue. Shortly after they meet there is this exchange:

ADAM  
Made to command thus freely I obey,  
And at thy feet the whole Creation lay.

Pity that love thy beauty does beget:  
What more I shall desire, I know not yet.  
First let us lock'd in close embraces be;  
Thence I, perhaps, may teach myself and thee.  
EVE

Somewhat forbids me, which I cannot name;  
For ignorant of guilt, I fear not shame:  
But some restraining thought, I know not why,  
Tells me, you long should beg, I long deny.

ACT II, Scene 1  
(Summers 436)

Later, when the two have fallen, we hear Adam and Eve complain with standard Restoration vigor about the problems of being and having a wife:

EVE  
Better with Brutes my humble lot had gone;  
Of reason void, accountable for none:  
Th'unhappiest of creation is a wife,  
Made lowest, in the highest rank of life:  
Her fellow's slave; to know and not to chuse:  
Curs't with that reason she must never use.

ADAM  
Add, that she's proud, fantastick, apt to change;  
Restless at home; and ever prone to range:  
With shows delighted, and so vain is she,  
She'll meet the Devil; rather than not see.  
Our wise Creator, for his Quires divine,  
Peopled his Heav'n with Souls all masculine.  
Ah: why must man from woman take his birth?  
Why was this sin of nature made on earth?  
This fair defect; this helpless ayd call'd wife;  
The bending crutch of a decrepit life.  
Posterity no pairs, from you shall find,  
But such as by mistake of love are joyn'd:  
The worthiest men, their wishes ne'er shall gain;  
But see the slaves, they scorn, their loves obtain.  
Bluid, appetite shall your wild fancies rule;  
False to desert, and faithful to a fool.

ACT V, Scene 1  
(Summers 456-457)

Adam and Eve make a fascinating Restoration couple whose views on sexuality, women and marriage, brought a wealth of response from contemporary audiences.

### The Production

Dryden's Lucifer emerged as a boastful, heroic villain. At times he reminded me of the ranting "Herod" of the English Medieval drama. He is given dimension, however, when he bemoans his lost glory, envies Adam for being able to have someone like Eve and gloats over his success at having seduced Eve to fall only to be reduced to terror and submission by God's thunderbolt! Ivan Zizek, who portrayed this character in our production, carefully analyzed these dimensions and gave an impressive portrayal. Michael Lawler as Adam, gave depth and sincerity to his role that was admirable. And Rebecca Martin as Eve provided that fickle, loving, egotistical and changeable quality so necessary to make the love relationship with Adam believable.

During final technical rehearsals, the stage manager, Rachel Foran, and her lighting and sound crews were set up in the auditorium to run the show. They seemed so correct in their positions on either side of the walkway to Eden with their computers that instead of moving them up to the light booth for the actual performance, I decided to leave them in full view of the audience.



Figure 3. The cast and crew

From the moment the sound of the battle began and computerized lights fell across our scaffolding screen—

From the moment our devils crawled out of the smoldering red lake of fire—

To the exit of Adam and Eve through the audience and out the doors of the auditorium, the audience was caught up in the spectacle of this sometimes quaint, sometimes humorous and sometimes monumental play. It was a great way for me to exit the theatre at Western.

Editor's note: Dr. Davis retired in 2003 after thirty-nine years at Western Oregon University. During his tenure he served as the chair of his department as well as the division and held every office of the Northwest Drama Conference including two terms as President.

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## The Crucible Still Burns

ELAINE WIGGINS

Some plays are written in response to a specific event in time, but lose their impact as the passage of time reduces their relevancy. Other plays keep their relevancy regardless of the passage of time. *The Crucible* is such a play. The play "illustrates the danger of morality and religion, when they are hooked up with politics" and "shows what happens in a community when people don't trust each other and use people and events for their own political purposes" (Blaney 1-2). Miller wrote his play in response to the persecutions of the McCarthy era, and his play still speaks to and even aids the circumstances that allow normal fear to become mass hysteria. In America, these conditions of extreme fear exist in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, more commonly referred to as 9-11. The theme of witch hunts led by the pillars of society in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* remains relevant as it continues to play out in the modern news media in the headlines from the terrorist attacks.

In the 1950's Senator Joseph McCarthy was recklessly accusing government personnel and celebrities of communist sympathies, which led to the destruction of many innocent people's careers and the irreparable damage to their lives. His witch hunts were characterized by sensationalism, guilt by association, insubstantial evidence, and accused persons in turn accusing their friends and associates, all of which was fed by fear-induced hysteria. "McCarthy's ambition turned to ruthless anti-communism and ultimately destroyed his career" (Kercher 1). *The Crucible* "...opened at a time when the term 'witch hunt' was a commonplace expression" (Hendrickson 447). In his article titled "Why I Wrote *The Crucible*," Miller states that he was "...motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors' violations of civil rights, were fearful, and with good reason, of being identified as covert Communists if they should protest too strongly" (Miller 2). Arthur Miller was responding to a real,

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insidious threat on the part of the liberal leaders whose inaction began as discomfort and grew into fear of being blacklisted. The influence of that fear is prevalent and exists as a potential threat today.

A fear similar to the kind created by the McCarthy era grew in America in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Americans were shocked at the depth of hatred directed at them and sought answers in the midst of their confusion. Some people wanted first to understand how and why an act of hatred is born. In

*The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Lynn DeLisi, M.D. comments on a book titled "In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror" by Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg. DeLisi discusses the authors' "terror management theory," and states that "... suppressing one's thoughts of death by finding solace in a common culture is the premise for actions with good and bad consequences" (1). In this case, the common culture is one where terrorists believe they are doing good by committing acts of terrorism. DeLisi states that this extreme way of thinking "[S]ometimes leads to the collective need to annihilate groups of people whose beliefs go against one's cultural norms ..." which she offers as an explanation for Muslim extremists' attack. DeLisi concludes that a "... form of mass cultural paranoid psychosis occurred in its extreme ..." when America was attacked (1). Some Americans sought a sense of comfort through unity, national pride, and action. They demanded more from their leaders in the way of answers, information, and accountability.

Compelled not only by a sense of urgency, but also by a fear of embarrassment, the Bush administration responded to the 9-11 acts of terrorism with decision. The *New York Times* article "The Rowley Memo" suggested that certain important decision-makers in the Justice Department acted in "...an apparent effort to protect the F.B.I. from embarrassment and the relevant F.B.I. officials from scrutiny" (Safire 1). Embarrassment, fear, and ignorance within the nation's leadership overpowered their ability to employ reason, intelligence, and justice. Under the intense pressure to comfort and protect a nation, to uncover the evil unknown, and punish its representatives, American leaders resorted to the same tactics practiced by regimes, dictatorships, and tyrannies. Congress passed a resolution "...granting the president carte blanche to wage war against anybody he deemed responsible for the hijackings," and "Bush issued a few executive orders of his own. One called into being military tribunals in which 'enemy combatants' could be arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death entirely in secret." Attorney General Ashcroft has been slammed by the courts for "security overkill and unwarranted secrecy" (Solomon 2).

Our attorney general's name doesn't lend itself as readily as Joe McCarthy's to the mellifluous abstract noun that came to define the witch-hunts, loyalty oaths, and blacklisting of the '50's: "Ashcroftism" is not likely to enter American parlance. But if it did, the term would describe not only the climate of enforced conformity, but the administration's high-handed disregard for the most fundamental of constitutional protections: First Amendment rights to free association and free speech and the Fifth Amendment right to due process. (Solomon 6)

The choice of one man to silence dissent mimics in disturbingly familiar ways those of Joseph McCarthy at the center of the witch hunt.

Influenced by our government's inclination toward ethnic profiling, group arrests, and lengthy illegal interrogations and detainments, Americans embraced the "witch hunt mentality" as a means of coping with and responding to the attack, and the hysteria spread. "Other outlandish cases of repression and neighborly ratting crept into national consciousness," including an educator being fired for teaching a lesson on Islamic culture, and two men being interrogated for requesting stamps without an American flag (Solomon 6). Accusations and attacks were not limited to the citizens who cause suspicion because they look or act different from the mainstream, they were also aimed at the celebrities who typically enjoy a higher, more protected regard. Even the celebrity elite were quickly under suspicion. The website *Truthout's* "Issues" section carries an April 2003 article entitled "Hollywood Revives Macarthyist Climate by Silencing and Sacking War Critics." In it Andrew Gumbel lists examples of celebrities who have felt the backlash of their dissent: Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins were both dropped from scheduled public appearances after speaking their views, Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks faced boycotts and organized hate campaigns, and Janeane Garofalo has had an upcoming sit-com release date postponed. "The clearly emerging pattern is that entertainment personalities who speak out on touchy political subjects—particularly Iraq—do so at their peril" (Gumbel 1-2). Gumbel quotes Mike Farrell of *M\*A\*S\*H* as saying, "What this is really about is stifling dissent on a national scale." In response to this turmoil, "...the Screen Actors Guild has likened the atmosphere to the McCarthy-era anti-Communist witch-hunts of the 1950s. It issued a statement saying that no performer should be denied work on the basis of his or her political beliefs. 'Even a hint of the blacklist must never again be tolerated in this nation,' it said" (Gumbel 2-3). Despite a storm of hateful attacks, the Screen Actor's Guild held strong in the face of opposition and did not remove the statement (Gumbel 3). Similar to the way the 9-11 hysteria targeted the fringes of society, the hunting of witches in Salem also began with the more suspicious citizens: drunks, beggars, outcasts and the morally questionable. The attacks then proceeded quickly

and shockingly to the morally elite. Characters such as Rebecca Nurse, Mary Easty and Elizabeth Proctor found that good character, moral fortitude and life service meant nothing in the face of accusation.

In the midst of the climate of hysteria following 9-11, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* was revived on Broadway in the Spring of 2002. The characters spoke across time from their seventeenth century setting about the tragedy of innocent lives lost, pleading that the errors of their time never be made again. In a review by the *Brown Alumni Magazine Online*, Caryn James stated that the play's genius is in its "... infinitely malleable central metaphor ..." which "... lends itself to every conceivable threat to personal freedom and independent thought" (1). As American citizens experience the loss of freedoms due to hysteria born out of legitimate fear, they can see in the text of the play the message to remain true to the constitutional foundation, seeking a balance between freedom and security. *The Crucible's* John Proctor represents the struggle of an individual against a system; he exercises his last opportunity for personal freedom and independent thought, when he chooses to hang rather than submit to the loss of identity, honor and personal integrity through a forced, false confession. Proctor's guarding of that freedom serves as our reminder to defend freedom for all our citizens, especially in the midst of terror.

*The Crucible* remains relevant as evidenced by the presence of September 11, 2001 media headlines touting the use of witch hunts, false accusations, and organized campaigns on the part of U.S. leaders to quash dissent. In the revival of *The Crucible*, Liam Neeson took the challenging part of John Proctor, the play's protagonist. In a review of the revival, "Neeson compares the danger of the fundamentalist fervor in the play to the sentiments that led to the September 11 attacks. 'The horror of Sept. 11 awaked people to the real world of people with incredible anger and hatred in the hearts'" (Blaney 2). In addition, "Miller's ability to capture this struggle so dramatically may provide healing through this timely production. Neeson said: 'Maybe within this play is the answer to what we're all going through today'" (Blaney 2). Neeson's belief in the power of theatre to heal reinforces the importance of the play's ongoing availability to the American public. The power to make people think, the depth to help people heal, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* maintains its relevancy beyond the McCarthy era. Its message loses none of its strength with the passage of time.

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## ComedySportz: A History of a Competitive Improvisational Company

KEVIN BRADSHAW

### Introduction

The nature of improvisation as an entertainment venue has grown in the past twenty to thirty years, spawning new forms of improvisation and comedy troupes throughout the United States and the world. A look at improvisational theatre groups on the Internet lists over one hundred individual improvisation companies, not counting Theatresportz which can be found all over the world, and ComedySportz which can be found in eighteen cities across the United States.

The current status of improvisation in the United States owes much of its influence to two people, Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone. Viola Spolin began her work in the 1920's when she began to develop a new approach to the teaching of acting. Her theories towards acting were based on the idea that children would enjoy learning through a series of games and exercises that encouraged improvisation and a sense of play. Those theories and techniques are found in her landmark book, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, first published in 1963.

Spolin's son, Paul Sills, further developed his mother's theories and techniques and was one of the driving forces behind improvisational theatre in the mid-1950's. With the help of people like Del Close, David Shepard, Severn Darden, Elaine May and Mike Nichols, Sills created an ensemble of actors and, in 1955, founded The Compass near the University of Chicago. Their efforts led to the development of the popular improvisation company, the Second City. The Second City has developed such talents as Alan Alda, Robert Klein, Gilda Radner, Joan Rivers and Alan Arkin.

Another key influence in the development of improvisation in the United States and Canada is Keith Johnstone, author of *Impro*, 1977, and *Don't Be Prepared*, 1994. Johnstone began his career working for the Royal

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Court Theatre in London, England and was a founding member of the improvisational touring company, the Theatre Machine. Johnstone later brought his theories and ideas to the University of Calgary where he teaches theatre and improvisation.

Johnstone is also the founder and originator of Theatresportz and The Loose Moose theatre company. Theatresportz is a cross between theatre and sports, where teams compete for points awarded by judges trained in improvisation. Theatresportz is found in Canada, the United States, and in various countries around the world. His company has had a direct influence on ComedySportz.

ComedySportz was founded in 1984 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as a Theatresportz club by Dick Chudnow, and became ComedySportz in 1987. ComedySportz is currently located in eighteen cities in the continental United States. This study focuses on ComedySportz, its history, current business model and its training methods.

ComedySportz is a competitive performance improvisation company that functions as an entertainment venue as well as educational outlet through the development of specialized workshop classes that cater to a variety of students and individual needs. ComedySportz offers beginner, intermediate and advanced workshops that are taught by instructors who come from their player rosters and by team owners.

### Terms and Definitions

ComedySportz is run by its parent company, the World Comedy League, Inc. (formerly known as the Comedy League of America), which acts as the governing body or league commission that oversees the national operations. The WCL is governed by its national team managers and owners. The term "improvisation" indicates the creation of a story through unscripted performance (Wirth 208).

Performance improvisation is sometimes dependent upon audience suggestion and input in order to inspire the performer in developing their scenes and games. In a performance improvisation situation, scenes may rely upon a written scenario or text, and can involve pre-rehearsed material inspired in rehearsal using improvisation techniques. Performance improvisation is also sometimes dependent upon a knowledge of structured scene games and exercises that are incorporated in the performance situation. Examples of this type of improvisation show are found in Dudley Riggs' Brave New Workshop and in Chicago's Second City troupe.

ComedySportz bases its approach to performance improvisation entirely on audience suggestions layered on top of standardized or ComedySportz-created improvisation games and the show format of a sporting event. Like Theatresportz, ComedySportz' venue is further de-



defined as being competitive performance improvisation, combining performance based improvisation, audience suggestion, and a sporting venue.

The ComedySportz aceteletes (actor-athletes) are trained in improvisational skill games and techniques; are trained in the structure of the ComedySportz "competition" format; are instilled with the philosophies and teachings of Chudnow; are dependent on audience participation and suggestions; rely on the use of minimal costumes and props as well as a designated playing field marked with foul lines, and an apology box laid out on astro-turf where aceteletes apologize for uttering a pun or line that causes the audience to groan; usually incorporating music and taped or live sound effects from an additional "player" who is in charge of sound effects and music.

Furthermore, ComedySportz aceteletes wear blue or red uniforms, and compete in numbers of three to five players per team. The show is guided by a referee who wears a black and white striped referee's shirt; carries a whistle to start and stop play; uses a stop-watch to keep track of time, and carries a penalty flag with which to signal infractions or penalties. There are three penalties that the referee can call. They are: the Delay of Game foul, called when action on the field becomes dull or boring; the Brown Bag foul, called when an acetelete or audience member says something rude, crude, disgusting or out of context with the scene; and, the Groaner foul, called when an acetelete utters a line or pun which causes the audience to groan. The referee also seeks out suggestions from the audience and guides the format of the show based on those suggestions.

It is no accident that the sports aspect of the ComedySportz performance is well received and assists in the popularity of ComedySportz in the cities in which it is performed. Games and play have always captured the imagination of actor and audience alike. From the dramatic competitions and festivals of the ancient Greeks, to the exploits and dazzling feats of athletes like Michael Jordan and Deon Sanders who excel in their respective sports, the relationship between sport and theatre has been an intimate affair. Eugene Ionesco states that "a sporting match gives us the most exact idea of what the theatre is in its purest state: live antagonism, dynamic conflict, the motiveless clash of opposing wills (232). Kevin Kerrane, in his essay "Plays about Play," points out the abstract similarity between sport and drama as two forms of play. He says sport and theatre have in common:

1. Live physical action,
2. A special ordering of space and time,
3. Pageantry and spectacle,
4. A context of rules, rituals and performance conventions,
5. Suspense and irony generated by conflict, crisis and reversal, and
6. Arrive at a clear outcome. (13)

The ComedySportz match incorporates the six elements described by Kerrane and adds the additional dynamic of audience and athlete to achieve its goals. ComedySportz audiences come to the show expecting a fast paced, highly physical, comedic event using actors who perform in a mock sporting event. ComedySportz matches are formatted for fun and audience enjoyment, involving specific rules as described by the referee and the ritual of singing the National Anthem prior to every match. ComedySportz' sense of fun and game playing goes to one of the basic principles of theatre being a game. John Lahr states, "the fact of theatre being a game is often forgotten in the attempt to make a serious statement. Yet the process of "gaming" can have a more profound effect on an audience than a narrative plot" (35).

In addition to the performance aspect of the World Comedy League, most ComedySportz teams, or clubs as they are sometimes referred to, incorporate workshop programs that train individuals in improvisational skills and the ComedySportz show format. ComedySportz' mission statement provides an insight, albeit humorous, into the workings of the company:

The Comedy League of America is dedicated to enriching lives and transcending all boundaries by celebrating the creative imagination of the human spirit . . . in four minutes or less (*ComedySportz Handbook*).

### History of ComedySportz

Dick Chudnow attended school in the semi-affluent neighborhood of Shorewood, a suburb just north of downtown Milwaukee. He attended Atwater grade school, Shorewood High, the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, graduating in 1967 with a BA in Communications.

Chudnow's first employment after college in 1967 was as a teacher of speech and drama in Racine, Wisconsin, at J.I. Case High School. Chudnow was, at the time, an intern in the teaching program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He recounts a humorous story when he was going to be evaluated by his advisor. Apparently, the advisor would warn Chudnow ahead of time of her impending arrival. Chudnow would tell his class "whenever I ask a question, everyone raise their hand. If you know the answer, raise your right hand, if you don't know it, raise your left. So, when she came, everyone shot their hands in the air enthusiastically and someone always knew the answer." The advisor was so impressed that Chudnow received high marks from the head of the speech and communications department, who made a special trip to Racine to witness his "amazing teaching abilities" (Chudnow, 16 Jan. 1997).

Chudnow moved to California in 1968 and taught for two years in West Covina. In an interview written by Lois Blinkhorn for the Milwaukee Journal Magazine, Chudnow explains, "I fell back. My father wanted me

to have a teaching certificate so I would have something to fall back on - so I fell back" ("Funny Business" 10).

While in Los Angeles, Chudnow took improv classes from Sid Grossfeld and, according to Chudnow, this experience served as the foundation of his love and understanding of the craft. Chudnow explains:

I fell in love with improv. The concept was a revelation. I was into *shück*. I was a pain in the *shück*. Our instructor, Sid Grossfeld, wouldn't let me get away with it. I would be up there making everyone laugh with *shück*, and he would yell, "shück!" I'd do some more and he'd yell, "shück!" I wouldn't know what he was talking about. After all, I was making the rest of the class laugh. I finally got "it," and the rest of my life was clear. I wanted to do this for the rest of my life.

Chudnow continues,

There is "the" moment when you first "do" improv. You completely relax, the scene unfolds in front of you. It's effortless. It's coming from somewhere else than your brain. As Paul Sills says: "your brain can't work that fast." You can't write while you're doing improv. Everything is in front of you. You are watching. It's very enjoyable. It's meditation. Once you do it, and get hooked, it's an addiction. It makes you write in simple sentences. (18 April 1996)

In 1970, Chudnow was hired by the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as a teacher's assistant in the television/communications department and briefly taught television courses. During his time in Madison, Chudnow also taught improvisation workshops. He teamed up with one of his high school friends, Jim Abrahams, and began to assemble what was to become the core membership of the comedy troupe Kentucky Fried Theatre.

### Kentucky Fried Theatre

Abrahams had seen Chudnow in Milwaukee doing some improvisation and comedy routines and wanted him to join forces with the Zucker brothers, Dave and Jerry (also founding members of Kentucky Fried Theatre). The original purpose for getting together was to form a group that would do a "video comedy show on the order of Ken Shapiro's "Groove Tube" (Chudnow, 21 Jan. 1997). Chudnow fondly, and with tongue in cheek, recalls the first time he met Jerry Zucker:

I hit it off with Dave right away, he's very funny. We laughed and had great time. He brought me home to visit to see Jerry. Jerry came into the kitchen in a robe, reeking of Vick's Vapo-Rub, sicker than a dog. He looked terrible. I got a weird vibe from him. As much as I liked David, I disliked Jerry. I wondered how I could feel so differently about two people with almost the same genes. Of course, later on, when I got to know Jerry, I found my initial feelings to be right on the button. Jerry and I argued about a lot of things. Dave and I would just write and laugh. Jim had to arbitrate between Jerry and I. Jerry is a super guy, it was just a chemical thing. I'm sure, if he is honest about it, he would say the same of me. (21 Jan. 1997)

The origin for the name Kentucky Fried Theatre parodies the international food chain by the same name. Originally, the group wanted to call it Colonel Sanders Kentucky Fried Theatre, but opted to drop the "Colonel Sanders." Chudnow explains how he contributed to the naming of the group:

At the Big Boy, we were sitting at the counter trying to come up with a name for this thing we were going to do. I saw the Kentucky Fried Chicken sign (at the time Kentucky Fried Chicken was only available at Big Boys), and blurted out: "Colonel Sander's Kentucky Fried Theater." That night, we painted it all over Madison. The construction sign on State street (they were building the communication center at the time) stayed there the entire time of construction. Why didn't anyone poster over our one-half block long sign? God. (21 Jan. 1997).

At first, the group was unsure of the direction the company and style of comedy was going to take. The Zucker brothers wanted to use video, but since Chudnow had a background in improvisation, they decided to combine the live improvisation with video and film added to the equation. The group combined the three: film, video and live action, with the help of another member of the company, Chris Keene, who was "a genius in writing live stuff" (Chudnow, 18 April 1996). Chris Keene was to later prove important to Chudnow as the individual who introduced him to Theatresportz in 1984.

One of the first permanent locations for Kentucky Fried Theatre was a warehouse in the back of a bookstore called Shakespeare and Company. A small room used for storing books and equipment was converted into a small theatre space for the new company. The original investment for the company consisted of contributions from each of the members in the amount of four hundred dollars (\$400). The first sets that were used were made from cardboard (18 April 1996).

An indication of the comedic nature of the show comes from a story Chudnow recounts concerning the hundredth performance of a Kentucky Fried Theatre show. Since the bookstore and theatre was located near a donut factory, the members of the company bought donuts for the audience to enjoy during their anniversary celebration. After the show, the actors brought the donuts onstage and started tossing them out to the audience. Apparently, one of the audience members tossed a donut back up at the actors. Chudnow adds, "we tossed one back at this guy and he threw one back at us, and we threw one back at him, and it was this huge donut fight between the audience and us. It was amazing. The next day there were donuts in every crack and crevice, everywhere" (18 April 1996).

Chudnow's experience in improvisation was key to the success of the company. The following anecdote speaks to the respect Chudnow garners from one of his ex-partners with Kentucky Fried Theatre and also speaks to his skill as an improviser. During one particular performance,

the Kentucky Fried Theatre had developed a show that they had never timed out. The show was billed as an hour and a half show and the company ran out of material in thirty minutes. David Zucker, as quoted in Milwaukee Journal Magazine, says of this incident, "Jerry and Jim and I were so dejected about the whole thing we went off and had coffee. Dick went back on stage by himself and improvised for another thirty minutes. And it worked." Zucker also recalls, "Dick on stage was like no one else. He's the best person at improvisation I've ever seen - and this goes for people I know out here and in New York - anywhere. He's an all-star. I've always had a respect for his talent" (Blinkhorn, "Funny Business" 11).

### Kentucky Fried Theatre Moves to Los Angeles

In 1972 the group played at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and found additional success touring from their home-base in Madison. Because of the success that the group was experiencing at home and while on tour, Chudnow wanted to make a move to Los Angeles, since he had lived there two years previously. At first, the reaction of the group was against the idea of moving to Los Angeles, but Chudnow insisted. He and David Zucker went to Los Angeles on a scouting expedition and the two of them spoke to Zucker's uncle who was the chairman of the board of a local hospital.

The hospital owned several properties. One of those properties was a condemned, run-down building that had served as a drug rehabilitation center. This building was also located next to Twentieth Century Fox studios on Pico boulevard. According to Chudnow, the space was at least ten thousand square feet in size, was two stories, and there was plenty of room to build a theatre and living space for the group. The Zucker's uncle let the group have the space for six hundred dollars a month.

When Zucker and Chudnow returned to Milwaukee, they convinced the other three members of Kentucky Fried Theatre; Abrahams, Lisa Davis, and Jerry Zucker, that the move to Los Angeles should be made. The group rented a U-Haul, packed up their equipment and drove out to California to begin their theatre venture in Los Angeles.

The group renovated the space and outfitted a place upstairs in the same building for the five of them to live. Since the Zuckers' uncle was a leader in the local community, Kentucky Fried Theatre was able to do the renovations without permits and save quite a bit of money on the remodel. Once they were settled in, Kentucky Fried Theatre was able to open its doors to the public.

### Chudnow's Split from Kentucky Fried Theatre

One of the turning points in the group's history was Chudnow's marriage, in 1974, to Bobbie Barera, a woman he refers to as the "Yoko Ono"

of the group. His marriage was, in his opinion, the beginning of the end of his relationship with Kentucky Fried Theatre and his friends from Milwaukee. The marriage was a rocky one for him and created a rift in the company. Chudnow's wife was not well received by the other members of the group, who would keep her from coming back stage and did not welcome her. Out of frustration, she gave Chudnow an ultimatum that it was either her or the group.

Another reason for Chudnow's split from the group in 1974, the same year as his marriage to Barera, was that Kentucky Fried Theatre and Chudnow had differing professional goals. Chudnow's forte was in performing, and especially improvisation. The other members of Kentucky Fried Theatre wanted to agree that no one would perform live when and if they did movies. To try and solve problems the group would settle issues on the toss of a basketball, but by this time, the divisions were too wide and Chudnow decided to sell the rights to his material and leave the group.

At the time of the split, the group had been working on the material for *Airplane!*, the successful movie spoof co-starring Leslie Nelson. When he left the group, Chudnow sold his portion of the rights to all of his material, including the ideas for *Airplane!*, for two thousand dollars. Also at the same time, the group was developing the material for their first movie, *Kentucky Fried Movie*, which had originally been a part of their live show.

Chudnow's initial reaction to the success of his former friends and the breakup of their partnership as well as his failing marriage was depression and drugs. He says, "I was devastated, I was absolutely devastated. My marriage was failing because of my addiction problems, and we were on the track of self-destruction. I think both of us would be dead by now if we hadn't divorced" (18 April 1996).

After his break from Kentucky Fried Theatre, Chudnow stayed in Los Angeles working various odd-jobs; doing some television and commercial work, and driving an ice-cream truck. In 1982, after eight rough years, his marriage to Barera ended in divorce. In 1983, Chudnow contracted Chron's disease, an intestinal disorder, which caused him to lose large quantities of blood and made him anemic. He also decided it would be a good idea to see a psychiatrist to help him with his personal troubles. It was through these sessions with his psychiatrist, and some deep soul-searching, that Chudnow decided to move back to Milwaukee.

### Chudnow Returns to Milwaukee

In 1984, Chudnow returned to Milwaukee, and went to work in his father's scrap-iron business. Chudnow had difficulty with this type of hard, physical work because he was too weak and unable to stay awake for long

periods of time. Chudnow spent some time in the hospital fighting his disease and finally recovered his physical and mental health through therapy.

Chudnow's break with Kentucky Fried Theatre was, at the time, personally troubling and it took several years of therapy to pull him out of his depression. During his rehabilitation, his uncle Irv Chudnow, who was an actor in his own right, convinced him to audition for a play that was being done at the local Jewish community center. The play was *Scapino* and this experience convinced him that doing live theatre was not the career path for him. The greatest difficulty, for Chudnow, was "remembering the lines." He adds, "I couldn't memorize anything, that's why improv was always great" (18 April 1996).

During the same period he played the lead in *Scapino*, Chudnow began to teach improv workshops at the community center. It was also during this time that he re-kindled his friendship with Chris Keene; who had been one of the original members of Kentucky Fried Theatre when the group was in Madison and Milwaukee. Keene did not go with the group when they made the original move to Los Angeles.

#### Theatresportz<sup>1</sup>

Keene, who is now living in Los Angeles, teaching part time at a local community college and pursuing a career in acting, recalls that he visited Milwaukee in April, 1984. During his brief visit, Keene taught an improv class for Chudnow and introduced the group to some Theatresportz games and techniques. At the time, Keene was living in Seattle and was a member of their Theatresportz team (Keene, 15 Jan. 1997).

During the summer of 1984, Chudnow repaid Keene's visit to Milwaukee with a trip of his own to Seattle. While there, Chudnow observed a few Theatresportz matches and also traveled to Vancouver to observe a Theatresportz tournament. It was at these first contacts with Theatresportz that Chudnow got the idea for his own Theatresportz club in Milwaukee.

At first, Chudnow wasn't very impressed with the show aspect of Theatresportz. He adds:

I was impressed with the actors, but not the structure of the show. It didn't have a cohesive theme. It was supposed to be theater and sports but it was neither. It was like watching a workshop. They were very talented, but it was too loosely structured to be a "show." Something was missing. (21 Jan. 1997)

One of the events that apparently did change his mind about Theatresportz, was the Vancouver trip to observe the Theatresportz tour-

<sup>1</sup> Note: When Chudnow brought the concept back to Milwaukee, he altered the original "Theatresportz" name by dropping the final "s" and adding a "z." References to the Milwaukee version will reflect that change.

naments. Chudnow describes this event as the place he had his "epiphany" that would change his mind:

I was much more impressed with their talent. But it also struck me that 'boy' this show isn't worth watching. I wouldn't go back to it, but if it's a sport, truly a sport, and had a referee and had astro-turf and every sport thing that you could think of, it would be much more fun watching the show. (20 April 1996)

Another key ingredient to the changes that Chudnow wished to make with the Theatresportz format was the length of the scenes and the games. One of the important changes to be made was that the scenes couldn't go over three minutes, compared with the ten to twenty minute long form of the Johnstone format.

Chudnow, upon his return from Seattle and Vancouver, decided to implement some of the games from Viola Spolin's book, *Improvisation for the Theater*, and games developed in former workshops, some Theatresportz games, and add elements from various sports events to conduct his workshops. It was also during the period he played Scapino and was conducting workshops at the Jewish Community Center, that Chudnow combined his efforts with Karen Kolberg, former associate director of Friends Mime Theater in Milwaukee, and John Banck, who had been performing locally doing improv groups, and had done some local theatre as an actor. Chudnow, Kolberg and Banck comprised the first group of workshop instructors and company members of what was originally known as Theatresportz-Milwaukee.

The workshops continued to be conducted at the Jewish community center. Chudnow had advertised in the local community newsletter, the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, and announced that if anyone was interested, they could show up for classes in improvisation. The group first met in May of 1984 (Cohen, "Create Comedy" 1).

According to Rosie Frydman, one of the original company members who was in the first workshop group, there was a core group of ten to twelve people that became Theatresportz actors. Concerning those first workshops, Frydman states:

We just started showing up and we were meeting twice a week for a couple of months. And again, just the camaraderie within that group of ten people, and the talent, and the growing. Realizing that we were gonna try something, something that Milwaukee had never had. It was either we needed a comedy club, an improvisational group or a group similar to Second City. . . it was really exciting for me. (17 April 1996)

Dr. Marvin Berkowitz, a professor of psychology at Marquette University specializing in moral development, was also one of the original company members of Theatresportz-Milwaukee. Many of the initial workshop attendees were working professionals, like Berkowitz, who were taking

the workshops offered at the Jewish community center. Several of those interviewed offered their own personal reasons as to why they initially attended these sessions with Chudnow, Banck and Kolberg.

Berkowitz, for example, states that he hadn't planned on doing any shows. For him it was "simply a way to help expand my own resources. Spontaneously teaching, using characters and making up vignettes (to help) bring up examples while I was teaching" (20 April 1996). Another original player, Bob Orvis, had a writing background and wanted to improve his writing skills by taking the improv workshops at the community center. Orvis recalls being at a workshop when John Banck sneaked up from behind and threw him up on the stage. After that experience, Orvis says "it was fun and easy, that's when I started" (19 April 1996).

Another effect that taking the workshops had on Orvis was that he discovered a love for improv that made him aware that writing was, in fact, more difficult. Orvis recalls:

I was a commercial writer and I had started to write some plays. I believed in the writer doing the writing and the actors doing the acting. Once I learned what improv was, it was hard to write. Writing's hard, improv is easy. (19 April 1996)

John Banck, one of the founding members and original workshop instructors, was one of the few individuals who had any prior theatre training or experience with improvisation. For several years, Banck had taken workshops in Chicago at the Second City, and he also took workshops with Paul Sills in Milwaukee. Banck had also been doing some improv shows in the local Milwaukee area when he first met Chudnow and attended the first workshops.

Because of his prior experience in theatre and improvisation, Banck was a natural choice to be one of the leaders of the group. Banck feels that the people who took the initial workshops were very lucky to have the combined talents of Chudnow, Kolberg and himself. Banck states:

Those people were very lucky in the initial workshops to have all three of us, to draw upon all three of us. We were all skilled in various aspects of what we could provide. We ended up with a unique group of players the first group of Theatresportz, a very unique group of players. (19 April 1996)

### The First Theatresportz Shows: Milwaukee

The first performance for Theatresportz in Milwaukee was on October 17, 1984, at the Eighth Note Cafe, located on the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee campus. Chudnow had received a contract to do three shows at the cafe and agreed to put together his core group of players for this first show. Berkowitz recalls that the group had been doing workshops for several months in the summer of 1984, and that several students had come and gone. By the time they got their first contract to

perform, there was a core group of about ten core players (20 April 1996). The first members of Theatresportz-Milwaukee were: Dick Chudnow, Karen Kolberg, John Banck, Rosie Frydman, Brian Green, Marvin Berkowitz, Jan Eder, Judy Berkowitz, John Leicht, Nancy Meyer.

One of the first interviews related to the Theatresportz venture was given by Chudnow to Jeff Bentoff, a reporter for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, on October 12, 1984. In this article, Chudnow explains his initial hesitation to combine theater and real competition. While there is a certain level of competition in the audition and casting process, the idea of a real competition for points and audience approval was a radical idea at the time, even though he used teams and team competition in his earlier workshops. He states, "When I first heard the idea, I thought, it's impossible, it's contrary to every maxim of performance. There shouldn't be competition on the stage" ("Theatresportz Scores...", 4). His love for sports and the idea of combining the two, improvisation and sports, into a fun, challenging event, changed his mind about competing on stage.

By making the Milwaukee Theatresportz a true sport event, Theatresportz would be able to draw a "diversified audience" and bring in an audience that wouldn't normally go out to experience a theatrical event. Chudnow adds:

While your average tavern-loving baseball fan would be unlikely to go to a play at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, he said, this is the kind of thing where they feel like a fan, where they can act like a fan. This seems to be ready-made for a town like Milwaukee, that's so sports conscious. ("Theatresportz Scores...", 4)

### Milwaukee-Theatresportz' First Permanent Location

The contract for the first shows was for only three weeks at the Eighth Note Cafe, and Chudnow knew that his group would need a more permanent location for Theatresportz. While at the Eighth Note, Chudnow was already in negotiations with Henry Kalt, the owner of Kalt's, a local bar and restaurant that had an empty space known as their "green room." Chudnow recalls finding the space during a visit Keene made to Milwaukee in April of 1984. He and Keene had met for drinks at Kalt's and discovered that the "green room" would be an ideal space for Theatresportz (21 Jan. 1997).

The green room had been used for parties but had remained vacant for quite a long time. After the group decided that the show would be successful on the East Side of Milwaukee, Chudnow remembered the green room at Kalt's. He returned to Kalt's and asked the owner, Henry Kalt, if he would be interested in having entertainment in that room on a steady basis. Chudnow recalls that Kalt said "yes" to everything without any hesitation (21 Jan. 1997).

Chudnow drew up a contract with the help of his cousin, Dan Chudnow, who is a lawyer, paid for the cabaret license, and built their first playing field with the help of Bob Orvis, Marvin Berkowitz and others in the group. After installing "cheap" lighting, they opened at Kalt's in November of 1984 (21 Jan. 1997).

The first show at Kalt's premiered on Friday, November 9, 1984. The initial format was very similar to that of the Canadian model, with some creative and performative changes made by Chudnow to make it more "sports oriented." Chudnow added such sports motifs as "Astro-Turf," field markers, a scoreboard, vending, a referee wearing stripes, some fouls and a lot more audience participation (21 Jan. 1997). In Canada, he recalls, "they didn't wear uniforms there, didn't have a referee. It was all very casual" (Varick, "Theatresportz is Laughter...", 1).

Another key difference, Frydman adds in an article for the *Jewish Chronicle* by Leon Cohen, is that "the Canadian version is not as structured. They have no time limitations, as we do, and they don't have some of the penalties" ("Create Comedy...", 1). ComedySportz is a fast-paced event, where quickly timed games lasting no longer than three to four minutes are played out before the audience. By contrast, Theatresportz play is lengthened and games or exercises can last from ten to twenty minutes, sometimes longer.

Chudnow attributes some of the initial success of the company to luck. In the beginning, the company did not spend money on advertising. Instead, word of mouth, friends and family were counted on to bring in the audience. Events seemed to take on a life of their own. Chudnow recalls, "The second day we were at Kalt's, the local NBC station, Channel Four showed up. We never asked them to, never called them, or anything. They just showed up" (19 April 1996).

He adds that there was:

... a lot of luck and serendipity happening to make all of this happen. Finding all the right things and people was just strokes of luck. Everybody and everything just seemed to come along at the right time. (21 Jan. 1997)

Kalt's was once used as a vaudeville and melodrama theatre in the early 1900's. The space could comfortably fit about eighty audience members but somehow they were able to fit in about one hundred. The group ended up making their own tables and arranging the performance space to fit their needs (Chudnow, 19 April 1996).

The original design of the acting space consisted of a raised platform, eight feet deep by twelve feet wide. The surface was covered in green astro-turf and had white lines taped out to designate the off-sides of the field, and a rectangular box lined out at the down-stage center area to designate both the referee's location and the apology area where actelees apologize to the audience if they utter a pun and are penalized for the "groaner foul."

### Milwaukee-Theatresportz Expands Operations

The growth of the company took a major turn in the Spring of 1985. A man by the name of Key Howard contacted Chudnow. Howard was a local promoter who had connections with Harold Surp, the owner of the Midway Motor Lodge in Madison. Howard had seen a Theatresportz show in Milwaukee and arranged a meeting between Surp and Chudnow to bring Theatresportz to Madison.

Chudnow had attended the University of Wisconsin, Madison and was familiar with some of the members of the faculty in the theatre department. When it came time to put together a troupe, Chudnow posted notices on the green-room bulletin board of the theatre department and advertised his workshop.

During that summer, Chudnow and Kolberg traveled to Madison and conducted a six-hour workshop, once a week. The initial Madison workshop students were primarily from the theatre department and all had previous acting or performance experience, unlike the original Milwaukee group. Chudnow considers the inclusion of actors and individuals with performance experience a major change from the Milwaukee team in that, "it was astounding, these people could do all the exercises and the games better than we could do them. In the beginning, they were actors, they were in theatre and they picked up (on the games) immediately" (Rath, "Theatresportz: Zany...", 15).

The original Madison workshop students were Mike Rock, Pat Walsh, Jeff Kramer, David Miller and Teresa Lyons. By the time they had premiered at the Midway on September 6, 1985, the team had added Jennifer Rupp Abitz, Lorraine Bahr, Ellen Hastings, Seth Hoff, Leslie Hollander, Jay Indik, Brian Kapell, and Richard Willgrubs ("Theatresportz: Zany...", 15).

The show in Madison originally intended to revolve around a dinner venue that included one set price, \$11.95, for the dinner and show package. This particular venture failed, according to Chudnow, because "the food wasn't very good, I'm sure it's better now, so they didn't get many people for the dinner show." However, this did not mean total failure for the newly expanding company. He adds, "by the second week they were sold out for the late show" (20 April 1996).

Theatresportz continued to run for another eight weeks at the Midway but since the restaurant hadn't been making any money on the dinner shows, the ownership of the Midway canceled the group's contract. The Madison group moved to a restaurant called "Zingers," which went out of business a year later (20 April 1996).

In February of 1986, the group moved to a Pizza Hut restaurant located near the Madison campus. Theatresportz Madison ran for two years at the Pizza Hut location before the Pizza Hut management decided

they wanted a bigger take from the house which prompted Chudnow to move the team to Wendy's hamburger restaurant, located across the street from Pizza Hut. In September of 1995 the team moved to Rocky Ricoco's, another pizza parlor. ComedySportz- Madison recently purchased their own space, located in downtown Madison at 446 State Street, and opened in February 1997. The growth of the Madison club marked the first expansion team for Chudnow's enterprise. Equally important, founding members Pat Walsh, Jeff Kramer, J. Patrick and Mike Rock each went on to start their own teams in other cities in the United States.

Also in 1986, Chudnow began a venture for ComedySportz which would take ComedySportz into the high schools and develop a high school league. The high school league allows young people to get involved in ComedySportz, to have fun and encourage teamwork. The high-school league also gives students the opportunity to participate in friendly competition between "rival" schools and to feel a part of something special.

One of the most successful high-school leagues in the Comedy League of America is managed by James Bailey, artistic director, owner and producer of ComedySportz-Los Angeles. Bailey began his high-school league venture in 1989. Bailey has built a high-school league that is now found in over 40 high-schools in the Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties.

In a telephone conversation, Bailey states that the high-school league appeals on different levels to the students, teachers and parents. For the students, it is "fun, pure and simple." For the teachers, the "educators see it as a marvelous teaching tool. They observe theatre skills, public speaking, self-confidence, self-esteem and creativity." Bailey states that parents have told him, "You showed me a side of my kid that I never saw before" (23 Jan. 1997).

#### ComedySportz and The Comedy League of America

During this period of initial growth, Theatresportz in Milwaukee made a decision to expand their operations and franchise their version of the concept. In August of 1986, Chudnow was approached by a man named Pat Reardon, who owned a company called Summit Press Syndicate, which produced a news game show syndicated with various local radio stations. Reardon proposed the idea that Theatresportz could be expanded to other cities in the nation and that the Milwaukee club would serve as the home center for the expansion project.

In order to avoid any legal complications with Johnstone's Canadian based—Theatresportz, Chudnow and Reardon made the name switch to ComedySportz, which allowed them to move into other cities and set up new teams. Johnstone refused to be interviewed for this study; however, Chudnow explains that the relationship between Johnstone and ComedySportz is not strained, due in large part to the name change and

distinct deviations from the—Theatresportz format. In January of 1987, Chudnow incorporated under the name of Comprov, Inc., and the new business venture between Chudnow and Reardon was named the Comedy League of America.

During this expansion period, two of the key founding members of the original Milwaukee-Theatresportz team left the group. John Banck left the company to focus on his family and his job working nights at a local hospital. Kolberg also left the company due to business and personal reasons. At this point, Chudnow remained as the only original member of the Milwaukee-Theatresportz group which had begun two years prior.

The business partnership with the Reardons lasted until the fall of 1989, when Chudnow bought out their contract for around \$20,000. The major reason, according to Chudnow, was that the Reardons lost over \$40,000 on a ComedySportz video marketed for syndication. The Reardons began to try and recoup their money from the league and were anxious to sell. According to Chudnow, this business loss "took the wind out of their sails" (16 Jan 1997). Chudnow is still "grateful to the Reardons for their role in expanding ComedySportz" (21 Jan. 1997). ComedySportz, at its peak in the mid-nineties had expanded to twenty cities across the United States, the current number of cities stands at 18.

One of the initial problems with the business was the plan to pay their players and managers as salaried employees. When the Reardons were still involved in the partnership, the idea was to run the franchised teams as company stores. Attempting to control their employees from Milwaukee and keep track of records and receipts from the central location would prove to be problematic and create headaches for Chudnow. Chudnow states, "it was a mess. For one thing, who knew if they were sending all the money?" For him it became "too cumbersome" (19 April 1996). In an interview for the Milwaukee Sentinel, Chudnow states that the current arrangement involves each one owning a club "as their business and they pay us a royalty, just as you would pay a royalty if you performed *Arsenic and Old Lace* or whatever play you were doing" (Cole, "ComedySportz: has fun expanding," 4).

After two years of growth and development as a league, Chudnow decided to host a national tournament where teams from across the nation could participate on a national level. In 1988, ComedySportz-Milwaukee hosted the first-annual national tournament. This event has become one of the annual highlights of the ComedySportz season and is sponsored by the Comedy League of America. On an annual basis, teams from throughout the league gather to hold seminars, meetings and the national competition. The winner of the tournament receives a trophy called the "Meaningless Cup." The winner of the first "Meaningless Cup" was the Milwaukee team. The "Meaningless Cup" represents the ideal

that at ComedySportz, "we want to win, but we don't care if we lose" (Comedy League of America, *Manager's Manual*, 11).

Milwaukee has served as host to the Comedy League of America eight times: 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1998. In 1989, a west-coast tournament was held in Los Angeles and in 1991 Kansas City hosted an invitational tournament where only a portion of the league participated. In 1996, Kansas City hosted the first national tournament to be held outside of Milwaukee (Short, e-mail 20 Jan. 1997).

Having a national tournament where teams from throughout the league gather to compete and share ideas is the fulfillment of a dream for Chudnow who someday envisions the joining of Theatresportz and ComedySportz into one league; much like the American Football Conference (AFC) and the National Football Conference (NFC) did in the sixties. Chudnow would like to see Theatresportz and ComedySportz "competing against one another and having a Super Bowl of comedy" (19 April 1996).

By 1990, Chudnow owned the Milwaukee, Madison and Racine franchises. He still owns the Milwaukee and Madison clubs, having closed the Racine franchise in 1994, because it was not economically feasible to keep it open. Although the national growth of the company has been quite successful and divergent, Chudnow states that, "All of the expansion has come from people who saw a show and decided that they, too, wanted to become acteleets, or owners" ("ComedySportz: has fun...", 4).

Chudnow spends a great deal of time and energy in assuring that each of the franchised clubs adhere to the spirit of the ComedySportz show. He periodically visits teams across the league and offers his support, advice and experience to managers and players throughout the league. Most of his time, however, is spent managing the day-to-day operations at the company headquarters in Milwaukee, detailed below.

The current location of ComedySportz-Milwaukee is 126 North Jefferson Street in Milwaukee. This space doubles as the company offices, restaurant, bar and playing arena. In 1997, Chudnow and his wife, Jennifer, were heads of Comprov, Inc., a closely held corporation. Chudnow was president of the board and secretary, and Jennifer vice-president and treasurer. Chudnow was the sole share holder and supervised an advisory board that was made up of thirteen members, in addition to Dick and Jennifer: Joe Cortese, Bob Orvis, Angelo Farina, John Podlesnik, Carol Baumann-Hirschey, Gino Salamone (local radio producer), Judge Charles Hudson, Ralph Chicorel (local businessman), Dave Schmid (company accountant), Steve Sazama (restaurateur and bar owner), Dan Chudnow (company attorney), Kurt Scholler, and Marvin Berkowitz.

The office in Milwaukee is managed by Marie Mattia. Her duties and responsibilities include answering phones, taking reservations, commu-

nicating with the player personnel as well as general office and secretarial duties. General accounting and book work is handled by Jennifer Chudnow and corporate accounting and taxes are handled by Dave Schmid.

### Comedy League of America Philosophy

An important part of Chudnow's vision for the league and their mission is found in the *Player's Handbook* and explains the purpose and direction that Chudnow would like to see the league take. The league's mission statement reads:

Our Mission: Comedy League of America is a National Association of ComedySportz producers whose purpose is to support it's members by uniting, promoting, maintaining standards of quality and providing a forum for communication. (*Player's Handbook*, 7)

Rock, in his response to a written questionnaire about his own interpretation of what the league is, lists a series of reasons and functions for the Comedy League of America:

Comedy League of America's purpose is to bring together all these people running and or performing in ComedySportz groups all across the country. To unify, share ideas, create common cause, assist with one another's problems, share benefits and burdens, plan for the future. (To) learn from and teach one another, compare and contrast styles, glitches, solutions and generally have a sense of belonging to something where through our connectedness (sic), we contribute something more. (28 Oct. 1996)

In an open letter to the league, Rock calls it a "sacred mission to work together to realize excellence." His letter gives an insight as to the positive nature of the company and its strong work ethic, values and beliefs. One of the important aspects of the performance aspect of improvisation is honesty and trust. Rock writes:

Honesty is a very important quality to remember. It applies to everything. Each one of us needs to remember it with regard to our contributions to the group, the show, the rest of the players, and the audience. Ask yourself if you are being fair and honest in every aspect of the show. (Rock, "Letter...", Oct. 1992)

### Business Arrangement with League Teams

Originally, the franchisees paid the league a \$35 fee for each show performed. In return, Chudnow provided them with a ComedySportz manual that explained his philosophy and thoughts about ComedySportz, the available games to play, and how to play them. The manual also explained the structure of the show, the referee spiel, contracts and sound and technical details necessary to put on a ComedySportz show. Chudnow also put out a newsletter for the league which kept the teams updated with any changes in the show format and current events as well as provided a toll-free number so that the various franchisees could contact the main office in Milwaukee.



The current business model has changed dramatically since the mid-90's when Chudnow was head of Comprov. Due to major shifts in the comedy improvisation market, business decisions and changes in team ownerships, the World Comedy League, Inc. (WCL) was established in 2002. The WCL is a national corporation owned by eighteen shareholders. The shareholders are individual owners of the eighteen regional clubs in the United States. They are: Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Eugene, OR; Dallas, TX; Houston, TX; San Jose, CA; Portland, OR; Indianapolis, IN; Madison, WI; Milwaukee, WI; Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis, MN; Philadelphia, PA; Provo, UT; Quad Cities, IL and IA; Richmond, VA; Spokane, WA and Washington, DC.

The current board of directors at the WCL consists of Dick Chudnow as a member of the Executive Council; Jeff Kramer (San Jose), President; Dianah Dulaney (Houston), Vice President; Christine Walters (Richmond), Secretary; Mary Strutzel (Minneapolis), Treasurer and Pat Short (Portland), Executive Director of Operations.

The WCL has contracted with Chudnow through 2011 for rights to operate ComedySportz nationally and worldwide. The members of the WCL pay a fixed percentage of their royalties to Chudnow in exchange for the exclusive licensing of the ComedySportz product. This contract applies to existing and future ComedySportz clubs. The WCL is pursuing a growth plan that will enable them to gradually increase the numbers of clubs in the WCL. The plan is to add approximately seven clubs to the WCL in the next three years. The first new licensee to be added under the new WCL model is the New York City club.

Pat Short, Executive Director of the WCL, is quick to point out that the WCL is not a franchising operation and that the members of the WCL license the show just as if you were "licensing a play... it is not a franchise and there is a formal expansion process, with guidelines and a set of standards" that everyone must meet (Short, phone conversation 15 Sep 2003).

Another important deal that the WCL has been working with is an agreement with the Joey Edmonds Agency in Chicago, which represents the WCL as a booking agent to book shows on the college campus circuit. This arrangement has proved to be quite lucrative to many markets who would normally not have had access to an agent who can book shows with college student venues.

#### Remote Business Operations and Gilda's Club

Outside promotions, charities and business commonly termed "remotes" are an important part of the financial success of ComedySportz and the league. Each team in the league promotes their own corporate and private business to help supplement the income generated from the normal shows done in the evenings. Pat Short, general manager and owner of

ComedySportz-Portland, sees remotes as "two pieces of the puzzle." For Short, "...remotes are income. They carry very little incremental cost, depending on what acteleets are paid to do them." He adds, "in Portland, we only make money if we do remotes" (Short, e-mail 13 Jan. 1997).

Private parties can hire ComedySportz to come to their homes or buy out the house for their own special event. Corporations can hire ComedySportz to conduct leadership or team building seminars, incorporating ComedySportz inspired games or techniques. High School proms, office parties, and training seminars have hired ComedySportz for remote business.

ComedySportz Milwaukee has one of the most successful remote business operations in the league, generating over 50% of their business in this area. Bob Orvis, one of the original Theatresportz acteleets for Milwaukee, is in charge of remotes and outside business performed by ComedySportz-Milwaukee. The Milwaukee club produces over 300 remotes a year which is a full-time job for Orvis and many of the acteleets who depend on ComedySportz as their main source of income.

In addition to remotes, ComedySportz Milwaukee does at least one charity event a week, some held at the Milwaukee arena, and others at various locations throughout town. One of the most important charities that the Comedy League of America has designated as their "national charity" is Gilda's club, named in honor of Gilda Radner, former member of The Second City and star of film and television, who died of ovarian cancer on May 20, 1989. Gilda's Club is a foundation which calls for "participation, education, hope and friendship, to be made available to people with cancer and family members everywhere" (Bull, "Mission Statement"). Chudnow states that he began doing charitable events when he realized it was "our duty to do them" (Chudnow, e-mail 16 Jan. 1997).

#### Current Status of ComedySportz

There are currently eighteen members of the World Comedy League, Inc. in the United States. Each of the franchised teams has their own individual schedule of shows and marketing venues, all licensed under the banner name of ComedySportz and the World Comedy League.

The original player and owner's manual stipulated that the league wanted all the shows to be "uniform in format and structure." That did not mean that each city would not have "it's own personality and/or style." Furthermore, the rules allowed for individuality and differences. "We don't necessarily want clones of the Milwaukee matches, but we do want a uniformity from city to city. Within the format there is room for your style, and your individual creativity" (*Manager's Manual*, 172).

When the league first started, Chudnow exercised tighter control over the show's format and dictated exactly how he wanted things to operate in

order to maintain consistency throughout the league. The idea was to have a universal set of rules so that if an audience member from Milwaukee was visiting Los Angeles and wanted to see a show, that audience member would see the same product. This maxim holds true today. While each team may have taken on its own personality and style, the format of the show, the importance of the audience member, and the spirit of friendly, fun competition remains the same throughout the league after all of these many years.

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