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The art of producing: The life and work of Kermit Bloomgarden

Doherty, Lynn, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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THE ART OF PRODUCING:
THE LIFE AND WORK OF KERMIT BLOOMGARDEN

by

LYNN DOHERTY

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1989

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE ART OF PRODUCING:
THE LIFE AND WORK OF KERMIT BLOOMGARDEN

by

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Kermit Bloomgarden was probably the last of the great independent theatre producers in New York. Between 1940 and 1974 he produced forty plays, which won thirty Antoinette Perry Awards, eight New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, four Outer Circle Critics' Awards, and three Pulitzer Prizes. Among the plays he presented were Death of a Salesman, The Diary of Anne Frank, Equus, The Most Happy Fella, and The Music Man.

Bloomgarden brought to his work a keen business sense, impeccable taste and intelligence, and a passion for theatre that was reflected in both his choice of plays and the quality of the productions they received.

This study is a chronological survey in five chapters of Bloomgarden's career. The essential primary source is the collection of his business papers housed at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; interviews with several of his key employees and family members supplement information in that archive.

To my beautiful daughters
Kieran and Fiona

and to the memory of Adam
who told me I could when I knew that I couldn't.

PREFACE

Although the producer is usually an invisible presence to the public, his choices and decisions have enormous influence on the potential success of the show. Kermit Bloomgarden is a particularly fine example because he was so often correct in his choices, and because his career crosses the divide between single and corporate producers.

Bloomgarden also provides a convenient focus because his business papers, which represent an excellent primary source, have been preserved by the University of Wisconsin, which extended an invitation to house them. They are presently available at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Context has been provided by the inclusion of newspaper articles, published memoirs and biographies, and interviews with Violet Fox, Bloomgarden's sister, John Bloomgarden, his son, Virginia Bloomgarden Chilewich, his former wife, now remarried, Max Allentuck, his general manager, and Don Doherty, who worked for Bloomgarden both as an actor and as a stage manager. It should be noted that my concern has been specifically with his career as a producer, and not his private life.

I have edited the interviews so kindly given by John Bloomgarden, Max Allentuck, Violet Fox, Don Doherty, and Virginia Chilewich, in order that they may be limited to

material pertinent to the subject of this dissertation. Other sources, such as newspaper and periodical interviews and reviews, have also been edited. In addition, I have occasionally included an anecdote pertinent to the play or event under discussion, in the hope that it will impart a bit of the "world unto itself" feeling of a life in the theatre.

During the years of Bloomgarden's career, there were more than fifteen newspapers published in New York, as well as numerous periodicals which reviewed plays. Though I have used several sources, I have relied principally on the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune, since their reviewers usually offered lucid and informative criticism.

There are certain areas of Bloomgarden's career in which the documentation remains spotty. For example, several people joined him as co-producers for various productions, and often they were investors or business men who had no other connection with the theatre, and were not well enough known to be included in biographical indexes. Also, references in Bloomgarden's papers to most of the hundreds of plays he held under option but chose not to produce, contain no information as to how long he held them. In addition, while some of the road companies are documented both financially and as to the duration of the tours, others have yielded no information at all. When such information is available, I have used it.

I wish to thank the members of my committee, Professors Judith Milhous, Walter Meserve and Stanley Kauffmann, for their continued interest and encouragement. I am particularly grateful for Professor Milhous' endless patience and a

generosity of spirit which has made this an exhilarating and rewarding experience.

John Bloomgarden has given me permission to use and quote from all materials in his father's archives.

I also want to thank Mr. Harold Miller, the Chief Archivist of the Wisconsin Historical Society, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. Mr. Miller and his staff have produced an inventory that is a model of its kind, and a joy for the researcher. In addition, the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York City, and the Theatre Collection of The Museum of the City of New York have given me invaluable help. Finally, a last and grateful thanks to Sid Kemp and Stephen Davison of the Computer Center at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, whose endless help and technical wizardry allowed me to write this work on a computer, so that starting as a novice, I emerged a certified hacker.

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INTRODUCTION

The profession of producer is a johnny-come-lately in American theatre, emerging little more than one hundred years ago in response to the growth of technology rather than the needs of art.

The Panic of 1873 left the nation financially unstable for several years and forced the closing of many theatres.¹ In addition, the outward expansion of urban centers caused other theatres to lose the local audiences which had been their main source of income, thus contributing further to the changing face of theatre across the country.² However, it was the enormous expansion of the railroads in the second half of the nineteenth century that changed the structure of American theatre forever. In 1850 there were only six thousand miles of track and they were diversified in a way that made it virtually impossible to travel from one city to another by a direct route.³ Theatrical touring was a tedious, uncomfortable business of constantly switching from a major line to a small one-car branch, a horse-drawn carriage or even a river boat. It was impossible to tour a whole company since only the large river boats could accomodate scenery, costumes, musical instruments and whatever else was particular to any given show, and even the boats were limited in their access to many locations, as well as being quite slow.

Instead, the thirty-five or so resident companies that existed in 1850 were occasionally visited by guest stars who either travelled alone or possibly with one or two other players. Edwin Booth, for example, performed in California with his father Junius Brutus Booth in 1852.⁴ Charlotte Crabtree who achieved great success as a child dancer in the mining camps of the West reversed that pattern: By the age of seventeen, she had toured cross-country all the way to the East Coast.⁵

A company with which such luminaries might appear would be under the aegis of a resident manager who wore many hats. He either owned or leased the theatre, hired the actors during a yearly trip to New York (and occasionally from among the itinerant troupes wandering across the country), determined the particular mix of old and new plays to be presented, and supervised the box office. He also directed rehearsals unless the visiting star chose to do so, and he supervised the ongoing touching up, painting, sewing and repairs of the company's stock of costumes and scenery, generally replacing them only when absolutely necessary. In smaller towns, the manager was usually a local businessman with slight, if any, artistic ambitions. In many larger cities, however, the managers were often people who came out of the theatre and were true professionals. Louisa Drew in Philadelphia, Laura Keane (from 1855 to 1863) and William Burton in New York, and William Warren, Jr. in Boston were all successful actors before turning to management.

All of this changed in the early 1860's, by which time

the amount of railroad track had increased from the earlier six thousand miles to thirty thousand. In addition, by the end of the decade the first trans-continental line had been completed. Touring stars quickly realized the possibilities inherent in the new, easier means of transportation, while concurrently the resident companies began their decline. From the fifty of 1870 the numbers steadily dwindled to twenty in 1876, seven in 1880 and only one or two by the end of the century.⁶ At the same time, the number of touring companies increased rapidly, until there were about one hundred in 1876, and over four hundred by the turn of the century. Now, rather than a single star travelling alone from one engagement to another by awkward and time-consuming means, and coping with increasingly second-rate productions featuring generally inferior actors, the guest could head his own company and arrive with a complete production. He was able to hire actors of his own choice, and select the plays he wished to produce. Though there was always financial risk, it was not as great as it would be in the future. The country was eager to embrace anything that came from the East, particularly a new production featuring the latest in special effects. By opening in New York, a producer would receive notices which, even if less than scintillating, enabled him to take advantage of the promotional value of "direct from New York with the original company", words which virtually guaranteed substantial bookings.

The new actor-producers tailored their chosen vehicles to their talents, often reviving the productions that had made their reputations. Thus, in the season of 1887-88, Edwin Booth

toured six Shakespeare plays from September 12th to May 15th. In the first two months alone he played sixteen cities, with three weeks in Chicago being the only stop of any length. The remaining stops were for two or three nights only. During this eight-week segment of the tour, the company traveled over 3,780 miles.⁷

By 1904 the number of combination companies, as the new structures were called, had reached a peak of 470.⁸ The consequences of this rapid and inexorable progression were twofold: There was the predictable demise of many of the local resident companies, and there were staggering new logistics to be considered. There were fifty weeks of bookings for hundreds of companies to be arranged, including appropriate theatres, travel schedules, hotel and dining accommodations, and tons of scenery, costume trunks and musical instruments to be moved from engagement to engagement. To bring these productions together with the ever-increasing number of theatres across the country waiting to have their stages filled with a year's worth of entertainment, and to do it in a financially feasible manner demanded expertise of a kind that was beyond most of the new producers or local resident managers. The latter were by now simply in the real estate business, leasing their theatres to touring companies throughout a fifty-week year. A marriage broker was needed to bring companies and theatres together and to create order out of mounting chaos. The New York booking agents, the men to whom local managers came to cast the plays they planned to produce, surveyed the situation and quickly rose to the challenge.

Indeed, Abraham Lincoln Erlanger, one of their number, soon realized that by signing both theatre owners and actor-producers to exclusive representation contracts, he could greatly increase his financial gain. He would provide theatre managers with fifty weeks of guaranteed productions, thus eliminating their particular nightmare, the company that did not arrive because it received a better offer. At the same time, he could offer actor-producers fifty weeks of guaranteed bookings, work out the best travel routes, make the hotel reservations and take care of publicity. Sensing the enormous untapped potential of this new business, Erlanger joined with five other men--Marc Klaw, his partner in the booking agency, the Philadelphia firm of S. F. Nixon and J. F. Zimmerman, and the producer Charles Frohman, with his partner Al Hayman. They formed the Theatrical Syndicate in 1896, and effectively controlled the American theatre from that time until 1911.⁹ Most of the theatre managers with whom the new firm dealt were no longer functioning as individuals. Instead, groups of managers in particular locations, usually in proximity to a major city, had banded together into what were called circuits. There were several advantages to this new arrangement. Only one member of the group went to New York to arrange the next season's bookings, and he would be in a much stronger bargaining position than previously, being able to offer many weeks worth of bookings for his particular circuit.

In addition to managing the flow of most productions nationwide, the Syndicate began to build its own theatres and to send out its own shows to tour in competition with its

clients. Theatre building by other groups throughout the country had also increased significantly, and most of these fell into line with the Syndicate's policies, so that by 1909 David Belasco, the playwright-producer, was able to claim that it controlled over five hundred theatres. Even in New York, it controlled all but two.

Thus, in the early years of the twentieth century there were three kinds of producers functioning in the commercial theatre. There was the star-producer, dependent for his livelihood on the second group, the booking-agents turned producers. Thirdly, there was a small group of independent producers like Belasco or Minnie Maddern Fiske, the most popular actress of her time. Together with her husband Harrison Grey Fiske, editor of the New York Dramatic Mirror, she had leased a New York theatre and presented repertory there for years. These producers refused to give in to the Syndicate's exorbitant fees, and Mrs. Fiske toured the country playing in second-rate theatres, barns, and tents for many years, as did her only rival in popularity, Sarah Bernhardt. At the same time, Belasco fought endless court battles with the Syndicate on various monopolistic grounds.¹⁰

The years in court, as well as the incursion of motion pictures, the unexpected death of Frohman in the sinking of the Lusitania, and the internal fighting of the remaining partners gradually weakened the Syndicate's hold on the theatre. In addition, its equally egregious competitors, the brothers Shubert, helped to break the Syndicate's monopolistic hold on the theatre by the clever tactic of using the enemy's own

methods. They built their own theatres, produced and toured their own productions, and lured clients away from the Syndicate by offering better terms--which they promptly ignored once they had become powerful enough to do so. In addition, by 1910 about 1200 theatre managers banded together to form the National Theatre Owners' Association, and declared that they would book whatever they chose. By 1918, only Erlanger, who had dissolved his partnership with Klaw, remained active in the booking business, and the Shuberts had become the preeminent economic force in the theatre.¹¹

After the smoke of battle cleared a new breed of producer began to emerge. Neither a business man exclusively, nor a creative artist alone, he often came from small innovative groups such as the Provincetown Players or the Washington Square Players. These companies were primarily interested in new serious playwrights, and the experiments of the new stagecraft. People like Edward Goodman of the Washington Square Players, George Cram Cook of the Provincetown Players, and, in the nineteen twenties, Arthur Hopkins, Guthrie McClintic, and Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner of the Theatre Guild proved that it was possible to produce important serious drama in often unorthodox ways. The Theatre Guild, which competed in the commercial Broadway theatre, even made it profitable. These producers fostered new American playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Elmer Rice, and Sidney Howard, and they encouraged the work of new designers, allowing men such as Robert Edmond Jones, Norman Bel Geddes, and Lee Simonson to have the wide exposure in the commercial

theatre that they needed in order to continue to grow. By insisting on artistic commitment as part of the producer's responsibility, they helped to raise the quality of American theatre to new and dazzling heights.

Kermit Bloomgarden emerged from the ranks of the new producers in the early nineteen-forties. He combined sound fiscal abilities with a genuine commitment to the artistic worth of his productions. When he believed in a property he produced it, no matter how unlikely the prospects of commercial success. In 1949 he presented a drama about the last dreary days and pain-filled nights of a worn-out failure (even the title was deemed to be too gloomy, and Bloomgarden was urged to find something more attractive to potential viewers than Death of a Salesman).¹² A few years later, he mounted a dramatization of the diary of a teen-aged Jewish girl who died in the Holocaust, and this was followed by his first musical production, an unlikely romance between a fat, balding man in a wheelchair, and the tough, embittered waitress who was his mail order bride. This last became The Most Happy Fella, which won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1957, and like his other productions it testifies to the passion of this man who insisted that it be heard.

Kermit Bloomgarden's achievements helped put to rest forever the stereotype of the business man as producer, the non-creative role previously assigned to men who were not actor-producers, playwright-producers, or director-producers. From 1940 to 1976 Bloomgarden presented some of the most important drama of his time with integrity, daring and a

wholehearted commitment to the possibilities of theatre as art.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS

When Annie Grodensky arrived in America from Russia in 1880 she was eight years old, and one of the first things to mark the new life was a new name--Groden. Shortening or changing the surname of a family was common for the new arrivals. Most of these changes came as a result of the suggestions (and often the demands) of the Customs officials at Ellis Island, who had some difficulty in deciphering the complexities of Eastern European pronunciations and spellings.

Irving Howe, in his history of Jewish immigration to America, Land of Our Fathers, cites three waves of emigration from Russia and the surrounding countries in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In New York City alone, the Jewish population swelled from about sixty thousand in 1870 to approximately eighty thousand within ten years and to well over a million by 1910.¹ The principal cause of this great exodus was the assassination, in March of 1881, of the liberal Czar Alexander II. It unleashed a devastating wave of anti-semitism, which spread with incendiary speed across Russia and into Poland, Roumania, and throughout Eastern Europe.² The intention was the total obliteration of the Jews, and from that time until the outbreak of the first World War, virtually the

only chance of survival was to escape. America was the dream, freedom the goal. They came to this country a poor, mostly illiterate, rural population, and were suddenly thrust into the tenements and sweatshops of a totally strange urban environment. The story of the survival of this dispossessed people is a proud and moving part of American history.

Both Annie Groden and the man she would eventually marry, Samuel Zemed Bloomgarden, were raised in Orthodox families in New York. They were quite young when they married. Annie was barely twenty when her first child, Saul, was born in 1892. Two more sons, Robert and Elias, and a daughter, Violet, followed before their youngest child Kermit was born on December 15, 1904. The father owned a meat and poultry business and then became a manufacturer of matzos, the unleavened bread so important to Orthodox Jews. His income was sufficient for the family to escape the crippling sweatshop and tenement existence of so many of the new arrivals. Instead, there was a large comfortable home in Brooklyn, and cultural enrichment in the form of music or art lessons for the children. Violet, who became a gifted pianist in her teens, remembers her father's beautiful singing voice as they gathered around the grand piano in the living room. Sunday evenings were devoted to musicales for friends and neighbors.³

As a child Kermit displayed a talent for drawing and later attended the Pratt Institute, then and now a major training facility in New York for aspiring artists.

A great source of family pride was the children's uncle, Soloman Bloomgarden, a major Yiddish poet who wrote

under the pen name of Yehoash, in the first quarter of the present century. Irving Howe states that unlike the majority of his peers, his subjects ranged beyond immediate Yiddish concerns. A more lyrical poet, he wrote nature poems extolling the beauty of the world, and what Howe calls "lyrical exotica willfully distant from any Jewish experience," as in a group of poems devoted to Chinese porcelains.⁴ He also produced the first complete translation of the Old Testament into Yiddish, a work which was serialized from 1922 to 1927 in the Yiddish Day, the most popular daily of its time. Howe calls this work "the single most distinguished literary achievement in the paper's history."⁵

All of Annie and Samuel's children grew to achieve meaningful and successful lives. Saul became a high school principal in New York City. Robert was an engineer who also served with great distinction in the Second World War as an aide to Admiral Halsey. Elias, whom the family called Al, became both an attorney and a Certified Public Accountant, and Violet was a school teacher and later a child therapist.

As Kermit approached college age, the family fortunes changed drastically. His father suffered a series of catastrophic strokes, which left him unable to work until his death. Those who had not finished college had to attend evening classes while working during the day, and Kermit held a full-time office job while attending New York University during the evenings. This enabled him to help care for his mother, as she had become wholly dependent upon her children after her husband's death.

In 1926 Kermit received a Bachelor of Business Science degree from the university and went on to become a Certified Public Accountant like his brother Al, who by now owned his own business. Kermit joined this firm, Bloomgarden and Lerner, C.P.A.'s, but after three years found himself becoming restless and dissatisfied with the work. In early 1929 he decided to leave the firm and seek a wider horizon. He writes:

I was 25 years old; I had made quite a bit of money for a young man, and I had been working and helping to support my mother since I was 18. I felt it was time I took a vacation from responsibility. That past year had been spent trying to persuade our clients to get out of the market. I felt very strongly that the "New Era" was not based on solid economic conditions. The market was going wild but I did not trust it. There was so much money around then that when I left the firm, one of our clients, Samuel Strasberg, gave me a gift of \$5,000. I accepted the money and decided to take a freight train headed for San Francisco.⁶

Returning to New York a month before the stock market crash of 1929, he found that his benefactor, Samuel Strasberg, had sold his chain of motion picture houses in good time to avoid ruin, and had taken to sitting in a brokerage house with some of his equally wealthy cronies, watching over his investments in a highly unpredictable market. Strasberg asked Bloomgarden to sit with him and advise him on prudent moves. The younger man, who had been planning to open his own accounting office, agreed to the request, attracted to the exciting environment and the ever-present prospect of making a quick fortune. Unfortunately, the neophyte plunger forgot his own advice and began to buy stocks for himself with happy abandon.

When the bubble broke on October 24, 1929, this brief

but intense romance was likewise shattered, and he found himself penniless and in debt to his broker for \$5000. He later recalled, "Sitting in the broker's office that day, I could see shadows pass by the window; suicides on their way down from floors above. I sat through four movies on 42nd Street and then went home."⁷ The months that followed were extremely difficult, but after a good deal of struggle Bloomgarden managed to open a small accounting office in the Wall Street area. Within three years he had attracted a few clients, and slowly rebuilt his life, while the country remained locked in the grip of the Depression.

An accidental street meeting offered a possible way out of this gruelling existence. In 1932, Bloomgarden ran into Leon Shimkin, a childhood friend and former college classmate. Shimkin had already begun to build a brilliant career at the publishing firm of Simon and Schuster, one which would eventually see him in the president's chair. Learning of his old friend's difficulties, he offered to turn over some of Simon and Shuster's financial work to Bloomgarden, and the young accountant seized the opportunity gratefully. Sometime later, Shimkin mentioned that he had been giving free financial advice to a man named Arthur Beckhard who was a friend of the head of the firm, Max Schuster. He suggested that Bloomgarden take over the job on a paying basis and arranged for the two men to meet. They did, and quickly came to an agreement.

Beckhard was a concert manager with a list of clients that impressed Bloomgarden. Among them were Feodor Chaliapin, the great Russian basso, Georges Enesco, the composer, Felix

Salmond, the Belgian cellist, and Ellie Ney, the German soprano. Beckhard came from a wealthy family and was a graduate of Amherst College. He was the possessor of an antic charm which intrigued the younger man, but which, in reality, served to mask some rather dubious business practices. When his new accountant examined his books, which did not take very long, he immediately advised declaring bankruptcy. Beckhard responded with great seriousness that he would never run out on his debts and intended to pay back every penny. Greatly impressed by such nobly expressed sentiments, the young man happily accepted Beckhard's invitation to dine at a local speakeasy (a restaurant or nightclub which sold alcoholic beverages illegally during the Prohibition years). Again, Bloomgarden was impressed by his new employer's style. Lavish amounts of good food, fine wines and expensive cigars dulled his more prudent instincts until the bill came and as he later recalled, "Mr. Beckhard looked through his pockets, checked his coat, checked his pockets again. Perhaps as I was paying the check I should have thought of walking away from Mr. Arthur Beckhard. I found myself drawn to him, but at the time I could not tell you why."⁸

CHAPTER II

LEARNING THE TRADE

Bloomgarden came to Arthur Beckhard at a time that boded well for his own future. His new client had spent the last few summers running summer stock theatres devoted to producing new and untried plays. The previous summer he had made a great success with a play called Another Language by Rose Franken, and decided to present it in New York. Neither he nor his playwright had any previous Broadway experience, but that did not daunt the erstwhile concert manager. Indeed, he decided to direct the new venture, which makes its subsequent great success even more astonishing. This was the time when his new accountant joined the firm, ostensibly to keep the books. But Bloomgarden soon found himself coming to the office much more often than was necessary, fascinated by the many intricate procedures involved in assuring the continued good health of the new production.

During one of these extracurricular visits to the office, he witnessed an argument between the producer and his general manager, Martha McAllister, who promptly quit the job. Bloomgarden sensed the the importance of the moment to his own career:

When he said that he would have to get a new manager, I told him I was his boy. He said "What do you know about the theatre?" I said I knew nothing

about the theatre, but what did the theatre know about business?"

Obviously I wanted something beyond the practice of accounting and when the door opened up, I went in. I didn't know what was behind that door, but whatever it was I wanted it.¹

Beckhard agreed to give the young man (who was still in his twenties) a chance, and Bloomgarden became his general manager. The terms "general manager," "company manager," and "stage manager," have distinctly different meanings in the theatre. A company manager is a person who is hired by a producer to be in charge of all the financial work involved in one production. He usually comes on during the pre-production period, and will help prepare contracts for both technical personnel and performers. He must know the rules of employment and salary of all the various unions, which will always include Actors' Equity Association and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (the stagehands' union), as well as the various designers, choreographers, publicity, and musicians' unions. With the producer, he will draw up projected budgets for scenery, costumes and the like, set up the payroll system when the show is in rehearsal, deal with the possible ramifications of injuries and illness, and prepare contracts for the theatres, both in and out of New York, in which the production will appear. When the show has opened, he will be in charge of the payroll, work with the producer on publicity, make sure the theatre owners maintain the house in a safe and clean condition, deal with complaints from company or crew, and oversee any part of the production that deals with financial matters. In addition, when a production is out of

town, either before the New York opening or on a road tour, the company manager will be responsible for transportation and lodging arrangements, which he makes well before the show leaves town. He will also be sure that a bank in each city will cash salary checks for company members. He will even have a list of local doctors and dentists available in case of emergencies. Finally, he will have booked all the theatres to be played well in advance, and during the tour will make certain that the owners meet their contract obligations. His participation in the artistic decision-making process depends very much on the producer. Some welcome the advice and suggestions of their company managers; others see them as businessmen only.

A general manager is a permanent employee. That is, when a producer has more than one show running, the general manager will supervise the work of the company managers of each production. If the producer has only one show running at the time, the general manager will then function as a company manager for that show, but will always keep his title. Thus, when Bloomgarden joined Beckhard, he became a general manager because Another Language was already running, and Bloomgarden supervised both that show and The Comic Artist which was in pre-production work.

A stage manager, in contradistinction to the others, deals only with matters relating to rehearsal and performance of the play, never with the finances. He is in charge of all rehearsals, calls the cues during performance, and conducts understudy rehearsals. He deals with all problems that occur

from the footlights to the rear wall during the running of the show.

Beckhard's new general manager was an enthusiastic combination of self-confidence about his abilities and absolute naiveté about his new profession, and this particular mix sent him off on his first efforts in behalf of his employer.

Another Language was playing at the Booth theatre, (owned as were more than half the houses in New York) by the Shuberts. They were the strongest force in the theatre at this time, and their power was matched only by their greed. In going over the weekly receipts, Bloomgarden had noted a forty-cent charge for complimentary tickets which was going to the "Shubert Benefit Fund." Over an eight month period \$8,000 accrued to this mysterious entity, and Bloomgarden was convinced that it was simply another Shubert cover-up--a non-existent organization used to enhance their coffers.

He decided to beard the lion in his den and took himself off to the office of Lee Shubert, the master architect of their empire, where he announced that he had come to collect Mr. Beckhard's sixty percent share of the sums collected by the Shubert Benefit Fund. Mr. Lee (as he was commonly called on Broadway) insisted that the Fund was genuine, covering hospital expenses, sick pay leave and the like for Shubert employees. Bloomgarden persisted, Mr. Lee refused. Finally, the younger man prevailed, after suggesting the possibility of calling in the Collector of Internal Revenue to examine the books. He left the Shubert office with a check for \$4,800 in his pocket, still happily unaware of how close he had come to ending his new

career before it had really started.²

After this impressive beginning, he settled in to learn the business. Since Another Language was earning a considerable amount of money, there was no further talk of bankruptcy. Bloomgarden was earning a steady income and was able to help ease his family's situation. His mother had been living with his sister Violet since the death of his father, but now, with the country in the midst of the Depression, it became necessary for Violet to return to teaching to supplement her own family's income. Bloomgarden's mother was in frail health and needed some attention during the day, so it was decided that he would assume responsibility for her, since his working hours were more flexible than those of his sister, and he could look in on her during the day. He took a suite for them in the Hotel Cameron in Manhattan, and they lived there for some time, until his mother insisted that a young man should be on his own and lead an independent life. He arranged to take a small apartment close enough to allow frequent visits and supervision of her well-being.³

Bloomgarden remained with Arthur Beckhard until 1935, acting as general manager for three further shows: Susan Glaspell's The Comic Artist; Spring in Autumn, which was a translation of a Spanish play by Gregorio Sierra; and Picnic by Gretchen Damrosch, daughter of the conductor Walter Damrosch. None of the three was successful, and in May of 1934 Beckhard filed a bankruptcy petition, citing 132 creditors and very few assets.

In spite of his employer's unfortunate choices and

declining fortunes, Bloomgarden had apparently begun to build a reputation as a shrewd businessman and capable manager, since his next job took him to the offices of one of the most successful and respected producers on Broadway. Herman Shumlin was an excellent mentor for his new employee. Only six years older than Bloomgarden, he had begun his career as a theatrical press agent, then became general manager for Jed Harris, the most successful producer-director of his day. The strange convolutions and metamorphoses of careers in the theatre being what they are, both Shumlin and Harris would one day work for Bloomgarden.

Shumlin produced his first Broadway show at the age of twenty-nine. Within three years of that time he had produced and directed six additional plays, including The Last Mile by John Wexley and Vicki Baum's hugely successful Grand Hotel. When Bloomgarden joined the firm, the producer had recently produced and directed The Children's Hour, written by a twenty-nine-year-old woman from New Orleans who worked for him as a play reader. Her name was Lillian Hellman. The company manager on that play, before Bloomgarden joined the firm, was Albert Bein, who had written a drama which still remained unproduced. It would become Kermit Bloomgarden's first production.

William Wright, in his biography of Hellman, states: "A case could be made that after Hammett [the writer Dashiell Hammett], Herman Shumlin was the most important person in Hellman's early adulthood. He served as her mentor, would produce and direct five of her plays, and for a time was her

lover."⁴ Shumlin was an authoritarian in his work, and extremely demanding of everyone involved. He insisted on controlling every facet of the production, and was not above "coming down hard" on a draft of The Little Foxes which he felt could be bettered.⁵ When he directed Hellman's work, it was his vision that prevailed. She had little technical knowledge of how theatre worked, and no insight into casting.⁶ Talullah Bankhead, who starred in The Little Foxes, refers to Shumlin in her autobiography as "a taut and unhappy man" but also notes his "uncommon industry and ability."⁷ Carl Rollyson writes that he could be "vicious and violent with Kermit Bloomgarden," and adds that after a silent dinner with the producer, Bloomgarden's wife asked him if he and Shumlin ever spoke. "Not if I can help it," was the terse reply.⁸ However, away from the theatre and his work Shumlin was known to be charming and friendly, a good companion and a man of great integrity.

Bloomgarden's first play as Shumlin's general manager was Sweet Mystery of Life by Richard Malbaum, Michael Wallach, and George Haight. Directed by Shumlin, as were most of the plays he produced, it opened on October 11, 1935 to lukewarm notices, and lasted only eleven performances. The next production opened a year later on December 15, 1936. Days to Come was Lillian Hellman's second play, a deadly serious drama about strike breaking in a small Midwestern town. Brooks Atkinson called it "a bitter play, shot through with hatred," and it closed after seven performances.⁹

Late in 1938 Bloomgarden took on an additional job, while continuing his work with Shumlin. His new employer, the

Group Theatre, had existed as a producing organization since 1931, but had originated six years earlier as a dream of its founders, Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford. After three years of workshops, meetings and manifestos, it grew to include twenty-eight actors, in addition to the three directors. Their concept was that of an ensemble based on the Moscow Art Theatre and embracing the methods of Stanislavsky, as taught by Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya. They were committed to plays of social protest and to artistic experimentation.¹⁰ During this time many such plays were being written, but few were being produced in the commercial Broadway theatre.

The Group had produced five shows before their first hit, Sidney Kingsley's Men in White, opened on September 26, 1933, and by the spring of 1937 only two more plays--Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty (January 5, 1935), and Awake and Sing (February 10, 1935) had been successful.

During the years that Bloomgarden was with them, the travails and battles of the Group offstage would rival the passions of the dramas they presented onstage. A record of three successes and twelve failures aggravated the tensions of constant internal quarreling, and there was the ongoing problem of sudden defections by actors and directors who needed immediate infusions of Hollywood money if they were to survive. In addition, the three founders of the company seemed unable to determine any clear-cut division of responsibility and authority. The confusion and uncertainties continued to mount until the actors, in desperation, issued a "white paper" in

1936, which established a working plan that would limit Strasberg to artistic responsibilities, allow Crawford to become involved in the creation of new scripts, and force Clurman, who was a notoriously poor organizer, to follow a written plan of action which he would be given.¹¹

Unfortunately, this sensible document proved unworkable for the three directors, and in April of 1937 Crawford and Strasberg resigned from the organization, which appeared to signal the end of the Group. Yet scarcely seven months later, on November 4th, a newly revitalized and optimistic company led by Clurman, with Elia Kazan second in command, presented Odets' Golden Boy, which became the biggest success in their history.¹² Shortly after it opened, Bloomgarden joined them, becoming their general manager.

In June of 1937, he accompanied Clurman to England to help prepare for the London opening of Golden Boy, along with an entourage consisting of the actress Stella Adler (at that time Clurman's wife), Elia Kazan, Luther Adler (who had played the lead in the original production), and the playwright. Almost immediately, Bloomgarden found himself witness to one of the Group's lively policy meetings, in which Luther Adler proposed that they take the profits of Golden Boy and use them to go back to their original intention of producing repertory. Clurman demurred, claiming that the cost of repertory, as opposed to a single production, was enormous. Odets immediately accused Clurman of laziness, and Kazan's ferocious energy and aggressiveness brought the discussion to fever pitch. Thus, Bloomgarden was introduced to the offstage drama

of the Group, though as usual, nothing much came of the battle.¹³

Odets' anger at Clurman stemmed from the playwright's feeling that Clurman was sacrificing the Group's interests because of his intense preoccupation with Stella Adler.¹⁴ Adler, in turn, blamed the Group for taking over Clurman's life, citing her husband's insistence that Odets, Kazan, and Bloomgarden accompany the couple on what was to be a private week in Paris. Odets was then writing Rocket to the Moon, which would be Bloomgarden's first play for the Group. The playwright later recalled that he was convinced that Clurman, Kazan, and Bloomgarden were running everything and having all the fun while he slaved over his typewriter.¹⁵

Rocket to the Moon opened on November 24, 1938. It was a modest success and ran for 131 performances. During the rehearsal period, Bloomgarden had been busy with pre-production work on Herman Shumlin's next production, Thornton Wilder's The Merchant of Yonkers, which opened on December 28th, a month after Rocket to the Moon. Directed by Max Reinhardt, the play received decent enough reviews, but failed to attract an audience. It closed after thirty-nine performances. Almost immediately afterwards, the Group opened Irwin Shaw's The Gentle People on January 5, 1939. It was a fair success and ran for 141 performances.

Thus, Bloomgarden was involved in three virtually concurrent productions, each of which was, in reality, a full-time job, since their reviews had made the survival of each play problematical. In addition, he was working for difficult

and unpredictable people, and his ability to prevail under such conditions, and to gain the trust and respect of both Shumlin and Clurman, is a mark of his innate ability to deal with the often trying circumstances of his chosen profession.

A few weeks after the opening of The Gentle People, he somehow found the time to get married on February 10, 1939, even though by now he was carrying the double burden of Rocket to the Moon and The Gentle People, both of which were still running. His bride, Hattie Richardson, was a twenty-four-year-old singer from New Orleans, who was in the midst of a successful New York career at the time of the marriage. Using the name Linda Lee as well as her own name, she had already played the ingenue lead in Yes, My Darling Daughter in 1937 and in The Bat in the same year. She next became the featured singer on the radio program Believe it or Not and toured with the Clyde Lucas orchestra. After her marriage she would appear in Panama Hattie in 1940 and Banjo Eyes in 1941.¹⁶

Fortunately, the new bride was involved with her own career concerns, because her husband had little free time to give her. Five days after the wedding, Shumlin presented Lillian Hellman's new play, The Little Foxes, and it was a huge hit. The reviews were excellent, Brooks Atkinson calling it "biting and expert . . . a knowing job of construction, deliberate and self-contained."¹⁷ The New York Post called it " . . . a drama more honest, more potent, more brilliant than even her triumphant previous work The Children's Hour."¹⁸ The play ran for a year, and in the interim both Rocket to the Moon and The Gentle People closed. This left Bloomgarden with the

management of only one play, The Little Foxes, which lessened his work load considerably. The ongoing financial work of a successful show--the weekly payroll, bills for dry cleaning, repairs and replacement of worn costumes and set pieces, theatre rental, distribution of profits to investors--becomes quite routine, and most of it can be handled by office assistants. Thus, Bloomgarden was able to take on a new play, William Saroyan's My Heart's In the Highlands, which was presented by the Group on April 13, 1939 and lasted for only forty-nine performances.

The pace picked up once again toward the end of the year, and 1940 would see Blomgarden involved in five new plays, two of which were tremendous successes and a third which was his own first production.

This marathon effort began with the Group's production of Robert Ardrey's Thunder Rock, which opened on November 14, 1939, but closed after only three weeks. Shumlin's next production, The Male Animal, written by Eliot Nugent and James Thurber, opened on January 19, 1940. It garnered excellent reviews and ran for 243 performances. Once again, as Shumlin's fortunes continued to soar, the Group could find no success. Instead, they presented another dismal failure, Clifford Odets' Night Music, which opened on February 20th, and proved to be a critical disaster, closing in less than three weeks. Its early demise had only one saving grace; it allowed Bloomgarden six weeks to work on the play which would mark his debut as a producer.

The script of Heavenly Express had been around for

several years. As noted above, Bloomgarden had met the playwright, Albert Bein, when the latter was working for Herman Shumlin as a company manager. Earlier in his life Bein had been a tramp and had spent some time travelling the country in freight cars during the Depression. The play is a fantasy along the lines of Paul Osborn's On Borrowed Time, with a protagonist who is Death, in the guise of a whimsically charming tramp, riding a mysterious train--The Heavenly Express--for the purpose of collecting deserving old bums and taking them off to Hobo Paradise. Bein was not a new playwright, having written two previous works, Little Ol'Boy and Let Freedom Ring, both of which had been produced to good reviews.

The new play had been staged twice in summer stock in the early 30's, once at the Beechwood Playhouse in Scarborough, New York, and the again at the Hedgerow Playhouse in Moylan-Rose, Pennsylvania.¹⁹ In October of 1933, the New York Post reported that a producer named Delos Chappell had optioned Heavenly Express for production that season. Chappell had produced summer stock in Central City, Colorado, and the previous year had brought a production of Camille to Broadway, starring Lillian Gish.²⁰ But apparently he was unable to proceed with his plans for Heavenly Express, and nothing more was heard of the play for some time.

A brief announcement in Variety several seasons later stated that either Clifford Odets or Irwin Shaw would rewrite the last act of Heavenly Express for presentation by the Group.²¹ There is no evidence that either man ever worked on

the show, and the Group never did produce it. They did hold on to it, however, and in 1940 Harold Clurman recommended that Bloomgarden produce it as an independent venture. Clurman was concerned about the failure of Thunder Rock, because most of its large cast would now be out of work, since the next Group production, Odets' Night Music, required a small cast. Obviously undeterred by the play's history, Bloomgarden agreed to take it on. Clurman also urged him to hire Group alumni Robert Lewis to direct the play, Boris Aronson to design it, and John Garfield to play the leading role.²² He did so, and in addition, he invited eleven other Group members to join the production.²³ There is no evidence that anyone was brought in to do rewrites, and apparently the play was presented in its original form.

As a producer, Bloomgarden had to form a corporation called a limited partnership, which must be created for each new presentation. The structure of the corporation is as follows: There is a general partner--the producer--who owns fifty percent of all subsequent income as observed in the contract, and who is the sole voice in the decision-making process. There are also limited partners, the investors, who own the remaining fifty percent of the show, although they put up all of the money. All capitalization through the money-raising period until the first day of rehearsal is placed in escrow, at which time it is released to underwrite all production expenses and to start paying the bills for building the show. There is also an overcall--a percentage over the capitalization (usually twenty percent), which the investors

must provide, if it is needed, for purposes to be explained below. Only two things can cause the dissolution of the corporation. The first is force majeure--an Act of God such as the death of the star or something equally catastrophic--and the second is failure to raise the required money within a reasonable period of time.

The money used to raise the pre-production costs comes from the producer. If he is short of funds, he may exchange some of his share in the show for the needed "front money", which will then be used for backer's auditions including hotel rental, food, drink, payments to actors, and taxis. The producer also woos backers with expensive luncheons, makes many long-distance calls, and may even fly to the West Coast or Europe to meet with a star or find investors. There are also incidentals which must be paid out of this pre-production money, such as script reproductions, typists' fees and all office expenses pertinent to this production. Finally, playwright's options and costume and design sketches are all paid for by the producer.

Once the production money has been raised, the producer must start hiring a staff. He will need a company manager, stage managers, and a technical crew. In dealing with the IATSE--the stagehand's union--he can choose only three people. These will be the heads of the carpentry, electrical and props departments, and they will pick their own staffs. In addition, once the show goes out-of-town, the producer will have to hire the house crew chiefs of every theatre in which his show plays. This means there will be three extra people on the payroll

during that period, since he must also travel his own crew chiefs. He must then post the various union bonds which guarantee his ability to pay his employees' salaries.

Most important, the producer is now thinking of a director, one who will share his vision of the show, because from now on all artistic decisions will be made by a triumvirate--producer, playwright, and director. His company manager is arranging audition space, usually renting a theatre for a given period of time. There is also a theatre and possibly rooms at a studio to be rented for the rehearsal period.

While auditions are being held during the day, the whole producing and creative staff is involved. However, every evening after the auditions, the producer, director, company manager, and production stage manager will return to the office to lay out the rehearsal period on huge wall charts that will ultimately indicate what every member of the company is doing at every expensive moment of rehearsal. The company manager is also contracting for the theatres, both out-of-town and in New York.

The next step is the bidding process for scenery, costume, and lighting companies. The producer has already hired his designers, and now all the bidders for a particular facet of the production will come in on the same day to hear and see what will be required to construct the show. They will see sketches, scan the scripts, and look at plans of the theatres involved, and they will ask a lot of questions. Then they will go back to their offices, think about it, be aware of

their competition who were also at the meeting, and quickly submit their best bids.

Once rehearsals start, many producers go back to their offices, relying on the reports of their production stage manager and company manager as to how things are going, and keeping themselves available in case of serious eruptions. Others, like Bloomgarden, prefer to spend the entire rehearsal period seated out front in the theatre. Another decision for the producer is the choice of publicity firm for the new show. These people will be responsible for planting word about the show in newspapers and on the air, working with the star's publicists, designing the show poster and newspaper ads, and writing the Playbill biographies.

After the show has had its first performance out of town, the reviews may dictate an additional week or more of rewrites and rehearsal to get it into shape for the New York opening. If the show has stayed in New York and offered previews instead of travelling, word-of-mouth can also be enormously important. Again the opening may be delayed. In either case, this is where the overcall of the partnership agreement becomes important. If production money has been exhausted, this additional sum will allow further work on the show.

Bloomgarden appears to have been fully capable of assuming his new responsibilities, to judge by an early confrontation with the Shubert organization. At that time the Shuberts were actively investing in new productions, and there is an exchange of correspondence between that office and

Bloomgarden about Heavenly Express, which is extraordinarily telling of each side's approach to producing.

The first document is an undated memorandum written by Lee Shubert, apparently in response to an earlier budget proposal submitted by Bloomgarden. The tone is one of annoyance growing to rage as he protests item after item, substantially reducing the dollar amounts of each, and in some cases eliminating whole elements. He is careful to point out that in dealing with Bloomgarden the Shuberts will be getting less for their money than they do with Shumlin, because the latter never includes a fee for his services as director. Shubert goes on to complain that even the Group is a better bargain since they pay actors only half of what they could get elsewhere.²⁴

Bloomgarden's reply, also undated, is equally revealing of where his priorities lay. He is respectful and fairly chastened, and has lowered his budget expectations where he can, but refuses to yield on artistic choices. Thus, he rejects Lee Shubert's suggestion that he seek a designer who will work for union minimum, and insists on his choice of Boris Aronson for both artistic and practical reasons. He also defends his reserve figure and presents a detailed plan for the timing of the out-of-town run, which will result in considerable savings. Finally, he persists in the matter of receiving the same consideration as Shumlin and 'the Group, giving a careful explanation of why doing so will not cost the Shuberts any more money.²⁵ The tone of this response is considerate and thoughtful, yet even up against a truly

formidable opponent, Bloomgarden's belief in himself and the rightness of what he is planning becomes evident

Equally apparent are the two things that will become the hallmarks of his work--his insistence on using the best artistic contributors available and his own keen business sense with which to moderate the excesses. There is a final brief note from Bloomgarden to Lee Shubert, suggesting possible formulas for their financial participation,²⁶ but apparently the deal was never consummated, as there is no contract or other evidence of their investing in the show.

None of the talented people connected with Heavenly Express was able to save it. The show opened on April 18, 1940 and only Brooks Atkinson among the New York critics liked it, calling it, "a genuine fantasy of death in vagabond vernacular" and citing "the wild imagery of the writing and the rolling gusto of the road ballads."²⁷ It is hard to know if this was an aberration on Atkinson's part, since both Harold Clurman and Clifford Odets liked the show enough to invest \$2,000 each, all of which was lost.²⁸

The show ran for only twenty-nine performances, and possibly the badly bruised debutant retreated to lick his wounds, because there is no record of what he did for the next few months. However, sometime during the summer he returned to Herman Shumlin's office in time to begin pre-production work on Emyln Williams' play, The Corn is Green. It opened on November 28, 1940 and brought Shumlin still another great success, and a run of 477 performances. As before, Bloomgarden found himself managing two shows at once, when the Group opened Irwin Shaw's

comedy Retreat to Pleasure on December 17, 1940. However, it closed in less than a month, having served as their final production, and they disbanded shortly thereafter. The Group had been in existence only a bit more than nine years, and never was very much of a commercial success, but its importance lies in the energy and commitment to social issues which it brought to the Broadway theatre, as well as its nourishing of a whole generation of gifted artists who strongly influence American drama to this day.

Bloomgarden remained with Shumlin's office for another three years. During that time he was general manager for Lillian Hellman's very successful Watch on the Rhine, which opened on April 1, 1941 and ran for 378 performances. With only one play to manage, the next few months were the quietest he had known for some time. He became the manager of the Martin Beck Theatre, a job which entailed overseeing the housekeeping and dealing with rental of the theatre for rehearsals and future productions, as well as staffing and maintaining the box office. Another involvement was an extra-curricular activity to which he remained dedicated throughout its existence, the Stage Door Canteen.

The theatre community had been looking for a means to aid the war effort during the Second World War. In late 1941, the American Theatre Wing proposed organizing a cabaret which would offer free Broadway entertainment, as well as food and beverages, to servicemen passing through New York. The Shuberts donated the use of a cavernous basement under the 44th Street Theatre, and theatrical painters and carpenters fell to,

turning it into a bright, cheerful nightclub, where servicemen would be entertained nightly by performers, many of whom were appearing at the time on Broadway. Everybody involved donated their time and expertise, and the Canteen opened on March 4, 1942.²⁹

Jane Cowl, who had starred in Shumlin's production of The Merchant of Yonkers, was Co-Chairman, along with actress Selena Royal, and the two had realized early on that there would be a need for someone to supervise the business end of the Canteen. The job would entail the solicitation of food, beverages, volunteer kitchen help, furniture, lights and money, determining necessary expenditures, and solving the problems that would continually arise when an enterprise of this magnitude (it eventually served 3,000 servicemen a night) was run by generous and well-meaning, but inexperienced actors. Bloomgarden became Chairman of the Business Executive Committee at Cowl's request. At the same time, he was beginning to read new scripts with a view towards a second independent production, when his life was disrupted by a shocking and tragic circumstance.

On August 24th, five months after the opening of the Canteen, his wife either jumped or fell to her death from a window in their apartment on Central Park South. She was only twenty-seven years old at the time and had just returned from a summer stock tour of Pal Joey. Clad in lounging pajamas and red slippers, she fell from an open French window with a low sill in their seventh-floor apartment, while her husband sat reading scripts in the library. He noted her absence after

some time, and thinking that she might have gone for a walk, he started down to the lobby where he was met by a police officer who informed him that a woman had plunged to her death from an open window on an upper floor. This information had come from diners seated at an open-air restaurant, who had witnessed the fall. The horrified Bloomgarden, recalling the open window in the living room, took the officer back up to the apartment and showed him photographs of his wife. Although she had been treated in the past for what the police termed "nervous disorders", Hattie's death was eventually listed as accidental, since there had been no evidence of depression or agitation which might have caused her to take her own life.³⁰

After Bloomgarden returned from New Orleans where he had taken Hattie's body for burial, he plunged into pre-production work on Shumlin's new show, The Great Big Doorstep, written by Frances and Albert Hackett. It was a comedy which starred Dorothy Gish, the silent film star. The play opened on November 26, 1942 to negative reviews and closed after four weeks.

During this time, Bloomgarden was still involved in the running of the Stage Door Canteen. In fact, during his marriage to Linda she had joined him there, working as a Junior Hostess. Now, towards the end of 1942, he found himself embroiled in an extremely sensitive issue which could, if not successfully resolved, force the closing of the Canteen. It arose from the fact that during the Second World War the Armed Services of the United States were racially segregated, whereas the Canteen was pledged to be open to all members of the Allied

Forces on an equal basis, a reflection of the more liberal views of most of the theatre community. When it had first opened, the government had sent armed Military Police to patrol the premises, fearing the possibility of violence if a black man were seen dancing with a white woman. In addition there were very few black actresses working on Broadway at the time, and the Junior Hostess Committee was forced to go outside of the theatre community to find some pretty, young black women to act as hostesses. This was done over the protests of some members of the Governing Board, who felt that it was not right to have black women serving as hostesses. After a great deal of discussion, their objections were overridden and a racially mixed group of young women greeted the men each evening.

However, certain problems still continued. Some of the Senior Hostesses seemed unable to adjust to the decision, and, for example, would openly refer to the black soldiers as "darkies". Their distaste for the sight of these young soldiers dancing with white women was fairly open and obvious. As a result, there was a great deal of tension in the room, and black Hostesses began to leave the Canteen. The head of the Junior Hostess Committee, a young actress named Virginia Kaye, went to Bloomgarden, who was by now known as the official problem-solver of the Canteen. She was delighted to find that he shared her conviction that it must remain racially integrated, and they decided that a meeting of all the Hostesses, black and white, would be beneficial in clearing the air. Bloomgarden secured the balcony of the Martin Beck theatre for the purpose, and it was this meeting that

eventually led to an official policy of total desegregation of the Canteen.³¹

During the next few months Bloomgarden and Kaye continued to work together and began to see each other socially. By the summer of 1943 they had fallen in love. Virginia Kaye was a native New Yorker. She had graduated from the Hunter College High School for intellectually gifted children at the age of fifteen, and rather than pursue a college education chose to go on the stage, to the dismay of her family. She began to attend auditions, and soon the pretty young blonde attracted the attention of Armina Marshall, one of the producers of the Theatre Guild, who became her mentor and guide for several years. She made her debut in a revival of Eugene O'Neill's Ah, Wilderness in 1941, playing the role of Mildred, and soon began a concurrent career in radio. She played leads in dramas and soap operas, including the radio serial Rosemary, in which she performed for over five years. After her marriage, she would appear in In Bed We Cry in 1944 and Kiss Them For Me in 1945.

Bloomgarden and Kaye had actually met sometime earlier when she came to an interview with Herman Shumlin, but it was their work at the Canteen which brought them together. They were married on September 29, 1943, and the occasion was indeed a memorable one for all concerned. Bloomgarden was, as usual, in charge of the production and had arranged to borrow his brother Al's apartment for the day. The wedding party was a small one, with Herman Shumlin and Lillian Hellman among the guests. Everyone milled around awaiting the commencement of

the ceremony, and after some time had passed Bloomgarden noticed a slightly questioning look on his bride's face. Only then did he realize he had forgotten that someone would have to perform the ceremony. After a series of frantic phone calls he managed to find a judge who was not busy on this Sunday afternoon, and the wedding proceeded without further incident.

Herman Shumlin's next production, Lillian Hellman's The Searching Wind, opened on April 12th, 1944, after a rehearsal period that had proven to be extremely trying for everyone involved. The play deals with the failure of both American liberals and the more informed diplomatic community to perceive the dangers represented by the rise of Hitler in Germany. The various viewpoints are represented by two women and a man whose private lives assume equal importance within the play with the larger questions the playwright is asking about moral responsibility. Hellman struggled through endless drafts to strike a better balance between the two themes, and even after rehearsals had started, continued to cut her material so drastically that the usually reticent Bloomgarden pleaded with her to leave the script alone. She began to fault the direction, the actors and anyone else in her sight, becoming quite vocal during rehearsals. Again, Bloomgarden tried to calm her, and at one point had to persuade her not to fire Shumlin.³²

Virginia Bloomgarden frequently attended the rehearsals and witnessed the continuing tensions and hostilities. She recalls that Shumlin suffered agonizing migraine headaches while fending off the vituperous comments of his playwright.³³

But despite all these difficulties, the play opened to generally favorable reviews and ran for three hundred and twenty-six performances.

Bloomgarden was to do one more Shumlin production. The Visitor by Kenneth White opened on October 17, 1944 but did not have its predecessor's good fortune. It received negative reviews and closed after only twenty-three performances. This production marked the end of Bloomgarden's association with the office, but not of his working relationship with Shumlin. The latter was signed to direct the Luther Davis play Kiss Them for Me for the producing firm of John Moses and Mark Hanna, and Bloomgarden was engaged as company manager. Virginia Bloomgarden was also part of the production, being cast in the role of Nurse Wilensky and understudying the two female leads. The show opened on March 2, 1945 to excellent notices and a long run.

Now Bloomgarden faced an important decision. He was forty-one years old and had spent what he would later call "ten difficult but highly educational years" as Shumlin's general manager.³⁴ In addition to a thorough grounding in the business of producing, he had worked with some of the most gifted people in the theatre, many of whom would subsequently work for him. Among the latter were the designers Boris Aronson, Howard Bay, and Jo Mielziner, the actors Gene Lockhart, Florence Eldridge, Mildred Dunnock, Lucille Watson, Joseph Sweeny, Percy Waram, Jane Cowl, and Anne Revere, and the writers Lillian Hellman and Frances and Albert Hackett. Finally, he knew that he had an unusual ability to deal in a reasonable and constructive way

with talented people who were chronically destructive and unreasonable. Virginia Bloomgarden recalls his explanation for an almost uncanny knack of getting along with Shumlin. "If you want something that you know will be good for the play, ask him for the opposite. It works most of the time." After a moment he added, "I learned everything about what not to do in the theatre from Arthur Beckhart and everything to do from Herman Shumlin."³⁵

Perhaps it was this realization that convinced him to go out on his own. He could have remained one of the most respected general managers on Broadway, either with Shumlin or working for other production offices, but he wanted, above all, to become involved in making artistic decisions, and knew that he could only do so as an independent producer.

In an interview with Howard Kissel in 1974, Bloomgarden defined the role he had set for himself so many years before:

A lot of people think the producer is just a businessman and that he's the boss. That's nonsense. The author is in charge. It's part of the producer's function to keep the author and director working well as a team. On all the plays I've done, I've attended all the rehearsals, all of the out-of-town tryouts--for two reasons: (1) I've enjoyed watching the play take shape as the actors grow, and (2) I enjoy being part of a creative team. A lot of producers are absentee landlords--they turn over their creative responsibilities to the director. I don't work that way, and I feel that I have contributed to the final result of the plays I've done.³⁶

CHAPTER III

KERMIT BLOOMGARDEN PRESENTS

In the spring of 1945, Bloomgarden opened a small office in the Selwyn Theatre Building at 229 West Forty-Second Street where Herman Shumlin's office was also located. He immediately began to read scripts sent by literary and theatre agents and soon had the good fortune to find one that was an exciting challenge. Written by Arnaud D'Usseau and James Gow, who already had had a major success in 1943 with Tomorrow The World, the new play was called Deep Are The Roots. It was brought to Bloomgarden by George Heller, the Executive Secretary of the American Federation of Radio Artists, who was looking for a co-producer. The two quickly came to an agreement to co-produce this drama, whose plot made it a risky venture for the new firm.¹

The play tells the story of a young black soldier who returns at the end of the Second World War to the small Southern town in which he grew up. There he is welcomed by the wealthy white family who had taken him in and educated him as a small boy. The happy reunion begins to pall when the boy turns down the family's offer to send him off for a fine university education. Instead he wishes to start a school in the black section of the town and teach young children. The situation deteriorates even further when the head of the family, a former

United States Senator, becomes enraged at the refusal and falsely accuses the boy of stealing a watch. The soldier is taken off to jail but soon released when the charge cannot be proven.

This traumatic experience releases long repressed emotions in the young man and the Senator's daughter, and they find themselves confessing their love for each other. She begs him to marry her and flee to the North, but he refuses. Instead he tells her that fleeing the problem would resolve nothing, as his place is here in the little town helping his people.

The producers set a budget of \$40,000, but soon ran into difficulty raising the money. The play was not considered a good investment, and they had only raised about half the needed funds when unexpected help arrived in the diminutive form of Jules Leventhal of the firm of Wee and Leventhal. This jolly rotund man, who spoke with a heavy Jewish accent, had a comical appearance that belied his genius for making money. He was the acknowledged king of the "subway circuit", that group of legitimate theatres that still existed in the outlying boroughs of New York City, and to which he regularly sent recently closed Broadway productions with their aged sets and costumes, and often members of the original casts. In addition, he would stage revivals of past hits, and his ticket prices were always considerably lower than Broadway. During periods when they were not offering live entertainment, the theatres would show films. The subway circuit lasted until the mid-fifties, at which time the last of the legitimate theatres

in the outlying boroughs were converted into full-time movie houses. The advent of television also helped to bring an end to these "on the road in the city" productions.

Jules Leventhal was merciless in financial dealings connected with his shows, but once away from the negotiating table, he was an extraordinarily generous and loyal friend, and so he proved to be to Bloomgarden. When this affable soul stopped by to greet the new producers, they told him of the difficulties they were having, and the older man asked to read the script. He told Bloomgarden that he would give them the needed sum, making this astounding offer even before he read the script. However, when he returned the next day he tried every way possible to dissuade the men from producing the show. "It's not commercial" he said, "It'll never make a nickel." Bloomgarden insisted that they would do it anyway, adding wistfully, "I guess that means you're out?" to which the surprised Leventhal replied "Out! Out! Who says out? Whatever you can't raise I'll give you."²

Though Bloomgarden and Heller were deeply touched by Leventhal's generosity, they decided that it would not be right to take money from him under such circumstances. After several dreary months of unending effort, they finally succeeded in raising the additional \$20,000 they needed. Now all that remained was to find money for the Equity bond, a sum equal to two weeks' salary for every Equity member in the production. Again Leventhal offered to help, and this time the weary producers gratefully accepted. He sent a letter to Equity guaranteeing the bond, a practice he was to keep up for the

next several years, whenever he knew that Bloomgarden needed help. He remained a good friend until his death, and never would take a single share of profit participation for his help.

While raising the money, the producers were also looking for a general manager. Louis Lotito, who managed several theatres in New York, recommended a young man named Max Allentuck, who was the company manager for a show called Jacobowsky and the Colonel, written by S. N. Behrman and still running after a year. Before that Allentuck had done a long road tour of Philip Barry's Without Love, which starred Constance Bennett, a descendant of a distinguished theatrical family and a beautiful tyrant who had sent four company managers back from the tour. The Theatre Guild, which produced the show, decided in desperation to send out the totally inexperienced but highly intelligent young man. For reasons known only to herself, Bennett took to him immediately, and word reached Broadway that at last she had met her match. Whatever the reason, Allentuck says, they got along well from the start.³

Bloomgarden also liked him on sight, and Allentuck joined the firm, where he would remain for the next twenty-nine years. In his relationship with Allentuck, the producer departed from the practice of Herman Shumlin, who kept both a professional and personal distance from his general manager during all the years of their association. He and Allentuck not only became close friends, but from the beginning the manager was a part of the decision-making process, whether financial or artistic. His opinion was solicited and given

careful consideration, and he was privy to the most sensitive meetings and problems, a practice that would endure throughout their years together.⁴

Elia Kazan was signed to direct the play.

Bloomgarden had known him as an actor and stage manager with the Group before he had gone to Hollywood, where he was in the process of building a fine career. He had already directed the films of A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, and Gentlemen's Agreement, and Broadway productions of Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth, and Jacobowsky and the Colonel. Kazan did not want to direct Deep Are the Roots, but was talked into doing so by his wife, Molly Day Thatcher, who was a friend of Bloomgarden's. Kazan and Thatcher had been living apart for some time, since her discovery that he was involved in an adulterous affair. Now she had agreed to take him back, and he later said that he was so grateful for her forgiveness that he would have agreed to anything she wanted.⁵

Barbara Bel Geddes had been cast in the important role of the Senator's young daughter, and Gordon Heath played the soldier. Rehearsals went well, and the play opened at the Fulton Theatre on September 26, 1945. It was a huge hit. Howard Barnes called it "hard-hitting and engrossing, controversial and compelling" and singled out Barbara Bel Geddes as "superb, giving a beautifully modulated, splendidly assured performance."⁶ The New York Times praised the producers for "taking on a play whose subject matter would gray the hair of a booking agent and making a success of it."⁷

Deep are the Roots ran for 472 performances. In an

interview on the eve of its first anniversary, Bloomgarden had some thoughts on the theme of the play:

I think Arnaud D'Usseau and James Gow were right in doing it. Here's why: You can plead for an end to discrimination, for social and economic equality for the Negro, but when you do you always come up against that cliché "Would you want your daughter to marry one?" Now, intermarriage is not the issue at all today, but is simply a red herring, a blind to sidetrack you, to confuse the simple, basic issues of economic and social justice for the Negro.

And the play shows all of this. The Negro soldier, who has come home from war with a fierce desire for justice, tells the white girl, "I didn't come back from Europe to marry you." He has come back to fight for his people. What he wants to do in that Southern town is to build a school and to give his time and his energy to his people. And he is the one to say intermarriage is not the problem, intermarriage is wholly an individual matter.⁸

In 1946 the producers sent out a road company of the play, which received good notices but failed to draw audiences. There were also unauthorized productions in Moscow in 1946, and East Berlin in 1947, for which no royalties were paid.⁹

After the opening of Deep are the Roots, Bloomgarden moved his offices to 1545 Broadway, on the corner of 45th Street, taking a larger suite in a building which was torn down in 1986. Most of the facade of the building was covered by an enormous advertising billboard, into which peepholes were cut to create windows for the new office.

His next play was a comedy called Woman Bites Dog, written by Samuel and Bella Spewack, who had written major Broadway successes such as Boy Meets Girl and the musical comedy Leave it to Me. The new work had originally been optioned by Herman Shumlin, but he decided not to produce it.

Bloomgarden chose Coby Ruskin, who had worked for him as a stage manager, to direct the play. Ruskin had written some unusually penetrating critiques of plays under option in the office, and Bloomgarden had learned to rely on his judgment with good results. Rehearsals went smoothly enough until a problem arose with Elaine Stritch, the young actress who played the leading female role of a newspaper reporter. She seemed unable to build a performance, and had to be replaced out of town by Mercedes McCambridge.

The play tells the story of a young returning war veteran who perpetrates a political hoax on the extremely conservative publisher of a nation-wide string of newspapers. The young man invents a fiction that his small home town has been radicalized in its entirety by Communists. His intent is to destroy the credibility of the publisher by convincing him to print this story. The body of the play is taken up with the chaos that ensues when the publisher mounts a massive campaign in his papers to demolish this imaginary enemy. After the opening on April 17, 1946, the critic Lewis Nichols reported, "The satire is such broad burlesque that it loses its point." In addition, he felt, "The Spewacks may be granted a few bright and bizarre lines of comedy, enough to make up a good review skit. Unfortunately, a complete evening out is not built that way."¹⁰

The play lasted only five performances before closing. Two happier events occurred shortly thereafter, with the birth of Bloomgarden's first child, David, on May 14, 1946, and the new father agreeing to produce Lillian Hellman's upcoming play,

Another Part of the Forest, which she would also direct. After the acrimonious rehearsals of The Searching Wind, there had been a virtual estrangement between Herman Shumlin and Hellman, exacerbated by a suit she brought against the producer over some unpaid taxes which she felt were his responsibility.¹¹ However, a more important reason for their differences may lie in her demonstrated need for total control. She said at the time, "I had a good time directing the play, not because I wanted to, but because I was tired of arguments and knew no director I thought was right for me."¹² Bloomgarden, in turn, told an interviewer, "I was very happy when Miss Hellman asked me to present the play. I feel very proud to be bringing a new play by Lillian Hellman to Broadway. To me it is one of the high points of my life."¹³ Max Allentuck has recalled Bloomgarden's jubilation at gaining this prize:

It was a terrific challenge for Kermit, who was absolutely dedicated to making it the best production ever. He went all out to please her, and that was really his strong suit. It was always the author that he managed to stay close to, and it behooved all of us on the staff to lean over backwards and make sure that everything was done properly so that there would be no managerial snags.¹⁴

The play concerns the Hubbard family of The Little Foxes, but is set many years earlier when Regina is a young girl. It is not an exploration of possible reasons for Regina becoming the woman she is in the earlier play, but instead shows her with her personality already in place, probably inborn. The young girl is, if anything, even more frightening in her calculated cruelty because of her youth, and the play is far more harrowing than The Little Foxes. It deals with the

way in which the Hubbards amassed the family fortune after the Civil War, by cheating, stealing, and defrauding those who trusted them. Patricia Neal was signed to play Regina, and Mildred Dunnock and Percy Waram played her parents. Everyone concerned was quite excited by the script, but from the beginning the rehearsals did not go well. Allentuck feels that Hellman did not understand that directing is very different from writing. Her lack of knowledge of stagecraft, of the ordinary language of directing and acting, resulted in an inability to make contact with the actors. In addition, she was unable to take criticism or listen to advice, and provoked endless scenes and tantrums. Bloomgarden, always reluctant to interfere with a director's intentions, asked Coby Ruskin to act as an intermediary, hoping that Ruskin's friendly and supportive manner could help soften what criticisms might be necessary from the producer. Though not a cure-all, this plan did ease the tension somewhat, and, more importantly, it enabled Bloomgarden to avoid direct confrontation with Hellman, whose ferocious temper and unyielding stands were proving to be extremely detrimental to morale and to the rehearsals in general.

José Vega, who was an assistant stage manager for the production, feels that the problem was Hellman's inability to translate what she wrote to the stage. She did not even block the play. "Actors would be behind furniture, or in corners, or talking upstage. None of that bothered the playwright; she was just listening to her words."¹⁵ Virginia Bloomgarden, who attended many of the rehearsals, feels that probably it was the

extraordinary professionalism of the actors that ultimately pulled the production together into a cohesive whole. "It finally looked like ensemble playing. The acting was exquisite," she recalls.¹⁶

The company began to be cautiously optimistic, and by the time they moved to Philadelphia for a pre-Broadway tryout they were anticipating a major success.¹⁷ The reviews in Philadelphia and later Detroit were good, though the audience response was not. They lost \$6000 in Philadelphia in two weeks, but felt that the New York audience would be less likely to be put off by "a witches' brew of blackmail, insanity, cruelty, theft, torture, and drunkenness with a trace of incest," as Brooks Atkinson was to describe it in his review.

Another Part of the Forest opened on November 20, 1949, and ironically, it was Atkinson and the other New York critics who would doom the play, not because of negativity--they were all fascinated by it--but because of their emphasis on the sensational. Calling it old-fashioned melodrama, Atkinson went on to offer praise that damned: "She has contrived scenes of madness, desperation and venom that have tremendous impact in the theatre. Between them, Miss Hellman and the actors make the horrible Hubbards people you cannot ignore."¹⁸ Richard Watts called it Hellman's most fascinating play, but added, "Their snarling, contemptuous, bitterly humorous scorn for each other is matched only by the way in which, without surrendering a trace of this hatred, they sardonically band together against the outside world."¹⁹

The play managed to eke out a run of five months, and

it did garner two Tony Awards, one going to Patricia Neal as best featured actress in a drama, and the other to Lucinda Ballard for her costumes. The Tony, a most sought-after prize in the theatre, was named for Antoinette Perry, who headed the American Theatre Wing for two decades after the war. It is awarded annually for excellence in several categories and is considered a mark of truly distinguished achievement.

A road company of the play was sent out the next season, but was not successful, closing in Chicago after a few weeks. In 1948 a film was made of the play, which starred Fredric March, Florence Eldridge, and Ann Blyth. It should be noted that when a Broadway play is first produced, the playwright's contract always contains a clause which grants him a portion of the fee from any subsequent film sale. The most common division gives the author sixty percent of the sum received and the producer the remaining forty percent.

Sometime in 1947 Bloomgarden became interested in the production possibilities of a play called Command Decision, which William Wister Haines had adapted from his well-received novel. After optioning the script, the producer requested rewrites that were substantial enough to require two further versions before he agreed to produce the show.

The play looks into the tortured mind of a United States Army division commander, faced with making a decision that would cost the lives of many of his men. Brigadier General Dennis must decide whether to send his pilots on a series of bombing missions over Germany which would take them

beyond the range of fighter protection. Thus, he has to weigh the immediate cost of lives lost against the future saving of many more, if the flyers are successful in destroying their targets. The play is eerily reminiscent of a problem faced by an American President only two years before, when he had a possibility of ending our war with Japan immediately, by authorizing the use of the newly developed atomic bomb to destroy two Japanese cities.

The play was directed by John O'Shaughnessy, an ex-dancer and actor who had previously directed only in summer stock and for Equity Library Theatre. Command Decision opened on October 2, 1947, starring Paul Kelly in the role of General Dennis and featuring several young actors who would go on to distinguished careers. Among them were James Whitmore, Arthur Franz, Stephen Elliot, and John Randolph. The reviews were excellent. Brooks Atkinson said, "Mr. Haines has written [the play] audaciously out of an immense fund of knowledge. [It is] expertly acted with tautness and decision under the crisp direction of John O'Shaughnessy."²⁰ Ward Morehouse called it "extraordinarily vigorous . . . the author has been uncommonly successful with his characterizations . . . an exceptionally good job of playwriting."²¹

Command Decision ran for 409 performances, and a touring company was sent out, but like its predecessor it was not successful. In 1949 a film was made of the play, which starred Walter Pidgeon and Clark Gable.

In an interview with Ward Morehouse two years later, Bloomgarden talked about the generally poor business his last

three plays had done on the road. He expressed doubts about whether serious drama could ever tour successfully, but then added, "but a producer must feel a certain responsibility to his author, who is deserving of a road showing . . . I think it is disgraceful to close a play taking in twelve thousand dollars a week or more."²²

In the same interview he touched on another problem that was of concern to him:

I'm in the theatre to stay. I want to produce not one play a season but two or three; in that way you keep alive. The thing we've got to do in the theatre is to make pictures in the East and keep our people in the East. Hollywood is always stealing young people who are not ready for stardom of any kind. It infuriated me when Hollywood took Barbara Bel Geddes and Patricia Neal. Pat is a sweet and wonderful girl and she will come back to the theatre. I regret very much that there are agents who sell talent down the river like cattle. It's heartbreaking that we have to go to the Coast for some of our actors when we're casting a play, but the fact remains that the Coast steadily drained the theatre of its talent, particularly character actors.

It is worth noting that what Bloomgarden proposed in that interview enabled the English theatre to keep its best actors, who are able, because of the close proximity of the film studios to the London stage, to commute easily between the two mediums.

The Morehouse interview above also holds the answer to a question that arose shortly after the opening of Command Decision and continued to recur throughout Bloomgarden's career. On October 10, 1947, barely two weeks after the show opened, he received a letter from the National City Bank of New York over the signature of Lester Scharf, Assistant Manager. It informed him that his sixty-day loan in the amount of

\$15,000 had been approved, and the money was now available. The question of why he needed this money is an intriguing one. In the two years since he had become an independent producer, he had presented four productions, three of which had good runs and earned decent profits. In addition, both Another Part of the Forest and Command Decision had been sold to film companies, and this meant additional income for him.

In the interview Bloomgarden states that he wants to produce, "not one play a season but two or three." To do so would almost certainly mean that he would have under option several additional plays for each one that he chose to do. For example, between the years 1947 and 1949 he had under option for varying periods of time, the following plays, in addition to those which he did produce:

Disturb Not the Dream by R. D. Skidmore

The Eagle and the Serpent by Maxine Wood

Garden of Olives by Elva Hugamir

Mother Furie by Nellise Child

Purple Dust by Sean O'Casey

The Queen of Sheba by Alex North

Strange Calamity by Dorothy Parker and Rose Evens

Mine Was One Voice by Elaine Carrington

The Naked and the Dead by Lillian Hellman

Each of these plays represented a monthly fee paid to its authors while the plays were under option, which could mean two or three years of payments. In the case of well-known playwrights like Hellman, O'Casey, and Parker, the amounts in

1948 or 1949 could be many hundreds of dollars each month, while an unknown writer might receive one or two hundred dollars per month. Thus, Bloomgarden paid out several thousands of dollars each year for the rights to plays which he never produced. It should be noted that by law a producer may not use the profits from one show either to bolster the losses of another or to invest in a new show. This is to protect the investor who owns part of a money-making production.

Max Allentuck has observed, "Bloomgarden wanted to get his foot in the door in a major way, so he optioned as many plays as possible. That takes money."²³ In addition, Allentuck feels that another factor contributing to Bloomgarden's continuing need for money is that a producer does not begin to earn money from a successful production until it has recouped its costs, which sometimes takes a year or more. Therefore Bloomgarden's only income until that time would have been a small weekly stipend as producer, and office costs connected with the production.²⁴ Finally, the man's integrity--his sense of responsibility to playwrights--was obviously stronger than his desire to amass a personal fortune, since he continued to send out road companies of serious dramas for many years.

During the latter part of 1948 things were going well for him. Command Decision was nearing the end of a profitable run, his second son, John was born on December 3rd of that year, and his reputation as a producer of important plays was firmly established. Although he had several projects under option, his next play would be none of these. Instead,

everything else was pushed aside for a new work by a young writer named Arthur Miller, who had written one previous success, a play called All My Sons.

Each of the three persons closest to the production of Death of a Salesman has his own version of how Bloomgarden came to produce the show, and though their stories are similar, each differs in important details. Elia Kazan, who would direct the play, remembers it thus:

When Art and I weren't sure which producer to entrust it to, I suggested that we give it to Cheryl [Crawford]. To my surprise, the force it would have with an audience did not strike her. She hesitated. The time allowed for hesitation in the theatre is brief . . . I told her to forget the play.
Now luck was loose. Art and I decided to pass the script on to another good friend, Kermit Bloomgarden and his associate, Walter Fried.²⁵

The last sentence is inaccurate, in that rather than being an associate of Bloomgarden's, Walter Fried had been the company manager for the production firm that Kazan, himself, had formed with Harold Clurman to produce All My Sons. When Clurman decided to leave the partnership after presenting this one play, Miller showed his new play to Kazan and Fried, who were very excited by it and decided to find a producer for the project.

Arthur Miller, too, seems to feel that it was luck that brought the property to Bloomgarden. Citing what he calls "the whimsical transformation of another person's life," he goes on to say:

Kazan knew him and as much because we happened to have come to a halt a few yards from his office building as for any other reason, he said 'Well, let's go up and say hello'. When we stood across the desk from him and Kazan said he had a play of mine for him

to read, Bloomgarden squeezed up his morose version of a smile, or at least a suggestion of one he planned to have next week.²⁶

Thus, both men ascribe luck, chance, and whimsy as the determining factors in their choice of Bloomgarden as producer, a premise that is difficult to accept. Surely the playwright and director had some inkling of the play's worth and potential when they set about to find a producer. In addition, Kazan, who appears to have been in charge of the search, was quite aware of Bloomgarden's intelligence, his willingness to take on serious dramas, and above all his respect for the artists with whom he worked. The absence of any mention of these qualities as playing a part in their choice may be due to personal prejudices arising from events which will be discussed below.

Bloomgarden's own recollection of how he acquired the play is rather different from the others:

I read in the Sunday Times that the producing auspices of Harold Clurman, Walter Fried and Elia Kazan would not be doing Arthur Miller's new play Death of a Salesman. They had teamed up to do All My Sons, but Kazan and Miller did not choose to continue the arrangement.

I had lunch with Wally Fried, who was a friend, and asked if it would be all right with him if I tried to get the play, at which point I would bring him back into the picture. It was fine with him and I called Kazan. Gadge [i.e., Kazan] asked if I were busy with a play at that moment and I said no.

I read the play that night and was so impressed and excited I could not fall asleep. I spent the night looking at the clock waiting for a decent moment to call Gadge. At exactly 9 a.m. I woke him up to tell him how much I liked the play and how proud I would be to produce it. He threw me a curve. He was delighted to hear how much I liked the play, he said, but Cheryl Crawford had first refusal. "Well, that's the end of that one," I thought. I could not imagine anyone turning this play down.

Two days later, Kazan called and said, "You still interested?" My heart raced and I thought, "Kermit, you lucky son of a bitch." "You bet," I said. "Cheryl

turned us down," Kazan said.

A meeting was set up between Miller, Kazan and me. It was a good meeting (Miller's knee locked sometime during the meeting and he had a helluva time unlocking it) and it was settled on that day that I would produce the play.²⁷

Once the men reached their agreement, Kazan and Miller began to work on script rewrites. Kazan felt that the flashbacks slowed the play down and also took away some of the power of the reality scenes. He suggested that Miller group them together as a single unit, but when Bloomgarden read the revised version he was horrified at the destruction that had taken place and refused to continue as producer unless the new version were abandoned in favor of the original concept. Both playwright and director yielded to his demand and Miller, working with him for the first time, learned something about this man he had remembered earlier only as "an accountant turned producer whom I had last seen going over Herman Shumlin's books a couple of years before."²⁸

The producer also questioned the director's choice of Boris Aronson to design the show. He felt that they needed a designer who knew lighting well enough to use it as a design element. He finally persuaded the two to accept his choice, Jo Mielziner. The play called for almost sixty different scenes, and this brilliant artist produced a unit set that did not have a single mechanical move. The only piece of "realistic" design was a single flat depicting the tombstone in the last scene²⁹.

Bloomgarden felt that his three successful productions in as many years entitled him to seek production money without allowing the potential investors to read the play, a practice

he would adhere to for many years. He was, in fact, able to raise the necessary sum of \$101,000 in this manner, and among the investors were many knowledgeable members of the theatre community, whose participation spoke of a great deal of faith in his ability to pick worthwhile plays. They included Audrey Wood, the most important playwright's agent of her time, producer Leland Hayward, directors Joshua Logan and William Wyler, Lillian Hellman, and Louis Lotito, who managed several Broadway theatres. Jules Leventhal also continued his practice of investing in Bloomgarden's plays sight unseen.³⁰ In his memoir Bloomgarden writes, "Even people intimately involved in theatre often cannot tell from reading a script what will work and what will not. Sometimes it is a matter of taste or what strikes a chord in your own experience; sometimes you confuse your own feelings by worrying about what audiences will like; and sometimes you simply don't know."³¹

The play tells the story of a failure--an aging salesman who is no longer able to continue the self-delusions about his own abilities and successes that have sustained him through a lifetime of rejection and disappointment. Now he must confront two realities with which he cannot cope. He has lost his job and knows he cannot obtain another, and he must accept the fact that he is responsible for the stunted psyches and tawdry lives of his two sons. Miller had originally visualized Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play, as a small man with a large, physically dominating wife, but after several short actors had auditioned he changed his mind, feeling that "these very good actors seemed to lack the size of the

character even if they fit the body." Lee J. Cobb, whom both Bloomgarden and Kazan had known when he was a member of the Group, had been sent a script. The tall, stocky actor had gone to Hollywood years before and had built a career as a character actor. However, after reading the play he was eager to audition, and flew cross-country in his own plane to keep the appointment. Even before his audition Miller began to see Willy in him--smiling winsomely at a waitress in a coffee shop while ordering a turkey sandwich, laughing at a baby's antics in Miller's living room. The playwright recalled, "So large and handsome a man pretending to be thoroughly at ease in a world where he obviously did not fit, could be moving."³²

Mildred Dunnock, who had played Lavinia Hubbard in Another Part of the Forest, auditioned for the role of Linda, Willy's wife, but all concerned felt that she was wrong for it. However, she persisted, and since the role was proving difficult to cast--they read nineteen actresses in all--Bloomgarden allowed her to audition again. But he still felt she was too young for it. She asked for, and received, a third audition at which she appeared in shabby clothes, graying wig, and drab nmakeup. Her appearance now matched her reading of a careworn, middle-aged woman, and she won the role.³³

During the first week of rehearsal, Bloomgarden sat silently in the rear of the theatre and watched what he felt was an incipient disaster taking place. Kazan was staging the important last scene of the first act in a highly sentimental manner, which destroyed the emotional balance of the rest of the play. Knowing that this would certainly lessen the impact

of the drama, Bloomgarden chose not to interfere. "I could only hope that he would figure it out himself, because if I pointed out his mistake before he was ready to accept it, I would have difficulty convincing him and I risked hardening his position."³⁴

Luckily, into the second week, Bloomgarden's decision to trust Kazan was vindicated, when the latter suddenly sensed that he was leading the play down a destructive path, and announced that he had been directing the scene all wrong. After that, rehearsals proceeded very well, and when the company left for Philadelphia for a two-week tryout period there was a sense of something extraordinary coming to life. Unfortunately, they were the only ones who knew it. The Philadelphia box-office advance was only \$2,000 for the entire run, and nobody in that city seemed to have heard of the playwright or any of the actors. They were due to open on a Monday evening, and Bloomgarden and Kazan decided to have a private invited runthrough the day before, for an audience composed of the families and friends of the theatre employees, and anyone else in Philadelphia known to any member of the company. As a result of the word-of-mouth after that performance, there was a block-long line at the box office Monday morning, and by midweek the entire two-week run was sold out. The word even reached New York, and since at that time plays in Philadelphia played Thursday matinees, Allentuck was besieged by telephone calls from working actors in New York eager for tickets to the afternoon performances.³⁵

The Philadelphia reviews were superb, as were those of

the New York critics when the play opened on February 3, 1949. The audience that evening reacted much the same as the early viewers. When the final curtain fell, they sat hushed, stunned and hesitant to break the spell by applauding. Sobbing could be heard, and people were holding bowed heads in their hands. Then a tentative scattering of applause was heard and suddenly the theatre erupted in a giant roar--people shouting, laughing, exclaiming. The audience refused to leave even after the actors left the stage and the house curtain descended, and instead milled about and chatted as if reluctant to leave the newly created fraternity of those who had shared this extraordinary experience.

In his review of the play, Brooks Atkinson called it, "a superb drama . . . rich and memorable. Mr. Miller has looked with compassion into the hearts of some ordinary Americans and quietly transferred their hope and anguish to the theatre."³⁶ Howard Barnes wrote, "A great play of our day has opened at the Morosco. Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller has majesty, sweep and shattering dramatic impact."³⁷

After the play settled in for what would be a run of 742 performances, some unexpected problems began to chip away at the overall euphoria. Bloomgarden became aware of them about five weeks after the opening, when Mildred Dunnock came to him and asked to be let out of her contract. He was quite surprised, since she had fought so hard for the role, and had received excellent personal notices. She was reluctant to give a reason, but upon the producer's insistence she told him that Lee J. Cobb was continuously harassing her. He would even

whisper to her in the wings just before they were to make a joint entrance, "What are you doing in the theatre? You don't belong here. Why don't you go back to schoolteaching?" Her outraged employer charged backstage that evening, to tell Cobb that this unacceptable behavior must stop immediately. The actor ungraciously agreed, but then proceeded to transfer his malicious attentions to the other members of the cast, one by one, until he realized that nobody was really listening any longer.³⁸

Cobb would also complain constantly of exhaustion, due, Bloomgarden subsequently found out, to all-night poker games after almost every evening performance. He even feigned a sudden heart attack, which brought Kazan, Miller, and Bloomgarden rushing to his home, where they found him sprawled comfortably in front of his fireplace, smoking a postprandial cigar. The sight triggered the release of months of pent-up rage that Kazan had felt toward the actor, and the resultant screaming recriminations were enough to send Cobb hurrying off to the evening's performance.³⁹

Cobb's unprofessional behavior continued to cast a pall over the company for the duration of his stay. Bloomgarden had this to say about the troubled man:

The most unfortunate thing about Lee was that he could have emerged the biggest actor in this country. But he was impatient. He would not tour with the show, and all he could think about was getting out when his contract expired and heading for the Hollywood loot, which ironically and sadly, I don't think he ever managed to get. He gave one of the great performances of the century in Salesman, but he was a disturbed and unhappy man. His presence was always 'heavy'--there is no other way to describe it.⁴⁰

Death of a Salesman won the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, and seven Tony Awards. These were for best play, playwright, designer, director, featured actor (Arthur Kennedy), and producer. Yet in spite of this acclaim, the play did not earn a great deal of money. Max Allentuck explains:

The play had a long run, but it didn't make much money. Straight plays don't. It made money, but you couldn't retire on it. They screwed up the movie sale. I think Miller had something to do with that ... It didn't do terribly great on the road. A heavy drama like that is pretty hard to sell on the road no matter what its reputation. And I always maintained that more people didn't go to see it than went to see it because they knew what it was about. I used to stand in the back of the theatre at night and see those men walking out--the faces on them--it was something. So word got out. A show like this, it ain't easy, I'm telling you.⁴¹

A touring company was planned for the next season and Kazan, who was anxious to get back to Hollywood, suggested that Harold Clurman direct the production. Bloomgarden agreed but soon regretted it. Neither Miller nor Kazan was available for the auditions, and Clurman, of whom Bloomgarden was quite fond, seemed rather uninterested in this most important procedure. Sometimes an actor would give a mediocre reading, but one which the producer felt could be much improved. When he suggested that Clurman talk with the actor, the reply would invariably be, "If you want him, take him. I can get a performance out of him." This attitude continued until Bloomgarden finally spoke up: "Harold, you are not God. I haven't got the answers and neither have you. You frighten me with this kind of talk."⁴²

Thus, from the start Bloomgarden was put into a position he detested--telling a director what to do. He had

always prided himself on making artistic choices that would allow him to trust his creative team completely, but he realized as rehearsals proceeded that Clurman's work was destroying the show. The problem was that the director used Kazan's staging as he was supposed to do, but was directing the play in a way that was utterly opposed to that staging. It made no sense. Bloomgarden knew that he had to interfere, but even here his innate respect for the artist determined his action. He did not insist that Clurman follow the original direction. Instead he allowed him a choice; he could restage the action and then direct as he chose, or keep the original staging and follow Kazan's direction.

Unfortunately, Clurman seemed unable to resolve the issue, and the rehearsals never achieved a cohesive wholeness. The first dress rehearsal in Detroit was a disaster. Bloomgarden had a mass of notes for Clurman, who asked if they could meet at the theatre at eleven the next morning, two hours before the company was due to begin another runthrough. Bloomgarden was there on time but Clurman did not arrive until the company was gathered together on stage at one p.m. Bloomgarden writes:

. . . and then Harold came. He sat down to address the company and then did something I have never had a director do before or since.

"Kermit has some notes for you," he said to the cast.

It is one thing to give notes to a director; if he agrees with you, he takes your words and puts them into a language the actor will understand. In this case I found myself in a terrible spot, but I did the best I could, reworking my notes as I went along, because I felt it was absolutely necessary to try to get through to help these actors. I was desperate, in other words.

I finished the notes, such as they were, and found

a phone to call Kazan. "You and Miller better get your asses down here. Kazan and Miller did come and stayed with the play until it opened, which was not only helpful, but necessary.⁴³

The road tour produced a disappointing financial return. We might note that thirty-four years later, in 1984, a revival of the play in New York took in over three hundred thousand dollars at the box office during the first week-end of ticket sales.⁴⁴

If, after the heady successes of Deep Are the Roots, Command Decision, and Death of a Salesman, Bloomgarden needed reminding of the more typical realities of his profession, his next production would surely do that. It began in December of 1948, when Lillian Hellman told a newspaper interviewer that she had recently seen the first act of a play in Paris which she had found very exciting. Unable to remain for the second act because of a previous commitment, she managed to obtain a copy of the script, and a reading of the complete work strengthened her feelings that she would like to do an adaptation of it for the American stage. The play was called Montserrat and was written by a dramatist named Emmanuel Robles.⁴⁵ She brought it to Bloomgarden and asked him to acquire the rights for an American production. She was already at work on an adaptation of Norman Mailer's novel The Naked and the Dead which Bloomgarden had agreed to produce, but he agreed to her urging to postpone this work in favor of the French play.

The producer had never before entered negotiations for

a foreign property, and, uncertain as to the procedures, he telephoned Gilbert Miller, who had produced many such plays. Miller said he would be delighted to help and added, "To give you an example, I just bought a play called Montserrat and these are the terms I made." During this conversation, Miller may have been considering the fact that Bloomgarden's recent successes, and Hellman's stature as a playwright, would make the money-raising process much easier, because after some further talk, Miller and Bloomgarden agreed to co-produce the play and to have Hellman direct it.⁴⁶

The title character of Montserrat is a young officer in the Spanish Army of Occupation in Venezuela in 1812. He knows where Simon Bolivar, leader of the revolutionary anti-Spanish forces, is hiding. Montserrat is found out and refuses to reveal the hiding place. He has become convinced of the wrongness of his country's occupation of Venezuela and believes that only Bolivar can free the enslaved population. Branded a traitor, he is told by his Commandant Izquierdo that unless he leads them to Bolivar, six innocent people whom the latter has caused to be detained will be executed, one each hour. Montserrat refuses to yield, the six are killed, and finally he, too, is led to his death.

Once again, Bloomgarden produced a play in which difficult ethical and philosophical questions were asked. However, the moral dilemma of Montserrat is much fuzzier than that of Command Decision, and the choices cannot be weighed in any clear-cut manner. Bolivar, for example, is never seen in the play. He remains a symbol of hope to be talked about and

idealized, rather than a figure of action waiting in the wings for his moment to come. In addition, we never learn anything about Montserrat. He remains a passive figure throughout the play and we do not know what has brought him to his beliefs. He spends most of the play seated behind a desk with his head in his hands.

The most dramatically interesting role in the play is that of Izquierdo, and Hellman wanted the English actor and writer Emlyn Williams for the role. It obviously did not occur to her that there might be some awkwardness in having a successful playwright in the cast. Night Must Fall and The Corn is Green had already been produced, and Williams had also directed successfully in London. He quickly became aware of the disastrous possibilities when he tentatively suggested the substitution of a more formal nineteenth-century idiom for a contemporary American phrase Hellman had used. In an interview before his death, Williams recalled her response, "Hellman shook her head. Her face, not at the best of times suffused with human kindness, was of stone."⁴⁷

Her approach to directing was dismaying to another English member of the cast, John Abbott. He remembers that on the first day of rehearsal, she announced that she had not worked out any blocking, "but if you move around it will probably come out all right."⁴⁸ Julie Harris, the American actress, was at the beginning of her career and played a small role in the play. She remembers Hellman as "absolutely the worst kind of director." According to Harris, Hellman "carped and criticized so that the actors became tense and

uncertain."⁴⁹

Williams felt a horrifying truth begin to dawn on the company--Hellman simply did not like actors. He found her to be patronizing, and she conveyed the impression that acting was a demeaning profession. Her lack of knowledge of how an actor worked became patently clear during the first complete runthrough of the first act, when the actors' concentration must be totally committed to finding the continuity, listening for cues and responses, and grasping for lines that have suddenly vanished. The mental effort was enormous, and nothing should have disturbed it. Yet out of the blackness of the front of the house there suddenly came a barrage of blinding flashbulbs and noisy clicks as a photographer, with Hellman's permission, shot picture after picture of the runthrough.⁵⁰

Even before this episode, rehearsals were badly disrupted by another event that is a producer's nightmare. The need to replace a performer just before an opening is not only demoralizing, it also shatters the rhythm of the performance, the timing and ease of playing that can only come with weeks of rehearsal. In this case, Steven Hill, who was playing the title role, seemed unwilling, rather than unable, to develop a performance during rehearsal. He was a "Method" actor, that is, a student of Lee Strasberg, who had become a noted acting teacher in New York. Strasberg had evolved a highly regarded course of study at the Actor's Studio, based on the actor seeking within himself to find the motivation for his character's actions. John Abbott remembers that when Hill was asked how soon he might be prepared to show them how he

intended to play Montserrat, he smiled and gave an estimate of some weeks in the future, which would have meant some time in the middle of the pre-Broadway run.⁵¹ In addition, his experiments and explorations while trying to find his character were throwing the other actors off, making the rehearsals even more tension-filled.

When the show opened in Princeton, Hill's performance was still not there, and when they moved to Philadelphia the troubled Hellman asked Bloomgarden, who had had extensive experience with such acting methods when he worked with the Group, to explain to her just what improvisation, which seemed to be what Hill was still doing, was all about. Bloomgarden, who apparently had taken some classes with the Group's actors, began to reminisce. "I remember once we were given the problem of constructing the life of an orange," he began, and got no further. Hellman instantly cut him off, having made up her mind. "Let's go home," she said and marched off.⁵² They decided to give Hill his notice and to bring in William Redfield, a capable young actor known to both of them. When Hill was told, he accepted it quietly with a simple "Okay" and left the theatre. Bloomgarden turned to John Abbott, who had been touched by Hill's dignified exit, and said "You know-- that's not natural. He's a sick boy." Max Allentuck offers an amusing postscript to what could only have been a devastating blow:

Steve went back to New York and it suddenly hit him. He had been fired. He fumbled around, killing time while he's mulling all this around in his head and he wound up in a Forty-Second street movie house where he suddenly said to himself, "They fired me! They fired

me? Holy Jesus Christ," and then he became confused. He got on a train, went down to Philadelphia where the play was, and got there just at the end of the first act, where he found Lillian and Kermit on the street in front of the theatre, and proceeded to call them every name under the sun. He got that off his chest, went right back and caught the next train to New York.⁵³

The replacement of Hill with Redfield eased the tensions somewhat, but after the Philadelphia opening, poor notices made Hellman even more unsure of herself, and once again she took out her frustrations on the actors, bullying and provoking until highly respected professionals were reduced to tears.

As the senior member of the cast in reputation and experience, if not age, Williams took it upon himself to send her a letter summing up the feeling of the company. He wrote that though she was a fine playwright, she did not understand actors and handled them badly. Some of the cast asked him not to send the letter. The younger actors, in particular, felt that it might prevent them from ever working for her again, while the oldest member of the company, Reinhold Schunzel, himself a director of some eminence, said to Williams, "If I was a guest in England, I wouldn't behave like this. What would you think of me?"⁵⁴ But Williams stuck to his intention and sent the letter, feeling that it was absolutely necessary, and trying as much as possible to shield the other actors by omitting any criticisms they might have made. He received angry responses from both playwright and producer, and was horrified by the "pure and simple vituperation" of Hellman's words.⁵⁵

Hellman herself had some comments to make about her

directorial capabilities. In an interview just before the New York opening, she said, "Directing is no great feat. Elia Kazan, Jed Harris, Herman Shumlin and maybe one or two others might make creative contributions to the production but the play was the thing."⁵⁶ However, some years later she had some second thoughts and in Pentimento admits, "I directed the play in a fumbling, frightened way, intimidated by Emyln Williams." Again she exercises her proclivity for blaming others for her failures.⁵⁷

The play opened in New York on October 29, 1949 to mixed notices. The New York Times said, "In view of the harrowing theme it has to unfold, Montserrat ought to be completely devastating in the theatre. As put on at the Fulton on Saturday evening, the effects it achieves are mechanical . . . The carnage is gratuitous . . . The writing is barren. The characters in the first act are thin and casual."⁵⁸ Variety noted, "A powerful but heavy drama with limited box-office appeal. The play's lack of movement appears to be aggravated by Miss Hellman's rigid, unimaginative staging."⁵⁹ The film rights to the play were sold to Twentieth Century Fox film studio, which ultimately decided not to produce the picture.

Shortly after the opening of Montserrat, the Bloomgarden family moved to a large apartment on Park Avenue to be near the Dalton School, whose kindergarden David was about to enter. The school offered a challenging curriculum for gifted children, and both Bloomgarden sons remained there until they were ready for college.

Bloomgarden's next production was a psychological thriller by Mel Dinelli, who had written several plays in this genre. It was called The Man, and for the first time its producer selected a play for its commercial possibilities. He would later tell his wife, "Whenever I pick a play that I think will be successful even though it doesn't get to me, I shouldn't do it. It doesn't work".⁶⁰ Martin Ritt, who had several Broadway shows to his credit, including the very successful Yellow Jack, directed the show, and Dorothy Gish, whom the producer knew from his Shumlin days when she had appeared in The Great Big Doorstep, played the housewife who is terrorized by a psychopath whom she unknowingly employs as a handyman. The latter role was played by a young unknown actor named Don Hanmer.

The play opened on January 19, 1950 to lukewarm reviews, the New York Times noting, "It has a depressingly clinical attitude toward crime and it stacks the cards against casual enjoyment."⁶¹ The New York Daily Mirror said, "It gets off to a slow and tedious start and only begins to generate excitement in the second act . . . We can only wonder why Kermit Bloomgarden, a producer who has hitherto been associated with such excellent fare as Death of a Salesman should have thought it worth presenting at the Fulton Theatre last night."⁶² The show lasted for ninety-two performances.

A few months later, Bloomgarden again became involved in a project whose prospects for success were dubious at best. In fact, Legend of Sarah might be called a textbook example of

how knowledgeable and experienced people can make a series of wrong choices that virtually assure failure. The play was a comedy written by James Gow and Arnaud D'Usseau, who had given Bloomgarden his first hit, Deep Are the Roots. Virginia Bloomgarden feels that her husband's critical faculties had been dulled by a strong sense of commitment to these playwrights and that he felt it would be wrong to abandon them just because a new offering didn't appeal to him. She also sensed that Bloomgarden felt that he owed Gow and D'Usseau the production in return for what they had done for him earlier.⁶³ Max Allentuck concurs with this opinion and adds:

Gow and D'Usseau had written Deep Are the Roots, and Kermit was very close to them. They had written this play which Kermit didn't want. Nobody in the office wanted it. Everybody had read the play and said it was bad, but the agents for Gow and D'Usseau were determined to get it on and they wanted Kermit to do it. Kermit took a gamble. He didn't want to give up Gow and D'Usseau. He wanted to hang on to them because good playwrights were what he wanted, and the fact was that nobody could convince them that what they had written was not good enough. They felt it was going to run and Kermit gave in. That's the only reason he produced it. He figured that the next one might be a good one. That's what they all do. They all make the supposition that the next one can be a blockbuster. So he gambled and lost.⁶⁴

Bloomgarden's initial error in deciding to do the play at all was followed by a series of mistakes which would only compound the problem. He signed a director whom he did not know and whose background does not appear to have been particularly suitable for this play. Benn W. Levy was an Englishman who had been a Member of Parliament and later wrote such light comedy successes as Springtime for Henry, Accent on Youth, and Clutterbuck. He also had directed in England.

Legend of Sarah is set in a New England environment and much of the comedy is based on the eccentricities of the Yankee character, making Levy an odd choice to direct the play.

Another surprising decision was to cast Marsha Hunt in the leading role. She played a young woman determined to protect the reputation of an ancestor who has been traditionally regarded as a heroine of the American Revolution, but who, a newly discovered document reveals, was instead a collaborator who became the mistress of the British commander, General Howe. Hunt had performed on the stage in a few unsuccessful plays and had appeared in Hollywood in such films as Carnegie Hall and Jigsaw, but had never evinced a flair for comedy.

In his review of the play, Brooks Atkinson noted Levy's "frenetic" direction and said of the writers, "They plot it and chart it the way writers of popular comedy used to do with some success a quarter of a century ago."⁶⁵ The New York Journal-American said, "When the final curtain falls you are left with the wish that things were better. But they are not . . . It is not good and Mr. Levy does not make it any better . . . Marsha Hunt who is billed above the others does not register . . . She says the words. She goes through the motions. And nothing happens to make you take her seriously."⁶⁶

The play closed after twenty-nine performances, and Bloomgarden plunged into preparations for a far more exciting prospect, a new drama by Lillian Hellman. Many critics would later call The Autumn Garden "Chekhovian," and indeed its

middle-aged characters, bored and idle as they sit in the lounge of a seaside boarding house, do evoke a sense of Chekhov's "left-over" people, unable to come to terms with the meaninglessness of their lives, and yearning for a mythical past in which there was some sense of purpose. Harold Clurman, who directed Hellman's play, said that the difference between the two playwrights was that Chekhov loved his characters and Hellman did not.⁶⁷

The cast included Fredric March in the leading role of Nicholas Deney, an alcoholic artist whose eccentric behavior makes him the catalyst for the action of the drama, as he provokes the others into examining and questioning their pasts. March had been Bloomgarden's original choice for Willy Loman, but he had refused the role, convinced that it was offered to him only as a means of engaging his wife, Florence Eldridge, who all concerned had hoped would play the role of Linda. Though Eldridge had not accepted the offer to appear in Death of a Salesman, she did join her husband in the new play. Jane Wyatt, whom Bloomgarden had known from the Group production of Night Music, and Lucille Watson, who had appeared in Hellman's earlier Watch on the Rhine, were also cast, but Watson withdrew during the rehearsal period, saying that she could no longer listen to Clurman's endless analyses of the play. She was replaced by Ethel Griffies, late of Legend of Sarah.

Bloomgarden felt that The Autumn Garden stood an excellent chance of being a huge hit, and during the pre-production work decided on a policy of limiting the number of house seats available for each performance. This was in answer

to a problem that had arisen during the run of Death of a Salesman, when members of his staff spent so much time handling requests for house seats and doing the bookkeeping required to fill the orders, that their own work was neglected to a great degree. Additionally, he decided to increase ticket prices for the weekend. Soon, however, this optimism was belied by the troubling events of the rehearsal period.

Fredric March, although a fine actor, was having difficulty in understanding his character, and Clurman, who had become obsessed with working out the relationship between Rose Griggs, Eldridge's character, and her husband Ben, played by Colin Keith-Johnston, spent most of the early rehearsal days with these two. March, after vainly trying to get Clurman to help him, took to bringing a notebook to rehearsal and sitting on stage writing endless pages of analysis and speculation. Jane Wyatt, who had left a thriving Hollywood career to play Nina Deney, the artist's wife, felt completely abandoned by Clurman. She finally confronted him and gave voice to her unhappiness: "Harold, you promised me I'd be good in this. I came from California and I don't know what I'm doing."⁶⁸

Hellman began to sit out in the darkened house taking copious notes at a small, lighted desk. It was impossible to ignore her presence, and Clurman began to peer out at her every time he gave a direction. Virginia Bloomgarden feels that the production never achieved the potential inherent in the writing. "There were things in that play that did not get onto the stage. It might have been better if someone else had directed it."⁶⁹

Joan Stanley, the actress playing the pivotal role of Sophie, the only young person in the play, began to have problems. Sophie is an important role, the character offering, in her youth and freshness, a poignant contrast to the rest of the cast, and Stanley was unable to present such an image. Once again, Bloomgarden had to replace an actor days before the Broadway opening. Joan Loring, the replacement, was a gifted and experienced performer, but Hellman and Bloomgarden felt that the company could use some extra rehearsal time because of the change, and the producer was able to secure a week in Boston. The actors were delighted, but Clurman refused. Thus, the play went directly to New York and opened there on March 8, 1951.

Brooks Atkinson's review was rather ambiguous, offering both praise and criticism:

Usually Miss Hellman controls her plays absolutely. This time she has let the characters take charge of their own affairs . . . She says that middle-aged people cannot escape from their pasts and that they are personally responsible for the sort of people they have become. Although this is true, it is not very profound nor original and it is seized upon here because the play is so diffuse and intangible.⁷⁰

The Herald Tribune called the play "a scattered script" and added, "Fortunately there are five stars and three featured players providing individuality and color beyond the writing."⁷¹

The Autumn Garden ran for only 101 performances. A tour with most of the original cast was sent out the next season, but did poorly and closed after only ten weeks.

During these years, Bloomgarden had remained active in the American Theatre Wing after the closing of the Stage Door

Canteen in 1946. He had helped in the creation of a training school for all phases of work in the theatre, and now was teaching a seminar on producing, which he continued to do for some time. He did not produce another play for more than a year and a half, and when he did, his choice seems to have been a response to a frightening malaise which held the whole country in its grip.

The House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities was formed in 1938. Familiarly known as "HUAC", it gained its strongest notoriety in the years from 1947 through the middle 1950's; when, under the leadership of Congressmen Martin Dies and John Woods, two Southern Democrats, the Committee purported to expose any person who worked to overthrow the government. However, for almost a decade its principal targets were Jews and blacks, against whom the Committee used insinuations which invariably remained unproven, but which did tremendous damage to reputations and characters.⁷² All this changed in 1948. With the election of Harry Truman, who had already begun to implement his anti-Communist drive by starting a new loyalty program for Federal employees, the Committee found new life. It now had an enemy, Communism, which could be fought with the official sanction of the President himself. The Justice Department next convened a Federal Grand Jury in New York which was given the legal means to prosecute those who were members of the American Communist party.

But the single most potent weapon the Committee received was the Attorney General's List. This paper,

originally intended as an internal document only, was a checklist of organizations with ties to one or more of four ideologies--Communism, Fascism, Totalitarianism and something called simply "subversive views." A person applying for employment with the government, who admitted to membership in the suspect organizations, could now legally be investigated to make certain that he was a loyal American.

Somehow, the list was released to Congress, to employers in the private sector, and to publicity-seeking blacklists. Thus, without actually charging illegal acts, and without allowing the means for individual reply, the government was able publicly to brand as disloyal anyone who had ever belonged to one of the suspect organizations, and suspicion was soon extended to those who were known to have attended a meeting, without necessarily joining the group. The unthinkable result was that any private citizen in possession of the List could, as Gary Wills states, "impugn another citizen's loyalty with what looked like the authorization of the United States government. From this single act, the general release of a document created for limited and internal use, arose the whole blacklisting campaign, the doctrine of guilt by association, the decade-long search of old letterheads and donations and attendance lists, the cobwebby stringing of 'ties' from shadow to shadow."⁷³

For the next several years international events seemed to conspire with the national hysteria to assist the machinations of the Committee. After the Communist seizure of the Chinese government, the explosion of an atom bomb in the

Soviet Union, and the convictions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for selling government secrets to the Russians, the Committee, with the help of a remarkable book published in 1950, decided to turn its attention to a far more glamorous group of possibly disloyal citizens than it had previously. The book was called Red Channels, and it had been compiled by a group of former employees of the Federal Bureau of Investigation with the help of a sometime radio producer named Vincent Hartnett. It was a small book and was divided into two sections. The first fifty pages listed Communist and "Red Front" organizations, the latter being groups which "sympathized with Communist goals." The remaining one hundred and fifty pages were a compilation of many hundreds of names of people supposedly associated with such groups.

Bloomgarden's name appeared in Red Channels as a "Red Fronter," and he was accused of sponsoring the production of the "Communist dominated play Death of a Salesman." He found himself among a rather mixed bag of personalities, including the playwright George S. Kaufman, the actor James Cagney, Lynn Riggs, who wrote Green Grow the Lilacs (which became the musical Oklahoma!), Gypsy Rose Lee, the burlesque star, and Irene Wicker, the "Singing Lady" of the children's radio show of the same name.⁷⁴ All were cited as supporters of Communist groups, but a greater concern for Bloomgarden was the possibility that two of his closest friends might soon be going to prison. Elia Kazan and Lillian Hellman were each called before the Committee and asked to reveal the names of any persons known by them to be associated with any of the groups

listed in Red Channels.

Kazan chose to cooperate with the Committee, and gave them the names of people who he said were Communist sympathizers. This caused a permanent break in his relationship with Bloomgarden, who refused to talk to him from then on. In his biography, Kazan talks of his decision and says, "I believed the Committee had a proper duty and I wanted to help break open the secrecy."⁷⁵ Hellman's response to a subpoena which she received on February 21, 1952, was as dramatic as anything she had ever written. Within two days of its receipt, and three months before she was due to testify, she put her beloved farm up for sale. She then worked out a careful analysis of what her financial future would be. The largest part of her income had come from writing for films, and she knew that since she did not plan to give the Committee the information they demanded, she would no longer be able to work in Hollywood. In her book Scoundrel Time, Hellman writes:

I had two polyp operations on my throat that year, and I think I remember the operations because they came two days after the opening night of the revival of The Children's Hour. I had directed the revival, and my memory of the operations is lying in bed thinking about my place in the theatre. Kermit Bloomgarden, the producer, had given a pleasant opening night party in a small Italian restaurant and, toward midnight, our press agent phoned in the New York Times review. I stood outside the phone booth as Kermit repeated the review to me, thinking what a fool I was to be so nervous about what anybody said about a play written eighteen years before. The theatre is, by necessity, often a silly business, and that night I seemed to me the sucker of the world.⁷⁶

This was her only acknowledgment of a friend's extraordinary act of generosity. By offering to produce the revival, and further, by suggesting that she direct it in spite

of her rather shaky past record in that department, Bloomgarden was giving her the opportunity to earn some money at a difficult time in her life. Thus, she would receive two fees and double royalties. The fact that in making the offer, which he did within three months of her well-publicized appearance before the Committee, he would possibly put his own professional future in jeopardy seems not to have occurred to her.

Even the choice of play indicates his willingness to take a serious risk to confirm his own beliefs. Eighteen years after its original production, The Children's Hour remained a searing indictment of those who would falsely accuse, and as Brooks Atkinson noted, "The implications are much broader now and have new political overtones."⁷⁷ By agreeing to let Hellman direct the revival, Bloomgarden took a still further risk, considering her past inability to communicate with actors, a failing that seemed almost innate, rather than being something that might improve with experience. Perhaps he sensed her need for personal affirmation at this difficult time in her life.

Kim Hunter and Patricia Neal were cast as the two accused schoolteachers. Hellman, obviously determined to rectify earlier mistakes, made an effort to get to know her actors rather than keeping them at a distance. She had become quite fond of Neal when the actress had appeared in Another Part of the Forest, and after Hunter was signed Hellman invited her to lunch to discuss the ways each of them worked. During the meal, the playwright confided to the actress an

acknowledgment of past problems in directing:

On Montserrat, idiot that I was, I thought I could go in there and somehow talk actor's language. I don't know what actor's language is! All I managed to do was screw myself up and screw them up. I didn't understand what I was saying. None of that foolishness for this production. I am going to talk in my own language, and if you don't understand what I'm saying, if it makes no sense in terms of the actor's needs, then we'll sit down and talk it out.⁷⁸

Hellman also invited the company to her home before rehearsals began, and explained her feelings about the way the play should be directed. Virginia Bloomgarden, who understudied the role of Karen and eventually played it, recalls Hellman's struggle to explain to Kim Hunter why she was dissatisfied with the latter's interpretation of the role. Hellman seemed frustrated in her efforts to make Hunter understand why the balance of tension between Karen and Martha (the Neal role) was being thrown off. Because Martha is the one who actually does have latent homosexual tendencies of which she becomes aware after the accusation, Hunter had apparently chosen to play Karen in a submissive, ultra-feminine way to counterpose the stronger style of Neal. Hellman felt that this was so damaging to her intentions in the play that she came close to firing the actress. Virginia Bloomgarden went backstage after a particularly abrasive rehearsal, to try and ease the tension by telling the young actress that Hellman saw Karen as the stronger one but that she did not know how to explain it in acting terms.⁷⁹

She seems to have succeeded, because Hunter began to play the role as Hellman wanted it, and the production started to come together. When it did open, on December 29, 1952, the

reviews were excellent. Richard Watts called it "a stunning tragedy . . . brilliant and powerful,"⁸⁰ while Brooks Atkinson wrote, "Serving as her own director, Miss Hellman has organized an excellent performance."⁸¹

In spite of a majority of favorable reviews, the play was unable to attract an audience, and Kim Hunter recalls Bloomgarden telling the cast and backers, "I think there is a great audience out there for this production, but they can't afford it. Will you all stick together with me?"⁸² With everyone taking pay cuts, he managed to hold the production together for six months, saying, "I can't stand the idea that this play won't last the season."⁸³ In spite of these efforts, the play lost its entire investment of \$50,000, and a road company the next season proved equally unsuccessful, losing \$19,657 in five weeks.⁸⁴

In late 1952, Bloomgarden sent out a tour of Joseph Kramm's play The Shrike, which had won the Pulitzer Prize as best drama of the year. A play of shattering tension, it starred José Ferrer as a man made so wretched by his marriage to a shrewish harridan that he tries to commit suicide, but is unsuccessful in his attempt. His wife promptly uses the botched attempt as an excuse to have him committed to a mental institution, and the body of the play deals with his frantic efforts to convince the doctors there of his sanity.

Ferrer directed the tour, which starred Van Heflin (who would later work for Bloomgarden in A View From the Bridge), and featured Doris Dalton as the wife. The producer's interest

was a financial one only. He simply arranged the tour, which did well on the road and provided some much needed income as he began preparations for his next production.

Though named in Red Channels, Bloomgarden was not called to testify before the Committee. Perhaps he was not a sufficiently public or glamorous figure to merit their attention but, for whatever reason, he was able to escape with his reputation undamaged. However, when Arthur Miller brought him a new play late in 1952, he would have a chilling reminder of what had happened to so many others.

Miller had been deeply troubled by the Committee's misuse of power, and found a strong parallel between their actions and those of the judges during the seventeenth-century witchcraft trials in Massachusetts. In his biography he writes:

The main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows--whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people. In other words . . . an act of contrition done not in solemn privacy but out in the public air . . . In effect, it came down to a governmental decree of moral guilt that could be made to disappear by ritual speech, intoning names of fellow sinners and recanting former beliefs . . . It was this immaterial element, the surreal spiritual transaction that now fascinated me, for the rituals of guilt and confession [at the HUAC hearings] followed all the forms of a religious inquisition, except, of course, that the offended parties were not God and his ministers but a congressional committee.⁸⁵

In April of 1952, he decided to go up to Salem and look through the local court records. The day before he left Elia

Kazan, who was shortly to appear before the Committee, asked to see him, and told Miller that he intended to give the Committee the information they wanted, naming names and dates. After this conversation, the playwright drove directly to Salem, and was so moved by the records of the trial, and the actual words of the citizens of Salem as written in their diaries and letters, that he soon forgot Kazan's shocking decision until he heard a radio report of the testimony while driving home. It was at that moment that he realized he had made a commitment with himself to write this play.⁸⁶

The Crucible tells the story of a Salem farmer who is asked to attest that certain of his neighbors are witches. He has had an adulterous affair with a young woman, and it is his guilt over this relationship that causes him to seek redemption by accepting a death sentence, rather than buying his freedom at the cost of condemning innocent people. Miller brought the finished play to Bloomgarden, and as they began production plans, they faced a painful decision. Neither felt able to work with Kazan again, and so they began to look for a director of comparable ability. Their choice was Jed Harris, a brilliant director who had been successful for more than twenty-five years. Among his many shows was George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber's Coquette in 1928, Our Town, by Thornton Wilder in 1938, and The Heiress, adapted by Ruth and Augustus Goetz from the Henry James novel in 1947. Harris had not worked in the last few years, and very possibly this inactivity was due to a major change in the economic structure of the theatre. Harris had always produced as well as directed his

own plays, depending on a single source of financial backing, usually a wealthy businessman. Now, however, costs had begun to escalate to a degree that made it difficult to find a single individual willing, or indeed, able to furnish the necessary sum. Instead, producers found their money through a limited partnership arrangement as described above, and as Martin Gottfried writes, "Harris remained adamant in his refusal to seek out investors, still too proud to submit his choice of play for someone else's approval."⁸⁷

George S. Kaufman once said "Every playwright has to have Jed Harris once, like the measles."⁸⁸ In the case of Miller and his producer, the contagion was more like a bubonic plague. Warned by many scarred survivors of the possibly destructive consequences of using this frighteningly eccentric man, Miller and Bloomgarden remained unconvinced and, based on the greatness of his past work, decided that he was the man for them.

Indeed, they found him delightful at their early meetings, and he accepted their contractual terms without a murmur. But he failed to send back a signed copy, and after some time Bloomgarden received instead a long letter requesting changes and new terms which the producer's lawyer, John Wharton, said were not possible.⁸⁹ After much back and forth by telephone and telegram, Harris asked Bloomgarden and Miller to come to his home. Once there, they were told that he would no longer talk to them, and they were no longer friends. Then he demanded that they rescind their last communication to him, a telegram giving him until 6 o'clock that evening to sign the

contract. Things began to heat up as Harris told Bloomgarden that he was a bad man, had acted in bad faith and could not be trusted. That did it. The usually unflappable producer, ordinarily the most courteous of men, responded in a manner never before seen by anyone with whom he had worked. He recalled:

Jed's accusation of "bad faith" apparently gave me the opportunity I had been waiting for. Using the vilest language I knew, I lit into him. I attacked him as an artist, as a man. I attacked his morals, his integrity, his right to breathe. I left nothing unsmearred. I was so unused to the experience of anger that I became breathless and overexcited and had to walk myself around the room to calm down. Miller and Harris sat frozen in their chairs; they had not said a word since I had begun. When I sat down, I said in a quiet voice, "Either you sign now or this thing is all off."⁹⁰

After Harris signed and the two men had left, Bloomgarden, tired and depressed, was certain that there had been no victory. He said to Miller:

We are in trouble. Everything we've heard about this man is true. He's dangerous because besides being a crazy son of a bitch, he is a moral and physical coward. Any man who can stand there and take what I dished out can only damage us in the long run. The first time he slips out of line we have got to get rid of him.⁹¹

Harris soon told Miller that the play needed much revision, and began working with him. Bloomgarden recalled, "Their working relationship horrified me. One day I came in on Arthur sitting typing a new scene as Jed pulled pages right out of the typewriter. This was my idea of how to produce hack work."⁹² Martin Gottfried says that Harris suggested co-authorship and shared royalties. The suggestion was refused.⁹³

A powerful cast was assembled for the show, including

Arthur Kennedy, Beatrice Straight, the eighty-year-old Walter Hampden, E. G. Marshall and Madelaine Sherwood in leading roles. Bloomgarden acted as his own company manager for the show, drawing a salary of \$200 a week. An article in the New York Times announcing the fact, discussed the growing complaint among producers. They asserted that under the law, they were finding it difficult to make a living, since they would receive no income from even a very successful show until all costs and particularly investors, were paid back. Thus, the playwright, director, and actors, received payments from the beginning, as did the investors, and often the show would close before the producer received a penny.⁹⁴

Once The Crucible started rehearsal, the troubles began almost immediately. Miller felt that Harris' concept of the play was totally wrong, and had led to gross misdirection. He writes, "Harris saw the production as a 'Dutch painting', a classical play that had to be nobly performed--an invitation to slumber, I thought."⁹⁵ This was vastly different from the playwright's concept of a group of peasant farmers in a primitive village. The actors became afraid of Harris' vicious temper and penchant for verbal abuse and ridicule. He gave them fixed places from which they were not allowed to move. Eye contact or emotional responses were forbidden. "He wanted to create a classical, depersonalized restraint and within ten days something leaden and dead lay on the stage,"⁹⁶ Miller says.

In desperation, Miller and Bloomgarden went to Harris and asked how he would feel about stepping aside. He calmly

agreed to being replaced if he would continue to receive his full fee and royalties. Bloomgarden was willing to consider it, but Miller became quite uncomfortable with the idea of publicly insulting a man of Harris' reputation, and the director remained.

Opening night in Wilmington, Harris did not watch the performance, choosing instead to spend the evening in a bar with Lillian Hellman and Miller's agent, Kay Brown. Yet he appeared backstage and told everyone how pleased he was with the performance. He told the actors that they need not rehearse the next day, and when Bloomgarden insisted that the company needed further work, Harris stormed out. Then began a series of truly bizarre occurrences. As Bloomgarden waited at the theatre for a camera crew which would be shooting cast picture for Life magazine, he received frantic messages from Lillian Hellman and Kay Brown, Miller's agent, that Harris was in the bar across the street throwing bottles and declaring that he was going to kill him. The women were truly frightened, but Bloomgarden went on with the picture call. He was standing on the stage when Harris burst in and flew past him, stopping only when he reached Miller's side, where he stood and said in a loud voice, "I'm going to kill that son of a bitch." He then turned on his heel, and again passed Bloomgarden as he exited hastily. Later, when Bloomgarden joined the others at the bar across the street, Harris was already there, but upon seeing the producer, he fled. The rest of the evening was a montage of Harris running before Bloomgarden in the hotel lobby, at the backstage food tables,

and various corners of the theatre. Late into the night, the producer continued to get telephone messages from terrified friends who were convinced of the seriousness of Harris' death threats.⁹⁷ Yet, the next day saw a calm and controlled Harris dutifully rehearsing the company, by now an embittered group who had had to endure his outrageous behavior for many weeks rather than a single, rather foolish evening.

The Crucible opened in New York on January 22, 1953 and received good reviews. Brooks Atkinson called it, "A powerful play, though of slightly lower stature than Death of a Salesman because of its emphasis upon the searing action rather than the humanity of the characters."⁹⁸ William Hawkins said, "Mr. Miller has made important advances in the poetic quality of his writing in The Crucible."⁹⁹

In spite of the notices, the play did not do well, lasting only a few months. Toward the end, Miller and Bloomgarden had the sets removed to save stagehands' salaries, and played the show in unchanging white light against black velours. This new simplicity and starkness seemed to enhance the production, Miller felt, but it could not save the play.¹⁰⁰

The Crucible won four Tony Awards; best play, playwright, producer, and best featured actress (Beatrice Straight). We may note that the play has received four major productions in England since then, and each has been critically acclaimed and enjoyed healthy runs. The first was at the Bristol Old Vic in 1954. Next, Tony Richardson and George Devine mounted a production for the English Stage Company in 1956, while Laurence Olivier directed it for the National

Theatre in 1965. Finally, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced it in 1986. It remains the most frequently performed of Miller's plays.

On May 10th through 12th, 1962, the play was performed at Boston University under the direction of Lloyd Richards. He used the original, longer version rather than the shorter published one. This production was a tryout for a proposed revival which Bloomgarden hoped to present in an Off-Broadway theatre the next season.¹⁰¹ Though the revival did not materialize, there remains a long and detailed critique by Bloomgarden which compares the two versions (see Appendix). His analysis is a forceful reminder of the theatrical intelligence and taste that were so much a part of his work.

Less than two weeks after the opening of The Crucible and while The Children's Hour was still running, Bloomgarden sent out a form letter to his "special priority list" of patrons. He urged them to order tickets well in advance for his next attraction, A Certain Joy, which would open in New York on March 5, 1953. Its author, Irving Ravetch, was described as "the brightest talent I have encountered amongst the new playwrights since Arthur Miller." The letter also named Daniel Mann as director. Mann's previous credits included William Inge's Come Back Little Sheba, the musical Paint Your Wagon, and Tennessee Williams' The Rose Tattoo.¹⁰² Bloomgarden had two co-producers on the show, named Peter Glenn and Thomas Hammond. A diligent search has failed to uncover any information about these two men, and it is quite possible

that their names appear above the masthead only because they brought large amounts of money into the production. Also, the fact that Bloomgarden does not include them in his promotional letter is significant, in that any previous connection with the theatre would have been worth a mention, using such phrases as "previously associated with" and adding the name of a known producer. The only thing we do know about them is that Hammond brought in \$12,000 which completed the financing.¹⁰³

Bloomgarden probably needed the money badly. He had not made a profit since Death of a Salesman in 1949. In the four years since, he had produced six original dramas and sent out the tour of The Shrike. Only the last earned any money. Montserrat, The Man, and The Legend of Sarah, were critical and financial disasters, and although The Autumn Garden, The Children's Hour, and The Crucible were important plays that earned more than decent reviews, the first two lost their entire investments, while the last paid back only half of its original costs. A brief notice in the New York Times was the first indication that the new show might be in trouble. It reported a one-day delay in the Wilmington opening, but gave no reason.¹⁰⁴ When A Certain Joy did open there on February 18, 1953, Variety suggested that "major surgery and some transfusions of the miracle kind" could help.¹⁰⁵ Local reviewers liked Walter Matthau as a romantic cad who seduces the foster mother of his son, whom he has not seen in several years. The actress Margo, who played the woman, and Jeff Silver as the boy who has built a heroic fantasy about the father he doesn't really know, also received good notices, but

the acting could not save the show. A second letter from Bloomgarden, dated February 19th, thanked ticket buyers for their support, while returning their checks. It goes on to say, "I regret to inform you that I am closing the play out of town and postponing the Broadway premiere to next season as the qualities inherent in the play have not been realized."¹⁰⁶ He had previously produced thirteen plays, and this was the first to close out of town.

Bloomgarden spent the next few months trying to sustain his faltering productions of The Children's Hour and The Crucible, both of which closed during the summer of 1953. He sent out road companies of both plays the next season, but they did not survive for more than a few weeks.

He was also working on a new proposal for financing, which was issued in the form of a publicity release on March 3, 1954. It stated that he was going to form a limited partnership corporation for the purpose of producing plays. Its structure would be the same as that of the standard limited partnership formed to produce a single play, in that he would be the general partner, and the investors would be the limited partners. It was suggested that the proposed capital be \$300,000. This fund was not just for a single production, but would be an ongoing entity, financing show after show.¹⁰⁷ In the news release, mention is made of this capital being used as a "revolving fund" for new plays, and this would seem to imply a way to get around the New York State law that prohibits a producer from using the profits of one show to keep another open, as it would not be specifically earmarked for any one

play. The problem is that if the first show were not a success, the "revolving fund" would become significantly depleted, and a second failure could wipe it out, particularly if one of the plays is an extremely expensive production, such as a musical.

This document reads very much like the work of a producer who has had a run of very bad luck, and is concerned about his ability to raise money for future productions. It is probably best that Bloomgarden apparently did not win over enough subscribers to his new plan to put it into effect, because his next production might have brought it to an abrupt end. Wedding Breakfast was a comedy written by Theodore Reeves, husband of Bloomgarden's chief play-reader, Pat Reeves. It dealt with the rather ordinary problems that beset two young couples, and it lacked any real tension. One of the young couples is unhappy because he is an up and coming merchant prince, while she dreams of an intellectual aesthete. The other pair is suffering mightily, because they have agreed to wait two years before marrying, in order to build a bank account. The play was not helped by its director, Herman Shumlin, whose ear for comedic dialogue was notoriously deaf. The production was not the stuff that long runs are made of, and the critics subsequently made this clear. Its out-of-town opening ran an hour too long, and the Broadway premiere was delayed for more than a week.¹⁰⁸ With a four-member cast including Virginia Vincent, Anthony Franciosa, Lee Grant and Harvey Lembeck, the play finally opened on November 20, 1954. John Chapman said of it, "Wedding Breakfast is on the slight

side and it does not begin moving in any particular direction until about half-way through the second of its three acts."¹⁰⁹ John McClain wrote, "There is a deluge of chatter, most of it written in a strange idiom which features the deletion of all but the key words in most sentences."¹¹⁰

Bloomgarden's response to the notices was quite atypical. He had always fought for plays he felt must be seen, but until now these were works which he felt had something important and significant to say. Now, however, he mounted a campaign to save a little comedy which had run for six weeks and was fading rapidly. On January 5th, the following advertisement appeared in the New York Times:

~~On the theatre-going public~~
 On January 15th I am Closing Wedding Breakfast. Yet I find this difficult to do. I feel that as a producer I must have failed in some way to communicate ~~yet I find this difficult to do. I feel that as a~~ to the theatre-going public how much fun and pleasure it would derive in seeing a play that is tender, touching and always enjoyable. The majority of the critics welcomed it. Night after night audiences laugh. And they are moved too, by the poignancy of the twin love stories.

Yet, for some unfathomable reason our audiences are not large enough to keep the play going. To those of you who are sitting back waiting for a later date, and to those of you who like the theatre, I say that you will miss something well worth seeing if you fail to buy your tickets now. I would like to give Wedding Breakfast the run it so richly deserves. But only a real avalanche of buying could change the closing date.

Kermit Bloomgarden¹¹¹

This was followed by a press release from the office, stating that a sudden upsurge in business would allow the closing notice to be rescinded, and that the show would continue indefinitely.¹¹² A few days later, a second release

announced that the weekly attendance had increased significantly since the appeal was made.¹¹³ The play finally closed on February 25th, having extended its run to 113 performances.

The closing of Wedding Breakfast signified the end of a terrible downward spiral in Bloomgarden's career. Until then, nothing he had produced since Death of a Salesman, regardless of intrinsic worth or fine reviews, was successful. But now he was to undergo the first of two astounding (and highly dramatic) reversals of fortune which he would experience during his lifetime. In a little over two years he would produce eight plays, six of which were of great significance, including his first two musicals, both huge successes.

CHAPTER IV

THE GLORY YEARS

The production history of Bloomgarden's next play, A View From the Bridge, is particularly significant because it demonstrates the importance of a shared vision between playwright, director and producer. The failure of the drama to attain the recognition that its author felt was its due, caused a rift between Miller and Bloomgarden which marked the end of their collaboration.

The new work had actually been incubating from 1947, the year of Miller's first success, All My Sons. Right after the opening of that show, he went through a kind of writer's post-partum depression, vaguely uncomfortable with his sudden success and questioning the meaning of it all. He took to wandering the streets of Brooklyn Heights, where he lived, for hours on end, and one day happened upon a strange sub-culture whose shadowy existence began to fascinate him. This was the world of the gangster-controlled waterfront, with its heritage of ancient Sicilian laws of survival. Here were the rigidly controlled hierarchies which performed rituals of selection that determined who should work and what tribute would be exacted for the privilege, which created a pervasive atmosphere of danger and retribution for those who sinned against the traditions.¹

For the next several weeks, the playwright spent hours huddled in rain-soaked doorways along with longshoremen awaiting the arrival of the hiring boss, who would make his choices and receive payment from the lucky ones. Miller also sat in the waterfront bars which the men frequented, and heard the stories of the terrible things that happened to those who defied the system. Eventually, he won their trust enough to meet privately with a few of their number, who were trying to organize a resistance to the brutal leaders of this dark kingdom.

Out of this experience came the seed of an idea to which Miller returned occasionally during the next eight years, but which never really took form until he received an urgent phone call from Martin Ritt in the summer of 1955. Ritt had directed Bloomgarden's production of The Man, and was now working as an actor in Clifford Odets' last play, The Flowering Peach. Its producer, Robert Whitehead, had agreed to allow the cast to use the theatre on Sunday evenings when the house was dark, and Ritt wanted to know if Miller had a one-act play that they could use. The playwright was intrigued by the idea of writing a short play, and ten days later he handed Ritt the script of A Memory of Two Mondays, a short piece which took place in the world of factory workers struggling to survive the Depression of the 1930's. Ritt liked the play, but felt that they needed a curtain-raiser. Once again Miller obliged, and within a few days gave Ritt a second short play called A View From the Bridge.² This was the play that came from his time on the waterfront. He had tried to write it several times during

the intervening years, but now it seemed to pour out of him, virtually writing itself.

When The Flowering Peach closed unexpectedly before the new plays could be staged, Miller and Bloomgarden decided to bring them to Broadway as a complete evening, with the same cast performing in each play. Both men soon realized that A View From the Bridge was the more important of the two plays (it ran for over two hours without an intermission). It is a stark, tension-filled drama about a longshoreman named Eddie Carbone, who harbors unconscious feelings of desire for the lovely young niece who lives with him and his wife. This repressed passion suddenly surfaces when a handsome young Sicilian, an illegal immigrant seeking work on the waterfront, comes into the girl's life and the two young people fall in love.

Eddie is a decent man who is driven to madness because of a jealous rage which he continues to deny until he explodes in a murderous fury. The play ends tragically, with Eddie lying dead in the arms of the wife who had always known the secret he couldn't bear to acknowledge, even to himself.

The cast of A View From the Bridge included Van Heflin as Eddie, Eileen Heckart as his wife Beatrice, and Gloria Marlowe as his niece Catherine. Rehearsals went well, although Miller had difficulty in focusing his attention on his work. He was, as he later wrote, consumed with his affair with the actress Marilyn Monroe, and his marriage of many years was coming apart.³ Thus, he remained preoccupied and remote from the proceedings. He now feels that the fairly short life of

the original production was due to the fact that from the beginning both director and producer had an erroneous vision of the play, seeing it as a commercial Broadway melodrama about revenge, rather than the small stark tragedy of repressed incest that he had written.⁴

However, it is possible that Miller's memory is faulty in his latter-day perceptions of what went wrong more than thirty years ago, since the New York reviews do not bear him out. After a brief skirmish with the Boston censors, which caused the deletion of much of the profanity during the pre-Broadway run, the plays opened in New York on September 30, 1955.⁵ Brooks Atkinson had little trouble in seeing the structure of A View From the Bridge as a retelling of classic themes. He called it, "a grim, rasping drama on a theme that Greek dramatists applied to kings and queens . . . Mr. Miller tells the story in epic form. A neighborhood lawyer serves as chorus . . . In the final scene, after the catastrophe, he relates it to the ancient myths of Greece." When Atkinson does fault the play, it is on the grounds of the writing, not the production. He says, "As a work of art it aspires a little above its station. In both the writing and the acting it is self-conscious, as if both author and actors were always trying for something more exalted than the narrative can yield." Atkinson was not impressed with A Memory of Two Mondays, calling it, "a pedestrian chronicle of working-class life in a Manhattan warehouse."⁶

Walter Kerr also found classic references in A View From the Bridge, citing the lawyer's role as one which "exists

to throw in a choral word or two as the curious tension mounts." He, too, felt that the play did not reach the heights of classic tragedy to which it aspired. The final paragraph of his review reads, "The last note of exultation that might have made A View From the Bridge a major work from a major playwright is missing--and missing in a context that begs for it. But the evening remains a must for anyone who is at all interested in what the contemporary American theatre is thinking about." Kerr was also dismissive of A Memory of Two Mondays, saying that it could have been omitted with little loss.⁷

Sometime after the opening, Miller began to work on a full-length version of A View From the Bridge, and a publicity release dated January 25, 1956 announces a one-time showing of the expanded version at the Coronet theatre.⁸ It was also staged in London by the director Peter Brook in October of 1956, and ran for eight months. A film of the play was made in 1961, starring the Italian actor Raf Vallone, and Maureen Stapleton.

Just after the Broadway opening, Bloomgarden received a letter from Milton Weintraub, the Secretary-Treasurer of ATPAM--the Association of Theatre Publicists and Managers--informing him that his name had been placed on the union's bond-exempt list, a rather touching gesture of faith for a producer who had not had a financially successful show in years. It meant that a letter of guarantee over Bloomgarden's signature would now be acceptable to the union, and he no longer need post a bond.⁹

Some years before A View From the Bridge, Bloomgarden had become interested in the dramatic possibilities of the diaries of a teen-age Jewish girl who had perished in the Holocaust. They had been published in English as Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, and in 1951 he showed the book to Lillian Hellman with a view towards adapting it for the stage. Hellman agreed that it would indeed make a moving stage presentation, but felt that it was not her kind of subject matter. She suggested her friends, the screenwriting team of Frances and Albert Hackett, who were delighted to take on the project.¹⁰ Bloomgarden secured the rights, and they began to work on it in 1953, when trouble suddenly erupted in the form of a journalist and novelist named Meyer Levin. Levin had been one of the first people to see the diaries in Europe, and in return for finding an American publisher, he had a loose agreement with Otto Frank, Anne's father, that he would have the first chance to adapt the property for the stage, and would receive the rights if his adaptation won the approval of a major Broadway producer.¹¹

Levin submitted a draft to Cheryl Crawford, who optioned it but subsequently let the option drop, feeling that the work was not good enough for a professional production. It was at this point that Bloomgarden asked for and secured the rights from Otto Frank. Levin has written that Frank had actually come to New York to oversee the authenticity of the Crawford production, "but at that point the prominent playwright Lillian Hellman and her producer, Kermit

Bloomgarden, had persuaded him [Frank], he told me, that as a novelist I was no dramatist, that my work was unstageworthy, that it had to be discarded and another version written."¹² However, Crawford, in an interview with William Wright, insisted that she had already decided that Levin's version was not good enough. As Wright notes, "Levin's entire case depended, finally, on a point of artistic judgment; whether or not his version was of Broadway quality. According to Cheryl Crawford it was not."¹³

In January of 1954, an advertisement appeared in the New York Post, signed by Meyer Levin. It was entitled "A Challenge to Kermit Bloomgarden" and in it, without any substantiation, he accuses Bloomgarden of illegally securing the dramatic rights despite knowing that Levin had already adapted the book. He goes on to add, "Cheryl Crawford was to produce it, but had a change of plan, common in the theatre. Thereafter, three good producers made offers for my play . . . Mr. Frank was influenced to reject these offers. A powerful theatrical attorney gave me just thirty days to secure an acceptable producer from a restricted list."¹⁴

Meanwhile, the Hacketts were spending a considerable amount of time on their adaptation, and by the spring of 1955, it was ready for production. Thus, Bloomgarden was doing the pre-production work on two complex and serious dramas at the same time, as The Diary of Anne Frank opened on October 16, 1955, less than three weeks after A View From the Bridge. Joseph Schildkraut starred as Otto Frank, and the seventeen-year-old Susan Strasberg, daughter of Lee, was chosen to play

Anne. Garson Kanin, who directed the play, had both written and directed Max Gordon's phenomenally successful Born Yesterday in 1946, and was also a top-ranked screenwriter. Without waiting to see the opening night reviews, Bloomgarden sent Kanin a note that says much about a Broadway producer who didn't know whether he had a hit, before he wrote it:

Dear Gar:

I want you to know how proud I am to be presenting your production of The Diary. Yours was a job of strength, intelligence, imagination, perseverance, and professionalism. No one that I've worked with before has had all this and also remained as decent and friendly and cooperative as you have been. You've made the play come alive.

Best,

Kermit¹⁵

Otto Frank, too, wrote a moving letter to the company just before the opening in which he affirms the rightness of Bloomgarden as producer and Kanin and the Hacketts as director and writers:

For weeks Mr. and Mrs. Hackett kept me faithfully informed about the preparations for it, about the rehearsals and the progress made. Having met them and Mr. Kanin personally in Amsterdam, and knowing Mr. Bloomgarden and his high qualities, I was convinced that the task of producing, writing and directing the play was in the best possible hands. Then I heard that for each character the actors and actresses had been chosen with the greatest care, all of them inspired by Anne's life and ideas and conscious of their task to convey her spirit to the audience.¹⁶

By the time opening night neared, Meyer Levin's behavior had become so erratic, as he continued his campaign of harrassment, that Bloomgarden hired security people for the premiere in case Levin tried to disrupt the performance. But

all went well, and the reviews were brilliant. Walter Kerr wrote:

Nearly all the characters in The Diary of Anne Frank--they are Dutch Jews hiding out from Hitler in a dingy and overcrowded garret--are doomed to death. Yet the precise quality of the new play at the Cort is the quality of glowing, ineradicable life--life in its warmth, its wonder, its spasms of anguish and its wild and flaming humor . . . The circumstances around her [Anne] are the circumstances of despair and decay. In the midst of this, a fresh and shining dignity, a springtime innocence and an instinctive honor rise to fill the shabby room.¹⁷

Brooks Atkinson, also, was deeply moved by the play, writing:

From any practical point of view the job of making a play out of the diary of Anne Frank is impossible. Perhaps that is why Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have succeeded so well. They have not contrived anything. They have left the tool-kit outside the door of their workroom. They have absorbed the story out of the diary and have related it simply . . . Nothing momentarily dramatic happens. It is a story of stealth, boredom, bickering, searching for comfort in other people, dreams, fears, hunger, anger and joy. It is lightly bound together by the character of an adolescent girl who is on tiptoe before life. She is amusing and vexing but also unconquerable because she is in love with life and squeezes the bitterness and sweetness out of every moment that comes her way.¹⁸

The play was a huge hit. It ran for 717 performances and won Tony Awards for best play, playwright, and producer. It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Outer Circle Award, and Bloomgarden won both a personal Tony Award as producer as well as the Shubert Foundation Award for Outstanding Individual Contribution to the New York Theatrical Season.

A year later, in an interview, Bloomgarden admitted how important that success was to his career. Talking about his

past efforts, he said, "Every time I did a show I had a tough time raising the money, especially the important plays. The Diary of Anne Frank--it was almost impossible to raise the money, and if it went broke, I'd have gone broke."¹⁹

In March of 1957, Meyer Levin filed suit against Bloomgarden, Otto Frank, and Cheryl Crawford, charging that they defrauded him of his rights by not allowing his version of the play to be produced. Once again he said that his play was rejected in the interests of crass commercialism, and that the ideals of Anne Frank as the symbol of modern day persecution were being trampled upon. He won a jury verdict which was later overturned by the judge.²⁰ In 1959, a film was made of the play, which starred Millie Perkins in the role of Anne. Finally, on November 21, 1986, in Rogersville, Tennessee, county officials refused to allow a performance of the play by a local theatre company, on the grounds that it was anti-Christian.²¹

Lillian Hellman, not generally thought of as a fey spirit, has written that she took on the project of adapting Jean Anouilh's play, The Lark, out of mischief, not need. Bloomgarden had bought the American dramatic rights and wanted Hellman to adapt it. He urged her to go to London and see the Christopher Fry version which was playing at the time. She didn't like it, and while dining with Anouilh's agent, Dr. Van Loewen, she told him that she didn't think the project was for her. He agreed, and said that it should really be the work of a poet. Piqued by his reaction, Hellman went back to America

and agreed to do the play.²² Bloomgarden later told an interviewer:

I came to the conclusion some time ago that both French and English playwrights have a tendency to overwrite. You just can't get American audiences to sit in the theatre listening to those long conversations. Frankly, I also was afraid that Fry might even add to Anouilh. I wanted an American playwright who understands the problem, someone who not only would scrupulously interpret the original author's intent but who also could edit and cut and dramatize for local consumption.²³

Hellman saw Joan in a distinctly non-poetic light:

History's first modern career girl, wise, unattractive in what she knew about the handling of men . . . The miraculous self-confidence that carried defeated men into battle against all sense and reason, forced a pious girl into a refusal of her church, forced the terrible death that still has to do with the rest of us, forever, wherever her name is heard.²⁴

Julie Harris was signed for the title role, and Hellman agreed to relinquish the directorial work to Joseph Anthony, a young director with the successful productions of Bullfight and The Rainmaker to his credit. Today, Anthony feels that she accepted him because she knew she could easily dominate a relative newcomer.²⁵ She began to do so almost immediately, and he finally asked her not to criticize his work in front of the actors. She agreed, but shortly thereafter Anthony was told by one of the cast that Hellman was now sending mute signals of agreement or disagreement to the stage as she sat behind him. In addition, her relationship with Anouilh was antagonistic from the beginning.²⁶ Max Allentuck feels that she wanted more discussion and interpretation than he was willing to give an adaptor.²⁷ Bloomgarden, as was his wont, defended his playwright-adaptor, and even before rehearsals

started, he sent an impassioned letter to Anouilh, clearly stating his position in the matter and carefully spelling out his role as producer.²⁸ (See appendix).

The notices in Boston were excellent, yet the play failed to attract an audience, losing more than \$8000 during the stay. It opened in New York on November 17, 1955 to extremely good reviews. The New York Times said, "Although the story of Saint Joan is old, the spirit is endlessly new. Lighted by the radiance of Julie Harris it is magnificent again . . . This drama seemed no more than an intellectual attitude in Christopher Fry's adaptation in London last spring . . . But Lillian Hellman's adaptation has solid strength in the theatre."²⁹

Walter Kerr said, "A great deal of the biting briskness, the cleaver-sharp determination, the haughty and hard-headed candor of this Joan comes from the pen of the lady who carved out and carved up The Little Foxes." He also praised Hellman's language, noting, "It has a simple, clear, timeless ring to it, and its directness is exhilarating."³⁰ The Lark ran for 229 performances, and Julie Harris won a Tony Award as best actress.

Years later, near the end of his career, Bloomgarden was asked by an interviewer how he survived the incredible production schedule he had maintained from July of 1955, when A View From the Bridge went into rehearsal, until the opening of The Lark less than four months later. He replied, "I was crazy. I would fly from Philadelphia to Boston, watch A View From the Bridge one night and Diary of Anne Frank the next.

Once in a while I would stop in New York and do casting on The Lark".³¹

Bloomgarden's next production was also an adaptation of an earlier work, though in radically different form. In 1924, the playwright Sidney Howard wrote a play called They Knew What They Wanted, which took place in California's Napa Valley wine-growing country, and told the story of an elderly farmer who sends for a mail-order bride, enclosing a photograph of his handsome young foreman rather than his own. The woman is far younger than he, an unhappy and lonely waitress who has never lived in a rural area. The ensuing love story is filtered through subplots including labor union struggles, politics and religion. It won the Pulitzer Prize, and about twenty-eight years later it caught the eye of the Broadway and Hollywood composer Frank Loesser, who had written words and music for Where's Charley in 1948, and Guys and Dolls in 1950. He began a musical adaptation of Howard's play, pruning away the subplots and reducing it to the basic love story. The score however, was so complex and innovative that it was closer to opera than a Broadway musical.³²

By the spring of 1955 the show, now called The Most Happy Fella, was completed and Loesser, who had given the production rights to his wife Lynn, decided that the project was too important to be entrusted to her alone, since it was her first. They asked Blomgarden, who was then working on both Diary of Anne Frank and The Lark to join them, and he accepted their invitation. The situation of one producer being a

neophyte and the other having more than twenty years experience did not present the problems one might normally expect, because Mrs. Loesser was anxious to learn and Bloomgarden had always been generous in sharing his knowledge with less experienced members of his companies. Max Allentuck notes:

Kermit would never let anyone get in the way, but he was very good about always making sure his co-workers--authors, other producers--were involved in meetings. If there was a press meeting, a decision about a piece of art, a logo, he always called them all in to see what reaction they had. He kept them involved--not deeply, but on the perimeter. He was the one who called the shots but he made sure that his co-workers were part of it. He was good about that, always, and he was very smart.

The thing about Kermit and the people close to him--his staff--was that nobody yessed him. He was lucky in that. If he liked a property and he gave it to me or someone else and we didn't like it, we would say so. There was no phumphering around. At the time Diary was done--there was a glut of books about the Holocaust--and I said, "Is this the right time to do it," and he said, "You may be right, but its a good play and I'm going to do it." In the final analysis, he called the shots."³³

In working on his first musical, Bloomgarden found that this traditionally "lighter" form of theatre involved far more complexities and logistics than he was used to. There was an additional union to deal with--the American Federation of Musicians--and a far larger company than would be found in most non-musical dramas. There was a score that called for thirty-six musicians, a conductor, a music arranger, and an assistant conductor (usually one of the musicians). There were both singing and dancing choruses, and the auditions to find them would take at least eight days. This meant the rental of a theatre for an additional week, as well as salaries for two or three stage managers to run the auditions, plus a pianist.

Traditionally, each group, (male singers, female singers, male dancers, and female dancers) auditions separately, but after all the Equity members in each of these divisions are seen, the producer is required to hold open calls, during which anyone walking in off the street must be seen. These auditions usually add up to seeing between 600 and 800 people, all anxious to fill between eight and thirty-two jobs. The only relief for the people sitting out front (producer, director, choreographer, musical director, composer, librettist, and all their assistants) is a preliminary step, which is called "typing". That is, the producer may, if he chooses, line applicants up across the stage (usually twenty at a time) and eliminate as many as he wishes, on the basis of their being physically wrong for the show.

Rehearsal periods are also more complex and more costly. Several studio rooms must be rented so that singers, dancers, and principals may rehearse separately. A musical means more stage managers, more stagehands, more lights and scenery, more (and more expensive) costumes, and therefore more (and more expensive) cleaning bills. Also, there is need for more frequent replacement of costumes, as they usually receive much harder wear in a musical production.

A musical needs a larger theatre, which means a higher rental, and the logistics of out-of-town travel involve fifty or sixty people, rather than the twenty or fewer in a non-musical play.

When The Most Happy Fella returned to New York for its opening on May 31, 1956, its producer already had two

successful shows--Diary of Anne Frank and The Lark--running, and the critics now gave him a third hit with their jubilant welcome for The Most Happy Fella. Brooks Atkinson said, "Mr. Loesser has caught the anguish and the love in some exalting music. Broadway is used to heart. It is not accustomed to evocations of the soul."³⁴ Richard Watts added, "[The play] has an impressive score, a sound dramatic book, excellent singing and acting . . . The tale is told with considerable dramatic effectiveness."³⁵

The Most Happy Fella ran for 676 performances and sent out a touring company and a bus-and-truck production, both of which were very successful. The latter is a considerably cut-down production, which uses less scenery, cheaper costumes, unknown names, and just a few musicians. It literally does travel by a bus for the company, and a large truck for the physical production. Rather than playing major cities for weeks or months at a time, as does the first touring company, it plays smaller towns for one or two performances, often in high school gymnasiums or on college campuses.

The show won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as best musical of the year.

When The Most Happy Fella closed in the fall of 1957, it had earned a profit of \$260,000 on an investment of \$375,000. In 1989, the cost of producing a full-size Broadway musical ranges from three to five million dollars, or about ten times that of 1955. Thus, an equivalent profit would be two to three million dollars. Even today, the show continues to earn income for its investors through record sales and productions in

summer stock and by amateur companies.

In a newspaper article published shortly after the show opened, entitled "In Tribute to Loesser, Bloomgarden", Whitney Bolton discusses the contribution of the gifted composer-lyricist, and then goes on to say:

There is one more hero thoroughly to be celebrated. His name is Kermit Bloomgarden, who almost may be called a one-man theatrical season.

Since last fall Mr. Bloomgarden has brought to the theatre of New York, A View From the Bridge which was not a profitable production but plainly a respected one, The Diary of Anne Frank, a magnificent contribution to the season, The Lark, Miss Lillian Hellman's beautiful adaptation of the Anouilh version of the Joan of Arc story, and now The Most Happy Fella. The producing of any of these would be a season's work for most managers. Almost any manager in town would have been proud and content to call it a season worthwhile with either The Lark or The Diary of Anne Frank. Certainly, to have produced both would have been a full card of work. But to add A View From the Bridge and now this towering musical was to make a season for one man in which the wonder is that he had the energy to do it and the strength to survive.

It is not possible to express one's thanks to Mr. Bloomgarden. He provided four works of singular distinction and merit, he cast them impeccably, he mounted them with taste and imagination.³⁶

In June of 1956, with both Diary of Anne Frank and The Most Happy Fella still running, the New York Times reported an unusual proposal made by the producer, who was enjoying financial stability for the first time in years. Bloomgarden told the Times that he intended to present to the League of New York Theatres a plan whereby certain seats at every play on Broadway would be set aside for high school students who could purchase them for seventy cents.

He had already set aside twenty-five seats in the Cort Theatre, where Diary of Anne Frank was playing, and subsequently did the same for The Lark. He felt that this

might be a way to attract young people to the theatre at a price they could afford and might lead to their becoming life-long theatre goers who would sit further down, as adults. He added that he was aware that producers often did this with failing plays, but it was his hope to change this. "I've always wanted to make this a general practice, and I wanted to be in a position first where I, myself, was doing it. Then I could say to the boys, 'Look, I'm doing it. How about doing it, too?'"³⁷ Though Bloomgarden's plan was never generally adopted, it has existed on an individual basis for more than thirty years, the successful Les Miserables being a recent example of a play whose producers have set aside student tickets from the beginning.

Later in the same year, Bloomgarden received the first of a series of offers from television production companies which sought his services as a producer of live plays and films. Showcase Productions, Inc. drew up a proposal inviting him to seek and acquire properties which he would then develop into films for television, a proposal which would have left him little time for his own work.³⁸ Columbia Pictures also made him an offer which he found more attractive. It included a substantial yearly fee in return for allowing Columbia to invest up to fifty percent of the monies needed for any of his Broadway productions that interested them. At the same time, he would produce television pilot films for an additional fee.³⁹ This plan, too, turned out to be too time-consuming for a man who wished to continue to produce live theatre, since it would involve his spending extended periods of time on the West

coast. However, Columbia did, in fact, put up a substantial amount of the backing for Bloomgarden's 1964 production Anyone Can Whistle, in return for the rights to produce the record album.

During these negotiations, the business of producing went on, and after some disappointing news Bloomgarden sent the following telegram to the playwright Tennessee Williams, which suggests the grace with which he conducted himself in the theatre:

Dear Tennessee:

I gathered there was a change in your producing plans for Orpheus Descending and that another producer was selected. As Audrey Wood knows, I told her more than a year ago how excited I was about the script and how anxious I was to do a play of yours. Needless to say I was very disappointed to lose this opportunity. I have the greatest admiration for your work and it would be a proud day for me to have the honor to bring a play of yours to fruition on Broadway. Despite the fact that a decision has been made on Orpheus Descending, the reason for this wire is to say I look forward to one day producing one of your plays.

Sincerely,

Kermit⁴⁰

Williams' reply was equally gracious, and concludes, "However, I do sincerely hope that some time you and I can get together as I respect so highly your values in the theatre, your dedication to plays that have something to say of value in our time."⁴¹

During this extremely productive time in his career, Bloomgarden still found time to work with the American Theatre Wing, and in October of 1956, the New York Times reported that

he, along with Joseph Anthony, would give a seminar entitled "How to Get In to See Producers and What to Do Then". At the time, he had a new show in rehearsal, Arch Obeler's The Night of the Auk. It was directed by Sidney Lumet, whom Bloomgarden had known as a child actor with the Group, and it starred the film and stage actor Claude Rains. The play tells the story of a group of scientists returning to earth on a spaceship, after being the first to land on the moon. Tragedy has stalked the enterprise, one man dying mysteriously on the moon, and several others on the trip back. They never do land, because at the moment of re-entry, a series of nuclear explosions destroys the earth. The dialogue is heavy with philosophical statements of a particularly pretentious nature. It asks many questions, but provides few answers.

The Night of the Auk opened on December 3, 1956 and received universally negative notices. Brooks Atkinson, perhaps looking for something positive to say, called Howard Bay's design of the interior of the ship the best thing in the show,⁴² while Walter Kerr complained that there was no action in the play, as the men were just standing around hoping to find out what had happened.⁴³

Two years later, speaking of Bloomgarden, Lumet was to tell an interviewer:

I think he's one of the best. He assembles all of the elements; he doesn't panic. He is not a tamperer. If a play is wrong, it's wrong, but that's what he bought. He trusts the people he hires and backs them, and he makes a genuine creative contribution along the way. I was with him when we read the New York reviews of The Night of the Auk. He merely said, "We'll close Saturday." He was saddened by it, but there were no tears, no recriminations. He was very adult about it

all.⁴⁴

Bloomgarden's next venture was equally unfortunate, and aside from an out-of-town review, little is known about Maiden Voyage. Bloomgarden acted as co-producer with Anna Deere Wiman, wife of another Broadway producer, Dwight Deere Wiman. The play was a comedy by Paul Osborn, who had previously written A Bell For Adano, which was an adaptation of John Hersey's novel, and the far more successful On Borrowed Time. Maiden Voyage concerned some sly goings-on among the Gods on Olympus and starred Melvyn Douglas, Mildred Dunnock, and Walter Matthau. The theatrical newspaper Variety often sent reviewers to look at new productions before they came into New York, and this time the report was not too bad, suggesting only that with some revision the play would probably do well on Broadway.⁴⁵ No evidence has yet been found as to why Bloomgarden decided to close it out of town.

There is, however, a rather charming footnote to this otherwise disappointing production. When Arthur Miller was in London to oversee the casting of the Peter Brook production of A View From the Bridge, Marilyn Monroe was also there, filming The Prince and the Showgirl with Laurence Olivier. Bloomgarden sent Miller a telegram in which he said that he thought Monroe would be wonderful playing the leading female role in Maiden Voyage.⁴⁶ Miller replied that she was too exhausted to undertake such an effort, but he was quite certain that when she did make her stage debut, she would prove to be "one of the greatest stars we ever saw."⁴⁷ Bloomgarden possibly felt that

he owed Miller some sort of explanation for his suggestion, and the final exchange in the correspondence includes the following:

I would like you and Marilyn to know why I thought she would be right for us and it would be good for her, and that you both understand that it was not her name I wanted, but her talent. I wanted what I saw in her the first few minutes of my meeting with her when she walked into our house for dinner without makeup.⁴⁸

In early 1957 Ketti Frings, a Hollywood screenwriter of note, wrote an adaptation for the stage of Thomas Wolfe's autobiographical novel Look Homeward, Angel. She showed it to her friend Mildred Dunnock, who immediately saw the potential of this beautiful play, plus a fine part for herself as the mother of the dreaming adolescent Eugene Gant. She took the script to Bloomgarden and also left a copy at the office of Robert Whitehead, another leading producer at the time. Luckily for Bloomgarden, Whitehead was out of town, and when Bloomgarden read the play, he was as moved and excited as Dunnock had been. He called her immediately, saying that he wanted to produce it as soon as possible. However, he did not think that Dunnock was right for the part of the tough, cold-hearted boarding-house keeper. She yielded to his decision because, as she later said, "Kermit is a fine producer. He has great integrity. He produces the plays he want to produce, and he puts into the casts the people he feels should be in them."⁴⁹ It should be added that as a gesture of thanks, Bloomgarden assigned a percentage of his personal profit from

the show to Dunnock.

Bloomgarden sent a script to Joan Crawford, who returned it with a note explaining why she could not do it at that time, and then added, "I think Miss Davis [i.e., Bette Davis] is an idiot to turn it down."⁵⁰ Obviously, the producer had a very specific image in his mind for the role. The part went eventually to Jo Van Fleet, while Anthony Perkins, son of the actor Osgood Perkins, played Eugene. The role of his father, W. O. Gant, was played by the Welsh actor, Hugh Griffith.

Virginia Bloomgarden was working in television at the time, and recommended a fine young director named George Roy Hill to her husband. Though he had never done a major Broadway show, Hill's television work made an excellent impression on the producer, who signed him to direct the new offering. It was difficult to raise money for this stark drama, and as the rehearsal date neared, Bloomgarden was still missing \$40,000 of the \$125,000 he needed. He finally had to take on a co-producer, in the form of a group called Theatre 200, Inc., a syndicate composed of 200 individual investors mostly from Pittsburgh, and headed by a man named Edward Spector. The terms were not easy for the producer, who had to give up a share of his participation in the show.⁵¹

Look Homeward, Angel opened on November 28, 1957 to rave reviews. Brooks Atkinson called it, "A solid drama . . . played with great tenderness and passion . . . It has gargantuan humor and vitality."⁵² Walter Kerr wrote, "The elusive borderline between fiercely contending truths is, under

George Roy Hill's unerring direction, precisely trod by an entire company through five mercurial scenes."⁵³ The play won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Outer Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. It ran for 564 performances.

In February of 1958, Theatrical Interests Plan, Inc. (TIP), announced that it had acquired a "substantial managerial interest" in Look Homeward, Angel from its producer. Like Theatre 200, TIP was a syndicate of investors, and they bought twenty percent of the producer's share. In addition, Theatre 200 also bought five percent of Bloomgarden's share for an announced sum of \$25,000.⁵⁴ The show's good reviews and the additional prospects of a road tour, a film sale, and foreign rights made it an attractive venture for the two groups, but it turned out to be less profitable than expected.

A year after the play's opening, Bloomgarden wrote to Ketti Frings, obviously angry at what he termed her "harping on my handling of this show," which he attributed to either ignorance or lack of understanding of how Broadway works. He chided her for her refusal to acknowledge the error they both committed in not signing Anthony Perkins to a longer contract. Mrs. Frings had pushed for four months, while Bloomgarden insisted on eight. The play had made Perkins an overnight star, and now that he had left, the box-office had fallen off seriously. They had not been able to replace him with an equally magnetic draw, and the future was uncertain.

Bloomgarden was furious with Frings' statement that he should monitor expenses more carefully, and reminded her that she was the only playwright he ever presented who refused to

fly in to see how the production was holding up unless he paid for the trip. Finally, he suggested that she come to him with her questions and complaints "rather than every Tom, Dick or Harry who probably knows less than you do about the operation of a Broadway play."⁵⁵

He was obviously not completely successful in his efforts, because a second letter over Max Allentuck's signature went out to Frings on January 16, 1959, and also attempted to answer her complaints about what she evidently considered heel-dragging in organizing a tour. Allentuck expressed great concern about the poor audience reception of serious drama outside of New York, and cited the examples of Sunrise at Campabello and Two for the Seesaw, two fine plays which failed on the road in spite of excellent notices. He also explained the need to have a star who was more or less a household word, citing it as the most important prerequisite for a successful tour.⁵⁶

A thirty-five week tour was arranged, starring John Barrymore, Jr. and was sent out in October of 1959. It amassed an advance sale of \$600,000, but would need \$875,000 just to break even. It was unable to reach that sum, and thus the tour was not financially successful.⁵⁷

During the rehearsal period of Look Homeward, Angel, Bloomgarden received a telephone call from a California film composer and radio personality named Meredith Willson. There was a wistful note in Willson's voice as he asked the producer if he would care to hear the score of a show he had written,

but he cheered up immediately upon Bloomgarden's agreeing to listen to a runthrough. Willson's request marked the closing of one door and the opening of another, after a long and frustrating effort to bring this project to fruition. He had been approached five years earlier by the producing team of Feuer and Martin to write a musical about small-town America at the turn of the century, and loved the idea. He went to work and quickly completed a draft which his producers found exciting, but which they felt needed more work. For the next four years, Willson rewrote and revised the music and lyrics, while his partner Franklin Lacy refined the book, but each version was either not quite what Feuer and Martin had in mind, or else their schedules would not accomodate a new production at that moment. Finally, feeling the show was ready to go, Willson presented the producers with an ultimatum to either produce the show within the next few months or release him from his contract. They offered him a compromise; if he would write an American Indian show, they would produce it first, and The Music Man, as the new show was called, immediately afterwards. Willson promptly secured his release and came to New York, looking for a producer.⁵⁸

Bloomgarden and Allentuck went to the home of Herbert Greene, music director of The Most Happy Fella, to hear Willson and his wife Rini sing the story of the irresistible con man who comes to a small Iowa town in 1911. He convinces the gullible inhabitants to buy a series of music lessons for their children, and to purchase (payment in advance, please) musical instruments to be delivered subsequently, but which, of course,

do not exist. Bloomgarden and Allentuck were utterly enchanted by the music, and the story of Professor Harold Hill's capitulation to the prim town librarian, Marion Paroo. The producer agreed immediately to produce the show, and went home in a state of euphoria.

Morton Da Costa, who had directed Plain and Fancy in 1955 and Auntie Mame in 1956, was signed to stage the new offering, and they immediately began to look for their star. It was absolutely essential to cast the pivotal role of Harold Hill properly, and to Bloomgarden it seemed that half the male stars of Hollywood and Broadway auditioned for the show, but none seemed to capture that particular combination of charm and williness that makes the Professor so endearing. After exhausting their list of possible Harolds, they were beginning to feel a bit apprehensive, when Bloomgarden suggested a name to Willson. "What", was the reply, "You mean Robert 'Snowshoes' Preston, half-brother of Chingachgook, and inventor of the igloo and the aluminum dog sled?"⁵⁹ Actually Preston had been in several Broadway shows, among them a revival of Eliot Nugent and James Thurber's The Male Animal in 1952, and the original Broadway productions of Max Shulman's The Tender Trap in 1954 and Carolyn Greene's Janus in 1954. As a teenager, he had studied acting in California with Mrs. Tyrone Power, mother of the movie star and descendent of the famous acting family, and worked in her classical repertory company. Unfortunately, he was best known for a series of second-rate Hollywood adventure films, in which he was usually cast as a sleazy villain, but when Preston walked to the piano in

Bloomgarden's home and began the first few bars of "Trouble", Professor Hill's first song, the search was over.

That was Bloomgarden's last happy moment for some time. Raising money for his show proved to be the hardest thing he ever did, so much so that he suffered a heart attack during the agonizing process, a fact that was kept secret, because he had found a backer willing to put up much of the remaining sum, and if it became known that he might not be able to supervise the production personally, the backer would probably have withdrawn.⁶⁰ Max Allentuck recalls:

We had terrible problems raising money for it, and at the last minute Kermit had to give a lot of it away. We were about \$50,000 short and in order to get that money he had to give up a lot of his points. He had to do it or he would have been responsible and there is one thing producers don't want, that is unless you are very rich, is to be in a position where you have to put up your own money.

I think he had forty percent and gave away fifteen. But if he had waited three more days it wouldn't have happened. We had a gypsy runthrough [a performance of the show on a bare stage with no costumes, for an invited audience of the casts of other shows, and friends and families of the company]. There were a lot of people--the place was full. Well, after that runthrough we could have raised enough money to do ten shows. That show was a love affair for everybody, and Kermit made more money on that one than all the others. It made more than all his other shows combined.⁶¹

With Barbara Cook signed as Marion the Librarian, and with David Burns and Iggie Wolfington in featured roles, the show opened on December 19, 1957, and it was an electrifying evening. The audience broke into rhythmic clapping to accompany the parade of the children's marching band in the finale, a phenomenon which would spontaneously occur at every performance until the show closed, and it seemed the most joyous, freely given expression of love possible.

The reviews were equally ecstatic. Walter Kerr singled out for special attention, "an entire first choral scene without a note of music. The words, the hands, the knees and the insane Rock Island roadbed do all the work; grunts, roars, gossip, and a form of Saint Vitus' Dance all merge into a syncopated conversation that is irresistible."⁶² John McClain began his review with, "The most important thing to say about The Music Man is that it is a whopping hit . . . This salute by Meredith Willson to his native Iowa will make even Oklahoma! look to its laurels."⁶³ The Music Man won Tony Awards for best musical, leading man, score, composer, featured actor (David Burns), featured actress (Barbara Cook), and best book of a musical. It also won both the Outer Circle Award and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. With the latter, Bloomgarden became the first (and only) producer to ever win that distinguished prize for both best dramatic and musical plays in the same year.

The show ran for 1,375 performances. A touring production and two bus-and-truck tours were sent out and lasted for almost three years. In 1970, Arthur Cantor and Stuart Little reported that the show had earned \$4,500,000 on a \$300,000 investment and, of course, it still produces income, being one of the most frequently revived musicals in summer stock and repertory.⁶⁴ In addition, the record album enjoys good sales to this day. A film was made of the show in 1962, in which Robert Preston repeated his role, and Shirley Jones played Marion Paroo.

During these exciting years, Virginia Blomgarden had

continued her own career. After understudying, and eventually appearing in Wedding Breakfast in 1954-5, she played in a well-received production of The Crucible in Michigan, and she worked frequently in television. In 1958 she signed to appear in the featured role of Mrs. Louis B. Howe in Dore Schary's play, Sunrise at Campabello. The role was cut out of the show during the pre-Broadway tour, but during the Broadway run she returned to play the more important role of Missy LeHand, secretary to President Roosevelt.

In the spring of 1959, the producers David Merrick and Leland Hayward decided to drop the option on a play called The Gang's All Here which they held jointly, because neither man would be free to attend to its staging for some time, and the authors, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, wanted a production as soon as possible. The playwrights had already had two major successes in Inherit the Wind and Auntie Mame, and when the play was released Bloomgarden decided to produce it. He had a co-producer named Sylvia Drulie, who was the wife of John Mazzola, then Chairman of the Board of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Drulie was the person who had given him the money he needed to finance the production of The Music Man, and she probably brought money into this show.

In an interview while the play was in rehearsal, the authors said, "We are taking a long look at the men who surround a President, the cronies who can become more powerful than kings . . . Our play is not about a President, or the President, but about the presidency itself."⁶⁵

Melvyn Douglas starred as Griffith P. Hastings, a President who was obviously modeled after Warren G. Harding, and E. G. Marshall was featured as a political manipulator close to the inept Chief Executive. George Roy Hill directed, and the play came into New York without any rehearsal problems. It opened on October 1, 1959. Walter Kerr said in his review, "The Gang's All Here has an old-fashioned ring to it, like the plays I used to see. I also found myself liking it like the plays I used to see . . . It is clear, simple and bold in its story-telling. The key speeches crackle."⁶⁶ Brooks Atkinson added his praise, "The Gang's All Here is effective drama with a conscience. The authors of Inherit the Wind have told another national story with principles as well as skill."⁶⁷

Though most of the notices were equally affirmative, the play did not do well. It closed after seventeen weeks, losing \$132,828 of its \$150,000 capitalization. During the last six weeks of the run, the playwrights' and director's royalties were either partially or wholly waived, as were the general manager's salary, office expenses, and the producer's weekly fee.⁶⁸

On April 6, 1959, Bloomgarden wrote three letters to friends concerning a play he had taken under option some time before. It was still called by its French title L'Hurluburlu and was written by Jean Anouilh, whose earlier play, The Lark, had given Bloomgarden such pleasure. An English adaptation had been done by a French writer named Lucienne Hill. Now Bloomgarden wrote to Hugh Griffith, the Welsh actor who had

worked for him in Look Homeward, Angel, to ask for casting suggestions and possibly a director.⁶⁹ He mentioned that he was specifically thinking of either Peter Brook or Peter Glenville. He also wrote to Ruth Gordon, the actress, and her husband, Garson Kanin,⁷⁰ and to the playwright-director Moss Hart,⁷¹ asking their opinions of the play. Since their replies have not yet been found, their recommendations remain unknown, but Bloomgarden decided to go ahead with the play.

At the same time he was in the midst of negotiations with the National Broadcasting Company, which wanted him to produce television films for a two-year period.⁷² According to the terms drawn up by his attorneys, he would produce two films during that time, for a fee of \$100,000. He would receive a \$25,000 severance fee, if NBC did not accept any of his proposals during the term of the contract.⁷³ A counteroffer from NBC proposed a package of six Broadway shows to be produced by him for television, including Wedding Breakfast, starring Marilyn Monroe, a dream of Bloomgarden's from the past.⁷⁴ At the same time, Ziegler, Hellman and Ross, the company which would do the physical productions under Blomgarden's aegis, proposed still another plan in which he would produce adaptations of David Selznick films for television.⁷⁵

Since all the negotiations were handled by Bloomgarden's attorneys, it is difficult to know how he felt about these offers, but Max Allentuck feels that he would have liked to do films, both on television and in Hollywood, but again nothing came of it. After fourteen months of talking,

NBC paid him \$20,000 to terminate his contract with them.⁷⁶ It is quite possible that once again he felt it would be difficult to turn his attention away from his Broadway work, especially since things were finally going so well for him.

He began work on the Anouilh play, now retitled The Fighting Cock, with Peter Brook as director. The play tells the story of a retired French general (he is nameless) who cannot come to terms with living out the rest of his life in what seems to be a world without honor or morals. He gathers together a group of his aging cronies in order to organize a movement to rid the world of what he terms the "maggots" who infect it. The play becomes a voyage of discovery for him, as he finds out that the world is still inherently loving and decent and hasn't really changed that much.

Rex Harrison played the general, and Natasha Parry and Roddy McDowall were featured. The play opened on December 8, 1959. The New York Times gave it a warm reception, saying, "Jean Anouilh has improvised another brilliant comedy . . . It is a worldly play by a man who distrusts idealism but has not hardened his heart against the idealists who have to learn the hard way. In grace, wit and feeling, The Fighting Cock is an extraordinary achievement."⁷⁷ The New York Herald Tribune was not enthusiastic, feeling that Anouilh had been less than successful in welding the play's many facets into a cohesive whole, and adding, "What M. Anouilh has rather wistfully written . . . stirs now and then into a lively ping-pong game of ideas, played at dusk . . . [However,] The Fighting Cock, lacking a clear core around which its glistening flying saucers

can soar, comes to seem fragile and thin before its philosophizing is done."⁷⁸

The play ran for four months, existing principally on theatre parties which had bought out entire houses for weeks ahead, probably on the strength of Rex Harrison's name. (This was the first play he did after My Fair Lady). It won a single Tony Award, for Roddy McDowall's performance in a featured role, but neither the award nor Harrison's presence could keep it open. When it closed, it had lost its entire investment of \$125,000. In an interview several months later, Bloomgarden said, "I loved The Fighting Cock although, to tell the truth, there were a lot of people who hated it and said they didn't understand it. I don't understand that. I took my kids, ages twelve and thirteen, and they understood it."⁷⁹

Some time after the closing of The Fighting Cock, Lillian Hellman brought Bloomgarden a new play entitled Toys in the Attic. It turned out to be her last original work, and her penultimate production. She later said that the play owed something to Chekhov's The Three Sisters, in that both dealt with sisters who talk endlessly about leaving their provincial homes to travel abroad, but who really focus their lives on beloved, newly-married brothers.⁸⁰ Hellman's play draws on autobiographical material. From her own background she drew two maiden ladies who run a New Orleans boarding house and who adore their younger brother Julian, a man unable to find a place for himself in the world until he marries. His bride has a wealthy mother who sets him up in a shoe business, which

promptly fails as miserably as all of his earlier efforts. This is a fairly literal retelling of Hellman's parents' lives. But at this point the play takes several melodramatic turns involving sudden unexplained wealth for Julian, jealousy on the part of his young wife, a severe and bloody beating inflicted on him by the husband of his ex-mistress, and the introduction of the bride's mysterious mother and her black chauffeur-lover. The play is more analytical than Hellman's earlier work in its examination of the harm done in the name of love, as the hopelessly inept Julian fumbles his way through life, trying to live up to his sisters' vision of what his success should be.

Bloomgarden and Hellman assembled a powerful cast. Maureen Stapleton and Anne Revere played Carrie and Anna Berniers, the two sisters, and Jason Robards, Jr. was Julian. Irene Worth played Albertine Prine, the mother of Lilly, the bride, a role played by a newcomer named Rochelle Oliver, while Percy Rodriguez played the chauffeur. Arthur Penn staged the show. He had recently directed two William Gibson plays, Two for the Seesaw in 1958 and The Miracle Worker in 1959. Hellman was less acerbic at rehearsals than during any of her previous shows, possibly because both Maureen Stapleton and Irene Worth were close friends of hers. However, there were still serious problems. Both Stapleton and Robards were drinking heavily at the time, which created some unneeded tension, and Hellman couldn't resist meddling as the rehearsals progressed. Even Stapleton was annoyed by it, and during the pre-Broadway stay in Boston took Hellman to task in a bar one evening, calling loudly and clearly across the room, "Lilly, you should never

address the troops."⁸¹

Variety noted just before the opening that Hellman, Penn, and Robards stood to gain tremendously if the show was a hit, since each of them was to receive a share of the profits, as well as their fees. This was an early example of a practice that has by now become standard in the contracts of major personalities.⁸²

Toys in the Attic opened on February 25, 1960, to generally excellent notices. Walter Kerr said, "That Miss Hellman is able to keep us fastened, for three brooding acts, to each gesture that is made and each thought that is not explicitly spoken, is a tribute to the limpid, unfussed, intuitively-shaped language she has written . . . I do not tell you that you are going to like Toys in the Attic, but you are going to listen to it, and with gratitude."⁸³

Brooks Atkinson also liked the play, noting, "It is head and shoulders above the level of the season, and it provides opportunity for some extraordinary acting . . . Being a professional theatre writer, Miss Hellman knows how to create characters who have minds as well as arms, legs and faces, and who are worth serious acting by people of talent."⁸⁴

The show proved to be a substantial money-maker, earning more than one hundred percent profit during its seventy-week Broadway run. It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as best drama, and two Tony Awards, one for Anne Revere as best featured actress in a drama, and another for Howard Bay for his set design. A film was made of the play in 1963. It starred Dean Martin, Geraldine Page, and Wendy

Hiller.

Bloomgarden sent out a road tour in September of 1960, starring Constance Bennett as Albertine, a piece of casting which the producer would regret. The show did quite well on the road, earning good reviews and making a steady profit. But when it reached Chicago, Bennett gave a television interview in which she complained of the serious nature of the play, adding, "There is too much sickness and unhappiness in the world for anyone to want to see it." She also opined that her role was instantly forgettable once she left the theatre.⁸⁵

Bloomgarden fired her immediately. She hotly denied ever having said those terrible things although the interview existed on videotape, and contradicted herself by asserting that she really had wanted to leave the show from the beginning.⁸⁶

In 1945, John Hersey wrote a novel called The Wall, which told the story of the last-ditch efforts of the Jews to resist the Nazis in the Warsaw ghetto during the second World War. Their amazing courage kept the invaders at bay for many months, and eventually some did survive. As early as 1950, the film producer David Selznick acquired the film rights to the book, but was unable to raise the necessary financing to proceed with a film.⁸⁷ Then in 1958 the director Jack Garfein acquired an option on a stage adaptation by Millard Lampell, a journalist, novelist, and radio writer.⁸⁸ Two days later the producer Roger Stevens announced that he would produce the play with Garfein.⁸⁹ However, they too, failed to come to

production. In February of 1960 Bloomgarden bought the rights to Lampell's play and mounted a production with the showman Billy Rose as co-producer. Rose had been a Broadway fixture for years, first as a song-writer ("Barney Google with his Goo-Goo-Googly Eyes"), then as producer of the Aquacade water show at the New York World's Fair in 1939. He produced on Broadway, notably Carmen Jones in 1943, and was the owner of the Diamond Horseshoe nightclub. He also was the owner of a Broadway theatre bearing his name.

In spite of the stark tragedy of the plot, and perhaps recalling how the equally painful material of Diary of Anne Frank had both touched and excited its audience, Bloomgarden was quite enthusiastic about the play. That summer he told an interviewer, "The Wall is a script nearly bursting with the three all-important elements I seek; superior writing, moving characters, and a powerful story. This play, for me, is particularly exhilarating in its content, reflecting as it does the courage and human dignity of people who resist tyranny against overwhelming odds."⁹⁰

Morton Da Costa, who had directed the phenomenally successful Music Man, was chosen to stage the new offering, a decision that left Max Allentuck rather dubious: "What was Tec [i.e., Da Costa] doing directing this show? It seems that when Kermit had a relationship he was very loyal. Tec was talented, but he didn't have the excitement, the ferocity to do this play."⁹¹ The gifted actor George C. Scott was signed for the leading role of Dolek Berson, a ne'er-do-well cynic who emerges as a leader of the Jewish resistance, and Yvonne Mitchell, a

young British actress, played the girl he loves. Scott, an alcoholic, made rehearsals difficult because of his lateness and non-appearances. He was not comfortable in the role, and his mounting frustration led to massive outbursts of anger, mostly directed at himself, though the company soon learned not to approach him at those times. At one point his rage led him to hit a wooden set piece with his fist, breaking his hand:⁹²

The Wall opened at the Billy Rose Theatre on October 11, 1960. The reviews were generally tepid, Richard Watts noting:

The stage can play the most perverse and unfortunate tricks. John Hersey's tragic saga of the revolt of the Warsaw ghetto against the armed might of the Nazis, The Wall, was a tremendous novel, heroic, shatteringly moving and savagely real. The drama based on it by Millard Lampell, which opened last night at the Billy Rose Theatre, has scenes of power and effectiveness, and it retains some of the shocking impact inherent in the nature of its poignant and terrible subject matter, but it seemed to me only occasionally the heart-breaking experience it should have been.⁹³

John McClain was more abrupt in his judgment, saying, "In spite of a resplendent cast and opulent settings the drama . . . is a big, bloody, bore."⁹⁴

By December, Bloomgarden was trying to bolster a failing box office with the receipts from the sale of 5000 tickets a week to New York City school children at greatly reduced rates. However, the show was still not meeting its weekly expenses, and Bloomgarden planned to close it on January 21, 1961. However, Vera Stern, the wife of the violinist Isaac Stern, and herself a survivor of the war, determined to fight for the play. Her father had died at Auschwitz and she felt that the Holocaust must never be forgotten. Within a few days she

rallyed a group of concerned friends and raised \$20,000 which enabled the play to remain open.⁹⁵ They continued to raise money, and ultimately there was enough to keep The Wall open for another six weeks, at which time Bloomgarden had to reluctantly close it, an act which presaged some difficult years ahead.⁹⁶

CHAPTER V

MUTED TRUMPETS

The closing of The Wall marked still another turn in Bloomgarden's fortunes. In the next twelve years, he would present only six Broadway shows, none of which were critical or commercial successes. He also turned to Off- and Off-Off Broadway, where he sponsored seven more plays, only one of which made money, although two others were critical, if not financial successes. Another factor that now began to tell against Bloomgarden, was that the costs of Broadway shows had risen astronomically in the last few years. The Gay Life, which opened a year after The Wall, cost \$480,000 to stage, and like most producers in the early 1960's, Bloomgarden found that his list of dependable backers had become much shorter. They were finding new and more attractive investments which would yield higher returns at a faster rate, and were far less risky. In addition, the entrance of television into the home had made the thrill of being close to a Broadway show and its glamorous stars far less meaningful. Now everyone could feel close to "show biz." More and more names were beginning to appear above the mastheads of new shows, and new and fanciful titles had to be invented to accomodate them. Thus, "executive producer," "associate producer," "special consultant to the associate producer," and other grand-sounding but meaningless titles

would be listed to satisfy the ego needs of people who contributed money, but nothing else, to the productions. Often a corporate investor would seek something more than profits or ego gratification. In the case of The Gay Life, Capitol Records invested almost half the total cost of the production in return for the rights to produce the record album.

The new project had come to Bloomgarden some years earlier, when he obtained the rights to make a musical version of Arthur Schnitzler's play The Affairs of Anatol. It takes place in Vienna at the turn of the century and tells of the romantic involvements of a charming young roué who is determined not to be trapped into marriage by any of the beauties he seduces. Bloomgarden engaged Fay and Michael Kanin to write the adaptation, and a letter addressed to them in March of 1961 demonstrates his concern about their conception of the leading character, as well as his insights into the problem. He writes:

I don't know whether you can use any of this or whether it is important in a musical, but I think we should have some idea of what his background is--does he work at his investments, has he an office, does the money just pour in which enables him to be a playboy and do no work? Is he bright besides being sexually attractive? These are all questions which have come to me in one way or another from different people. For myself, I feel that there might be a little too much of the family. [Also,] I feel that Anatol's entrance at Carlsbad, with the whole business of "Who's coming?" "He's coming." etc., is a little too pat. I think his entrance should be started, and the reactions to whoever he is can come as he makes his appearance on stage, in looks and whispers, rather than have preparation that begins before he appears. I feel that Magda [one of his paramours] must have an important scene with Anatol in the early part of the play so that when she appears again in the café scene, we are just

as perturbed for Anatol as he is. She is too important a character to be introduced just in that scene. Is there a way of bringing in an abbreviated version of the hypnotism scene?

As you see, I am groping and I am not being specific. I do know and feel, however, that if your idea is to make Anatol a driving force for the play, with his ability to get in and out of love affairs, then you have not accomplished it, in that he is neither witty enough nor active enough to be what we are all looking for.¹

At first Bloomgarden had considered the French actor Jean-Pierre Aumont for the role of Anatol, but he finally decided on an Italian stage star, Walter Chiari, instead. This proved to be one of the great mistakes of his career and was absolutely fatal to the show. He was seeking a European actor and had been told that Chiari was an immensely ingratiating performer. He flew to Italy to see him on stage, taking composer Howard Dietz and lyricist Arthur Schwartz along with him. All three were quite impressed with Chiari, and they returned full of enthusiasm and convinced that he was the man for them; and indeed, he was a charmer--in Italian. He could barely be understood in English, and he couldn't sing a note of music in any language. However, Bloomgarden had great faith in the coaching abilities of Herbert Greene, who had been his music director on both The Most Happy Fella and The Music Man, and nothing could convince him that Chiari was a massive error in judgment. The difficulties were compounded by the fact that the whole plot hung on this one character, and if the actor did not have the kind of strong charismatic presence that would convince the audience that he is indeed irresistible to every woman in Vienna, nothing else mattered. Thus, the beautiful

score, magnificent costumes by Lucinda Ballard, and Oliver Smith's finest set could not help. Perhaps Bloomgarden felt that Chiari was no more unlikely a leading man for a musical than those he had chosen for The Most Happy Fella and The Music Man, and they had proven to be ideal in their parts. Max Allentuck has said, "The casting of Walter Chiari was to me what destroyed that show. I think if they had the right actor playing the role, it would have been much better, because he was absolutely lost."²

Barbara Cook was cast opposite Chiari as Liesl, the rather naïve schoolgirl with whom Anatol finally falls in love, and her lovely singing voice and forthright performance made his inadequacies seem even more graceless. I attended the opening night performance on November 18, 1961, and it was obvious that Chiari was hopelessly ill at ease, seeming to have wandered in from some other time and place.

In his review Walter Kerr said that Chiari was utterly wrong for the show and, in addition, indicted the Kanins, "who seem to have mistaken the elegance of a chase among the chaises for the energy and industry of an ice hockey rink."³ Howard Taubman called the show "colorful, cheerful and leisurely in an Old World Way," and went on to chide Chiari for a "diffident performance," while describing the book as "an oft-told sentimental story."⁴

The Gay Life ran for fifteen weeks, losing all but \$16,000 of its cost. It won a single Tony Award for Lucinda Ballard's costumes. In an interview with William Peper shortly after the opening, Bloomgarden said, "I get great pleasure out

of producing, but I didn't have any fun at all on The Gay Life. It was just hard work.⁵"

In the same interview, the producer mentioned his new project, saying, "It would cost more than \$100,000 to do Moon on a Rainbow Shawl uptown. I can do it downtown for \$15,000." In view of his enormous losses on The Gay Life, the possibility of doing a charming and literate play for about one-twentieth the cost of the recent debacle must have been immensely appealing to Bloomgarden. The play, a comedy written by Errol Hill, takes place in a small village on the island of Trinidad, and tells the story of Ephraim, a young bus driver eager to leave the poverty of his village and seek a better life in England. He has saved a sufficient sum for the trip and is ready to leave, when the young woman he loves tells him she is carrying his child. The dilemma he faces--whether to abandon her and go to England, or to remain bemired in the poverty of the village--makes up the body of the play. The two leading roles were played by James Earl Jones and Ellen Holly, and Cicely Tyson played a warm-hearted and cheerful prostitute. A fourth featured role, that of a strong, loving wife and mother, had been originally assigned to Claudia MacNeill, an actress of wide experience. MacNeill soon made known her dissatisfaction with the director, George Roy Hill, and walked out of an early rehearsal, refusing to return unless he was replaced. Bloomgarden promptly fired her, bringing in Vinette Carroll to replace her, and then did something quite unusual in his career. He brought MacNeill up on charges before her union,

Actors' Equity Association, which fined her \$200, the equivalent of two weeks' salary. In addition, she was severely reprimanded for unprofessional conduct.⁶ When the \$200 was received by Bloomgarden, as producer of the show, he forwarded the check to the Actors' Fund, a charity established by the union for the benefit of needy actors.⁷

The play opened on January 16, 1962 at the Off-Broadway East 11th Street Theatre, and the New York Times said, "A brawling, laughing, bitter sense of life courses through Moon on a Rainbow Shawl. Errol Hill has charged his play with the truth and pathos of life on the island that is his home."⁸ The New York Journal-American called it "a solid success . . . a thoughtful and highly rewarding addition to the Off-Broadway season."⁹

In spite of excellent notices, the play failed to find an audience, and after six weeks Bloomgarden announced that he was lowering his ticket prices from a top of \$3.95 to \$2.95, and that he hoped other Off-Broadway producers would do the same, since the present scale was, he felt, out of line. His comments apparently provoked some anger among the community of Off-Broadway producers. Lilly Turner, for example, who owned the Gate Theatre said, "Let Mr. Bloomgarden, in his mellow wisdom as producer of one Off-Broadway play, speak for himself and his attraction," and David Ross, at the Fourth Street Theatre said (not having read the reviews, apparently) "There's nothing wrong with the price that a good show will not take care of."¹⁰ The play lasted for three months, losing \$10,000 in excess of its capitalization, a sum which Bloomgarden and

his co-producer, Harry Joe Brown, Jr. (about whom nothing further is known) had to absorb.¹¹

Soon after, the producer returned to the uptown world of Broadway production with the script for a new musical, which was called Nowhere to Go But Up. It was a charming idea, one which seemed to be ideal for a rowdy musical comedy. Based upon a true story, Nowhere to Go But Up tells the tale of two bumbling innocents who become Treasury agents during Prohibition and are sent to close down the gangster-ridden speakeasies of New York. The property was owned by a man named Steven H. Scheuer, who sold it to Bloomgarden for \$22,500 and co-producer billing. Herbert Greene, Bloomgarden's musical director, was also listed above the masthead as a co-producer, probably because of the money he was able to bring in.

The show was budgeted at \$350,000, with an overcall that would bring the total to \$420,000 if the option were exercised. More than half the sum was raised by Greene's brother, who had organized a syndicate of small investors, all friends and neighbors on Long Island. They were delighted to give him their money, as most of them had belonged to an earlier syndicate which he formed to invest in The Music Man, and the new show seemed equally promising. Tom Bosley and Martin Balsam played the leading roles of Izzie and Moe, and Ronald Field staged the production numbers for the twenty-four women who comprised the dancing chorus. Sidney Lumet, who had never been involved in a musical, was Bloomgarden's surprising choice to direct.

Lumet, in turn, made an equally unexpected decision, choosing to supervise the staging of the musical numbers, a job which is ordinarily left to the choreographer. Don Doherty, an actor in the show, recalls that Lumet would create an opening picture with groupings of singers and dancers for each production number, but then, since he knew absolutely nothing about dance steps, he was unable to move them out of this opening pose. Invariably, he would turn with much impatience to the distraught choreographer and say, "Instant choreography, Ron."¹² Since most of the musical numbers in the show were elaborate dances staged in the various nightclubs, Lumet's insistence on being part of their creation slowed the rehearsals considerably. The book scenes, burdened by an original script filled with weak jokes and much aimless running about, suffered greatly by Lumet's preoccupation with the musical staging, and the show was soon in trouble.

When Nowhere to Go But Up opened in Philadelphia, it was a disaster. Bloomgarden told Max Allentuck, who was returning to New York to conduct office business, not to come back for two weeks, during which time the company would work to salvage the wreck. When Allentuck returned, he took a look at the "new" version and immediately advised Bloomgarden to close the show. That evening, there was a meeting of the production staff after the performance, and among those gathered to hear Bloomgarden's decision was Mel Brooks, the comic writer and actor, who had come down to see it that evening. He insisted that he could fix it, giving them a show that would run a year or so. Bloomgarden yielded to his persuasions, and Brooks went

to work. Unfortunately, what he offered was too little and too late. He improvised everything during rehearsals, acting out the parts for the actors, never giving them rewrites or a new script. Thus, the actors had nothing to work with, and became quite demoralized. Apparently, Bloomgarden made no further efforts to close the show in Philadelphia in spite of what was, by now, an utterly chaotic situation. Perhaps he hoped that Brooks would ultimately pull off a classic Broadway miracle. Unfortunately it was not to be.

Allentuck blames Brooks for the fact that the show came into New York an even worse mess than when it arrived in Philadelphia.¹³ It opened on November 10, 1962, and Walter Kerr's review set the tone of the notices. He said, "If Bobby Clark [one of the great comedians of the American musical stage] were alive, the new show at the Winter Garden might be . . . If you've got blackouts instead of heart and jokes instead of for-real plotting, the blackouts and the jokes had better be extremely good. These range from mild to maybe."¹⁴ John McClain wrote, "The hitch seems to be the familiar one of a conception which will not sustain . . . too bad the idea wears thin and frazzles out completely in the last stanza . . . the curtain falls on a spectacle of unresolved pandemonium."¹⁵

A curious episode in the endless travails of this unfortunate show merits some notice, if only because it resulted in a change in the regulations by which the New York State Attorney General's office governs investments in theatrical enterprises. It began when Bloomgarden posted a closing notice, after reading the reviews. This sent waves of

shock through the ranks of the Long Island syndicate of investors, who could not believe their bad luck after the easy success of The Music Man. They showed up at the next performance, pushing baby carriages and waving placards which protested the closing of the show. Next, they went to court to obtain an injunction to stop the closing, "so that a publicity campaign could be undertaken to bring this play before the public and let the public decide before we condemn the effort, the artistry, the music and all the work and sweat put into this play."¹⁶ It was obviously abysmal ignorance of New York audiences that led these naïve people to think that any theatregoer would gamble the price of a Broadway musical ticket for the privilege of making up his own mind, unhampered by critical disdain. The effort to save the show was abandoned within a few days as the losses mounted, Bloomgarden telling a reporter the the whole episode was was "too stupid for words."¹⁷ However, it was this episode that caused the New York State Attorney-General's office to amend the rules governing investors' and producers' rights in limited partnerships, to make them more specific and thus more easily understood by prospective backers.

In 1963 Bloomgarden and his wife Virginia began to live apart and the following year were amicably divorced. When they separated, he moved to a penthouse apartment at 275 Central Park West, where he would continue to live until his death. The apartment had a large terrace, upon which, together with a neighbor, he grew vegetables, becoming inordinately proud of his tomatoes.

Bloomgarden's next production was an adaptation by Lillian Hellman of a novel called How Much?, by Burt Blechman. Retitled My Mother, My Father, and Me, the play is a bitterly satiric comedy which presents blatant stereotypes of Jews, blacks, women, and the elderly. It is about a New York family consisting of a mother, Rona, who is an inveterate shopper consumed with finding bargains which are usually of no use whatever. The father, Herman, is quite adept at shady business dealings, but is helpless in the face of his wife's heedless spending. Their grown son, Berney, has yet to find himself and wanders through the play trying to ingratiate himself with disparate groups of racial, sexual, and social eccentrics.

Once again, Bloomgarden picked a most unlikely director for his play; Gower Champion. A noted director of musicals such as Bye, Bye, Birdie in 1960 and Hello, Dolly in 1964, Champion had never done a non-musical production. Ruth Gordon was signed to play Rona, Walter Matthau her bewildered husband, Herman, and Anthony Holland their son Berney. As rehearsals progressed, the cast realized that Champion was intimidated by the material and didn't really understand it. Cast member Haywood Hale Broun recalls Hellman saying, "It's time we had Jewish villains." Broun felt that for the play to succeed, it would have to be directed "in a cold, brittle French style so that you realized this is not naturalism."¹⁸ However, Champion chose to stage it as a cheerful family comedy, which made the stereotypes even more offensive. The director was fired toward the end of the rehearsal period and Arthur Penn was brought in,

but it was too late to save the show. My Mother, My Father, and Me opened on March 25, 1963, and Richard Watts called it "relentlessly bitter, angry and sardonic as it strikes out savagely at every target that dares to raise its battered head."¹⁹ Howard Taubman added that the play was "a sardonic hymn of hate . . . [Hellman's] contempt for fraud and pretension is fierce . . . She lashes out at the corruptions of family life."²⁰

The show closed after seventeen performances, losing its entire investment, a particularly bitter blow to Bloomgarden. The financing had been so difficult that he had dissolved the trust funds he had established for his children with his profits from The Music Man in order to complete the capitalization, and that money was lost forever. In addition, the production caused a painful rift, which Bloomgarden revealed to an interviewer many years later:

Sometimes I make mistakes on a show. I screwed up on Miss Hellman's My Mother, My Father, and Me. My first error was in hiring Gower Champion as the director. In addition, the casting was all off. This philosophical comedy was really very avant-garde, but I ruined it.

Lillian and I didn't speak for a long time after that, but now we're very close again. In fact she organized a birthday party for me. She's a superb cook.²¹

In late 1963, Bloomgarden ventured Off-Broadway again, co-producing, with Philip Barry, Jr., a play called Next Time I'll Sing To You, by the English playwright James Saunders. It is based on the diary of an English hermit who lived in a novel in Essex for forty-two years, dying in his eighties. The

production featured Estelle Parsons and James Earl Jones, and was directed by Peter Coe, who had directed Oliver! in both London and New York. The play opened at the Phoenix Theatre on November 28, 1963, and Howard Taubman reported, "it is questionable whether what took place on the stage last night qualifies as a play . . . One recognizes the basic theme (man's inescapable solitude) as it recurs . . . but one finds that the meanings of too many variations are either banal or unsayable."²² Judith Crist called it "a non-play about non-communication", and her review closed with, "'If you don't know how to handle non-sequiturs,' one character remarks, 'leave the lousy things alone.' And there's a message for Mr. Saunders in that one."²³ The Phoenix Theatre had a strong subscription audience which enabled the play to run for twenty-three performances.

The next month, Variety announced that the producing firm of Robert Fryer, Lawrence Carr, and John Herman would join with Kermit Bloomgarden to produce a new musical by Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents, entitled Anyone Can Whistle.²⁴ Sondheim had established a brilliant reputation, first as a lyricist, with West Side Story in 1957 and Gypsy in 1959. He then wrote both words and music for A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum in 1962. A playwright who had written Home of the Brave in 1945 and The Time of the Cuckoo in 1952, Laurents also wrote the books for both West Side Story and Gypsy. Both men were riding the crest of success, and their new musical was considered a plum for producers lucky enough to

get it. However, Fryer, Carr, and Herman decided to relinquish their option, and Bloomgarden was forced to raise the money himself.²⁵ This proved to be surprisingly difficult in view of the caliber of the writers, and it became a long, agonizing procedure. At one point Laurents, who was to direct the show in addition to writing it, sent Bloomgarden a note which reads in part:

I beg you not to mention money problems or any difficulties to Steve anymore. It depresses him terribly and makes it terribly difficult for him to work. I must admit I don't like it either; it is damn hard to concentrate on all the production problems at a time when all the atmosphere is filled with gloom and forebodings about will the show get the money to go on? But it is really deadly to attempt creative work in such an ambience. So; merely tell him when the auditions are to be. He will do them and do them well. But spare him the gory details.²⁶

The difficulties encountered in finding investors for Anyone Can Whistle may well have been exacerbated by a peculiar situation which developed during the money-raising process. Bloomgarden had to hold countless backer's auditions, during which parts of both score and book were performed, and soon the show began to get an underground reputation as being intellectual and difficult, i.e., complex enough to demand some thinking on the part of the audience. It tells the story of a rural village on the edge of bankruptcy because of the actions of its highly eccentric and corrupt mayor, a woman who controls all the money and most of the inhabitants of the town. There are also a dubious "miracle grotto" and a mental asylum whose inhabitants are turned loose to co-exist with the townspeople, thereby introducing the theme of the show--who is mad and who is sane in the little town.

Ultimately Diana Krasny, Herman Shumlin's wife, brought in some of the needed money and joined Bloomgarden as co-producer, and with the additional help of Columbia Records, which paid \$50,000 for the rights to produce the record album, the full capitalization of \$350,000 was realized. Just before the opening, Bloomgarden told John Molleson, "It's harder than ever, chiefly because the economics are so much harder . . . Producing isn't the fun and joy it used to be. I suppose because the responsibilities are greater."²⁷

During the money-raising period, Bloomgarden sent Laurents a critique of the show which once again indicates the depth and quality of his analytical abilities (see appendix). Laurents apparently had difficulties revising his work, as the questions raised by the producer were still unresolved when the show opened on April 4, 1964. The critics praised Angela Lansbury in the role of the mayor. They also liked Harry Guardino as the reporter who asks too many questions, and Lee Remick as the asylum nurse who joins him in his search for the truth about the miraculous cures attributed to the grotto. Unfortunately, the rest of the play did not fare so well. Walter Kerr said, "It is exasperating, because it isn't very musical . . . nobody can sing . . . It has borrowed quite heavily from the avant-garde, though its borrowings are by this time quite thoroughly conventional."²⁸ Howard Taubman was also critical of the book, saying "There is no law against saying something in a musical, but it's unconstitutional to omit imagination and wit. In an attempt to be meaningful, Anyone Can Whistle omits entertainment. Mr. Laurents' book lacks the

fantasy that would make the idea work, and his staging has not improved matters. Mr. Sondheim has written several pleasing songs, but not enough of them to give the musical wings."²⁹

The show closed after only eight performances, because it had been unable to build a decent advance sale, and the reviews did not encourage a run on the box office.

Bloomgarden's next production did not begin rehearsals for more than a year and a half. He had optioned several new plays in the interim, among them The Beautiful and Anxious Maidens by Frances and Albert Hackett; Dear Kitty, a musical version of The Diary of Anne Frank by Alan Kupchik; a stage version of the film The Informer by Brian Friel; and Mirror in a Dark Room by the poet Norman Rosten. However, none of these was quite ready for production, and Bloomgarden decided to go ahead with a newly-optioned melodrama called The Playroom, about which he was quite optimistic. It had also attracted the attention of a woman named Trude Heller, who owned a New York discotheque bearing her name. Her patrons included many celebrated and wealthy people, and after joining Bloomgarden as co-producer, she was able to raise a large portion of the \$115,000 needed to finance the production. Max Allentuck and a man named David Karr also had financial interests in the play.

Mary Drayton, the playwright, had written three earlier plays, only one of which, The Debut, had been produced on Broadway. She was married to the actor Tom Helmore and had begun her career as an actress before turning to writing. The Playroom tells the story of Judy, a teen-age girl who plots and

carries out the kidnapping of her ten-year-old stepsister. She plans to murder this hated rival for her father's affections, and has enlisted the aid of several of her friends by calling it an adventure and a joke to be played on their elders, but she does not tell them of her deadly intentions.

Karen Black played the murderous Judy, while Tom Helmore and Augusta Dabney played her father and stepmother. Joseph Anthony directed the play, which opened on December 5, 1965 to mixed notices. Walter Kerr wrote, "Want a good scare? The Playroom will take care of your needs very nicely . . . carefully controlled, ultimately eerie shenanigans . . . as a piece of gooseflesh entertainment, with a novel and contemporary twist, The Playroom delivers."³⁰ Howard Taubman was less taken with the play, which he considered contrived in its effort to build suspense. He also faulted Drayton for what he felt was a deliberate effort to make the show "fashionably perverse and morbid, and wrote that "the effort to be contemporary and thrilling ends in an uneasy, even unpleasant compromise."³¹

The Playroom had limped along for four weeks when Bloomgarden decided to close it, which was no easy matter. An unusual clause had been written into the partnership contract between Trude Heller and himself, which said that any artistic or business conflicts that arose between the two would be decided by the director, Joseph Anthony. Bloomgarden wrote to Anthony on December 27th, setting forth his reasons for wanting to close the show. He enumerated in detail the four-week losses which amounted to \$28,000, plus an additional \$7,000 for

advertising. There had been a movie sale, but the advance for the first two weeks in January, traditionally among the poorest of the year, was very bad. In his letter, Bloomgarden explained:

As you know, any losses in excess of the capitalization are to be shared equally between Trude and myself. I am in no position to assume any personal losses, which would almost surely follow if we continued past January 1st. In the light of no foreseeable financial resources and bad prospects for business, there is no encouraging reason whatever for continuing past January 1st. As it is, closing January 1st will mean The Playroom Company will have suffered a loss of approximately \$115,000, its total capitalization, plus \$36,000 we reserved as our share of the film sale.³²

The last sentence refers to the fact that film sales are based on a play running a minimum of several weeks, usually six to eight, and a contract between the play's producer and the film studio can be terminated if it closes any sooner. However, staying open an extra few weeks could entail box-office losses even greater than forfeiting the movie sale. Anthony apparently felt Bloomgarden's decision to be a proper one in view of the losses incurred so far, as The Playroom closed on January 1, 1966.

A year after the closing of The Playroom, Bloomgarden put a new musical into rehearsal. It was called Illya Darling, and was based on the highly acclaimed film Never On Sunday. Bloomgarden had owned the musical rights for five years, ever since Jules Dassin, who wrote, directed, produced, and appeared in the film, had called him from Paris and asked him to consider doing the show. In 1966, just after Dassin had

married Melina Mercouri, who had starred in the film, he contacted Bloomgarden and told him that he would like to write and direct the musical. Max Allentuck feels that the only reason Bloomgarden agreed to go ahead on the project was that he did not have to raise any money. The capitalization was handed to him by a single backer, United Artists Films. When the film was originally made, United Artists bought the worldwide distribution rights for \$100,000 and made millions in profit when the modest little picture most unexpectedly became an enormous international success. Now, they gave Bloomgarden \$550,000 in order to keep Dassin happy, as he was continuing to do successful films for them.³³

Dassin had no interest in repeating his film role for the stage, and Bloomgarden signed Orson Bean to play the young American schoolteacher who is determined to educate and reform the lovely Greek prostitute Illya, once again played by Mercouri. Manos Hadjidakis, who had written the music for the film, was signed to write the score, which would be entirely new except for the essential "Never on Sunday." Several Greek actors also joined the cast, on Dassin's recommendation.

Rehearsals were complicated by the fact that Dassin did not understand that you cannot reproduce a film scene by scene onto the stage, and was reluctant to make the cuts necessary to transpose the story to a live medium. However, United Artists had given him a free hand, and he wasted much valuable rehearsal time with experiments that were invariably unworkable. For example, a problem arose which Bloomgarden, with all his predilection for indulging his directors, would

never have allowed to become a reality, if he had been in charge of the purse strings.

It started because Dassin had some difficulty with the actors. Again, he seemed unable to understand that theatre is not like film which proceeds with little rehearsal, but rather with constant re-takes of a scene until the director is satisfied. Therefore, Dassin would call the entire company in each day, and most of them would simply sit around waiting to be used, while he worked with one or two of the actors. He did not know how to organize a stage rehearsal schedule beforehand, and would not take the time to do it properly. It was easier to keep everyone around all the time. The cast soon became bored and restless, then infuriated. They felt demeaned at being constantly on call, never knowing when they would be used.

When the show was in previews, Dassin decided after a Saturday evening performance that he wanted a new musical number right after the opening. It was to be created and rehearsed the next day, so that it would be in place for the Monday evening performance. This involved Sunday rehearsals (the company's day off) at double, double overtime, and having a complete new orchestration written overnight. Unfortunately for Dassin, it also required getting permission from each person involved--performers, stagehands, stage managers, technicians, the orchestrator, and the copyists. Everyone initially refused, and after much discussion, a fee far in excess of what would be due each participant was decided upon. The new number was inserted on Monday evening at an

extraordinary cost, and promptly came out before the Tuesday performance.³⁴ One can only imagine Bloomgarden's thoughts after that Monday evening performance.

Illya Darling opened on April 11, 1967. Richard Watts felt that the story of the American innocent and his charming pupil was "unfortunately commonplace and a rather trying background for the brilliant star and attractive colorful production." He had good words for Orson Bean and the music and dancing, but overall felt that it was "a sometimes tiresome evening."³⁵ Walter Kerr had high praise for Mercouri, but felt that the evening was, "in the nature of a 'personal appearance,' which is not quite the same thing as a self-starting musical comedy . . . [Dassin] has thrown us bits and pieces, odd fragments and patches of the original story . . . Illya Darling inadvertently and unluckily makes movies seem better than ever."³⁶

The show ran for a year, helped by infusions of money from United Artists. A final note on it might be the revealing statement that Bloomgarden made during the pre-Broadway tryout in Philadelphia:

Producing a musical is fun but you can get your teeth into a straight play more. I remember when we were trying out The Music Man and Look Homeward, Angel in Philadelphia. I'd go to rehearsal at the Shubert [The Music Man] and then over to watch Angel at the Walnut. It was like coming out of a cellar into sunshine.³⁷

On September 18, 1969, a play called Hello and Goodbye opened at the Off-Broadway Sheridan Square Playhouse. It was written by the South African playwright Athol Fugard, and

directed by Barney Simon, who had been associated with several of Fugard's shows. Bloomgarden is listed, along with Commonwealth United Entertainment and Jonathan Burrows, as co-producer of the show, but there is no further documentation as to his activities in connection with the presentation of this show.

The play, a two-character drama, featured Martin Sheehan and Colleen Dewhurst as a brother and sister who meet, after a long separation, at their father's funeral. She is a prostitute, and he is a gentle, withdrawn man who has remained in the family home. During a day-long search for the father's hidden money, they review their unhappy and lonely lives in an effort to understand why they have become the adults they are. The New York Times liked the play, calling it "both unashamedly old-fashioned and, more to the point, thoroughly engrossing."³⁸ The New York Post felt that it was a disappointing work, but added, "don't underestimate the capabilities of Athol Fugard."³⁹ Hello and Goodbye ran for forty-five performances.

In the spring of 1970, a group of young Japanese musical performers arrived in New York to take part in a projected Off-Broadway revue. The production failed to materialize, but Ellen Stewart, the producer of the well-established Off-Off-Broadway company, La Mamma E.T.C., asked them to stay and allow her to present one of their shows which she had seen in Tokyo. It was called The Golden Bat and consisted of a series of musical numbers, each extolling a particular virtue--peace, love, friendship and the like--to the

accompaniment of rock music and exquisite settings and costumes. The show opened at La Mama in June of 1970, directed by Yutaka Higashi. The reviews were excellent, Clive Barnes noting, "They are enchanting people. They offer love as if it were a flower and the whole world were their garden."⁴⁰ Blomgarden saw the show, liked it immensely, and after its closing at La Mama, reopened it at the Sheridan Square Playhouse in August of the same year. His partner in the venture was Arthur Cantor, the Broadway publicist. When the show re-opened, the Wall Street Journal called it "an unusual and lovely show."⁴¹ The Golden Bat ran for 152 performances and then went on a world-wide tour, which Bloomgarden did not produce.

In 1971 Bloomgarden began to suffer severe pains in his left leg. When he began to have difficulty walking, medical examination showed a rapidly deteriorating arteriosclerosis condition which had affected the blood circulation to the leg. He entered the hospital for further tests, and his family doctor noticed the beginning of gangrene in the toes of that leg. As the infection resisted treatment, it soon became apparent that the leg would have to be amputated. While recovering from the surgery, Bloomgarden received an unfortunate setback, contracting a case of serum hepatitis, which his son John feels was probably due to contaminated blood in one of the transfusions he received during surgery.⁴²

When Bloomgarden finally emerged from the hospital, he decided to close his office and work at home. Though he was doing extremely well with a prosthesis, it was far less wearing

and time-consuming to work in the comfortable office he set up at home. Once established there, he was eager to start a new show. Even in the hospital he had been reading scripts and had several plays under option. One of these, a musical called Gulliver, was largely responsible for his continued optimism and enthusiasm during his illness. He was convinced it would be the one to put him back on top.

Gulliver had been brought to him in 1969 by Sean Kenny, the brilliant English designer whose conception it had been. Kenny had designed the musicals Stop the World, I Want to Get Off in 1962, and Oliver! in 1963, and now headed a repertory company in London at the Mermaid Theatre, together with the actor Bernard Miles. There they had staged Gulliver to great acclaim in 1968, and now Kenny wanted an expanded production on Broadway. Rather than the ornate and lavish scenery and set pieces that might have been expected for this eighteenth-century fantasy, Kenny had chosen to use a bare stage backed by a series of movable screens upon which were projected the various scenes of the show. Since the screens could merge, move up- and downstage, and turn in any direction, the scenic possibilities were far greater than if he had stayed with conventional set pieces. He did use techniques reminiscent of eighteenth-century scenic practices in the special effects, including machinery such as an enormous giant's hand to seize and raise Gulliver to the top of the stage, or miniaturization for the tiny, articulated Lilliputian fleet. Kenny felt that the use of technology rather than realistic scenery could give the locations and characters of the story a more appropriate

and fantastic look.

Lional Bart, composer of Oliver! and Stop the World, I Want to Get Off, had written the score, and Larry Gelbart, who had written the book for A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, was engaged to write a new script for the American production.⁴³

While doing the pre-production work on Gulliver, Bloomgarden was scrambling to stay alive professionally. He needed to generate income, and once again turned to Off-Broadway. There he found shows which were genuinely rewarding to do, and though only one was financially successful, the losses incurred by the others were never the staggering amounts involved in Broadway productions. Though his business records include virually no financial statements for this time, he probably drew a small salary on each show for his day-to-day business expenses and overhead. His new venture began with a new play by Lanford Wilson, the young playwright-in-residence at Marshall Mason's Circle Theatre Company. It was called The Hot l Baltimore and opened on February 7, 1973 to excellent notices. Bloomgarden saw the show at the tiny Off-Off-Broadway theatre (the designation for Off-Broadway theatres with fewer than one hundred seats) on upper Broadway which was the home of Mason's company, and found it fascinating. It tells the story of a group of dreamers, eccentrics, and down-and-outers who live at the hotel of the title, which is soon to be demolished. The play's structure is reminiscent of The Iceman Cometh, as the characters pour out the stories of their past lives and their uncertainties for the future, but The Hot l Baltimore is

far more comedic and optimistic than O'Neill's play. Thus we leave the theatre convinced that one way or another, these people will survive the loss of their tight little world. The New York Times review extolled the play for its "understanding and sensitivity about unwanted people," and called Wilson "a very American playwright, with a nostalgic longing for a lost sensibility."⁴⁴

At the time Bloomgarden saw the show, he was working with a man named Roger Ailes, an actor's agent who had come to him for advice about a play he wished to produce. Bloomgarden agreed to act as a consultant on the show, which was called Mother Earth, but after seeing The Hot l Baltimore, he suggested to Ailes that they take over the production and move it to a larger house. Ailes agreed, and on March 21st it opened at the downtown Circle in the Square Theatre, where it ran for over seven hundred performances, becoming the longest running play in the theatre's history. It won an Obie, the Village Voice award as best drama of the year and, most unusually, it also won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, rarely given to an Off-Broadway production.

Once The Hot l Baltimore was established in its new home, Bloomgarden left it in the hands of his son John. The latter had finished college, and after some time in London where he attended film school, he had returned to New York where he worked as a film editor. He also began to help out backstage, painting flats and acting as an assistant stage manager. There he found himself becoming quite interested in the backstage doings and soon apprenticed as a company manager

to his father. Now, with the show open and running, he became the company manager and Bloomgarden returned to his work on Gulliver. But this joyous work came to a sudden and shocking end on June 11, 1973, when Sean Kenny suddenly died of a stroke in London. Bloomgarden felt that the show was so totally Kenny's vision that it would be impossible to go on with it, and he sadly closed the door on this extraordinary play.

In the spring of 1974, Bloomgarden returned once more to the group now called Circle Repertory Theatre, where Marshall Mason had just produced another play that Bloomgarden felt deserved a larger audience. The Sea Horse, by James Irwin, has only two characters, a woman who owns a waterfront bar, played by Conchata Ferrell, and the sailor-lover who returns to her after many years, played by Edward J. Moore. Like Fugard's Hello and Goodbye, the evening is a dialogue between these two, as they trace the story of their relationship and what has brought them to where they are.

Bloomgarden, along with Max Allentuck and an investor named Orin Lehman as co-producers, moved the play to the larger West Side Theatre on 43rd Street, where it opened on April 15, 1974. It received excellent notices, Mel Gussow calling it "a tender, wistful play . . . [which is] unashamedly naturalistic, proving that there is still room in the theatre for plays about real people richly observed."⁴⁵ Richard Watts added, "[The Seahorse is] . . . written with skill, insight and forcefulness . . . Mr. Irwin is a gifted playwright and his future work will be awaited with high anticipation."⁴⁶ However, The Sea Horse

did not have the good fortune of The Hot l Baltimore, and in spite of the fine reviews, closed after eighty-four performances.

Bloomgarden would present one more Off-Off Broadway production, this time a musical revue based on the writings of Eugene Ionesco. The play was called Ionescapade, with music and lyrics by Mildred Kayden, and with Robert Allan Ackerman directing. It originated at Theatre Four on January 12, 1973, and moved to the larger Cherry Lane Theatre on July 27th of that year, closing sometime after the summer. The next season it reopened on April 25, 1974, again at Theatre Four, with a largely different cast and in an expanded form. This was the production that Bloomgarden presented. The New York Times, reviewing the new version, noted, "The scenes are amusing, although there is a knockabout intensity in some of the performers that flattens many of the laughs,"⁴⁷ and the New York Post said, "It seems to suffer from too loyal a fidelity to his [Ionesco's] spirit. It may be to his credit that it is almost as incomprehensible as he is."⁴⁸ The show closed within a few weeks, marking the end of Bloomgarden's Off- and Off-Off-Broadway work.

At the time that Ionescapade closed, Bloomgarden was seventy years old, virtually penniless, and still suffering the residual effects of his recent ill health. He had not done a major Broadway production in seven years, but his spirit remained undaunted. His passion for the theatre was as strong as ever, and in a final turn of fortune he would be rewarded

in a way that is the stuff of Broadway legends.

This venture began in the summer of 1973, when a new show called Equus opened in London on July 26th and was a huge hit. It was written by Peter Shaffer, who had had earlier successes with Five Finger Exercise in 1958 and The Royal Hunt of the Sun in 1964. The new play told a startling and highly dramatic story of a gentle young boy who suddenly and inexplicably blinds six horses at the stable where he is employed, and of the efforts of a psychiatrist to find the reason for this bizarre act and thus "cure" the boy. The next year, the National Theatre, which had presented the play, began to look for a suitable sponsor for a New York production, and at this moment one of Bloomgarden's chickens, or rather a formidable eagle, came home to roost. Lillian Hellman, who knew Shaffer and the director, John Dexter, persuaded them to give Bloomgarden the play, telling them that he had done exquisite work in the theatre, and that there was nothing wrong with his health.⁴⁹

Equus seemed to be an ideal production with which to mark his return to Broadway. Since the London production was to be duplicated, and Peter Firth would repeat the role of the young boy, the only work was to cast the remaining roles. This was quickly done with the signing of Anthony Hopkins, the English stage and film star, as the psychiatrist, and Marion Seldes as the boy's attorney. Dexter insisted on doing the casting alone, even though Bloomgarden knew the work of the American actors who would be chosen to play the remaining roles

far better than did the British director.

Thus, for the first time since he became an independent producer, Bloomgarden found himself totally removed from any decision-making, and reduced to the role of money-raiser and watchdog over the pre-production expenses of the show. The first of the two responsibilities was easily met when Doris Cole Abrahams indicated her willingness to join the production. Abrahams was an American who had worked as a theatre manager and producer in England for the previous twenty years, but had recently returned to America. She was eager to get involved in Broadway production and became co-producer with Bloomgarden when she agreed to guarantee the costs. This meant that she did not actually invest in the show, but rather signed a pledge to provide any additional funding needed after all other avenues of raising the money had been exhausted.

Contrary to all expectations, the rehearsal period was a most trying time for Bloomgarden. It should have gone smoothly, since there was none of the tension and edginess felt when huge sums of money are being spent on a new and untried property, and when crushing responsibility is laid on three people--producer, director and playwright. Everyone knew that any physical problems would be resolved, since they were simply duplicating a previous set and lighting plan. In addition, the worth of the play--already a well-publicized success--should have made the rehearsals a joy. Instead, they became a nightmare. John Bloomgarden, who was apprenticed as a company manager to his father, remembers the shock of seeing "this man who had always been treated like a king in the theatre"

patronized and publicly humiliated by the director.⁵⁰ John Dexter appeared to hate everything American in general and Bloomgarden in particular. He would spend endless time carping about problems concerning the set, and the lighting designer, Andy Phillips, would join in with his own complaints. The latter was angered by the fact that computerized lighting, which was already in general use in London, had not yet been installed in New York theatres, and he loudly and endlessly blamed Bloomgarden for what he considered evidence of the producer's frugal nature. Coming from the National Theatre in the early 70's, when there were constant and lavish bestowals of money to indulge their every caprice, Dexter and Phillips were unable to understand that commercial Broadway theatre is not subsidized and the money does not come easily. They felt that Bloomgarden's efforts were inadequate and that his desire to contain costs was inhibiting their work. John Bloomgarden recalled, "Each time you got past one obstacle, something else would come up to create a problem, and Dexter dwelt on each one."

Dexter also took the incredible step of banning Bloomgarden from rehearsals. For a man who had sat through nearly every rehearsal of every show he had produced, this was indeed a most shattering blow. John Bloomgarden feels that Dexter derived some kind of perverse pleasure from demeaning an American who was held in such high esteem by his peers. He also feels that it was only Peter Shaffer's respect and affection for Bloomgarden that enabled the producer to get through this trying time.⁵¹

Equus opened in New York on October 24, 1974. Clive Barnes said of it, "[The play is] richly rewarding on a number of levels . . . [It is a] psychological inquiry into a crime, a journey into someone's mind . . . It has a most refreshing and mind-opening intellectualism to it."⁵² Richard Watts noted, "It is the playwright's finest achievement . . . It is enormously dramatic and exciting . . . certainly the best and most distinguished new play we have had in New York this season."⁵³

The play won Tony Awards for both best play and director, and also won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Outer Circle Award. In its first year, Equus grossed over three million dollars, and played in New York for a total of more than three years. In addition, it is one of the few plays of recent years that was able to attract major stars as replacements. Both Richard Burton and Anthony Perkins played the psychiatrist, and for the latter it meant coming back as a Hollywood star to the man who had given him his first role on Broadway, the young Eugene Gant in Look Homeward, Angel.

Finally, on April 20, 1975, the night of the nationally televised Tony Awards, Bloomgarden made an acceptance speech which is one more indication of his love for this small world he had chosen as his own:

Doris [his co-producer] and I are here because of Peter Shaffer. He wrote the play and I was very fortunate that he permitted me to produce it. This is an exciting evening for me. It was a long wait. I wanted it for Peter. I wanted it for myself. I wanted it for David and John. Also, I want to say to the people who didn't win tonight, I'd like to see at some point that we find another way to give awards for excellence in the theatre without this competition.

In May of 1975, Bloomgarden spoke with the drama critic Emory Lewis, and his elation over his new success is evident:

I am having my best season in several years. You're only as good as your current season. I've always felt that you must only do plays that you believe in. Quality plays are always commercial.

I am proud of Equus. I regard it and The Lark, which starred Julie Harris, as my best productions. I'm particularly pleased with my policy regarding the on-stage seats. They are the best seats in the house, and we sell them only to students.

They must show their identification cards at the box office. I only charge the youngsters \$4.00 during the week and \$5.00 on Friday and Saturday. They are so intense that they become an integral part of the stage action. These kids are tomorrow's theatre goers.⁵⁴

Sadly, in the fall of that year, the future took on a darker look, and uncertainty replaced anticipation. While in Boston, preparing to launch the national tour of Equus, Bloomgarden began to complain about unexpectedly forgetting familiar names. John, who was working as company manager for the tour, was equally perplexed by this peculiar syndrome, and when he returned to New York, it was obvious that his father's condition was worsening. In early 1975, a series of tests revealed the presence of an inoperable brain tumor, and John and David (who was then in medical school) were told that their father's life expectancy was about six months. Radiation could alleviate some of the symptoms, but they would recur, at which time nothing more could be done. The boys decided to tell him the truth, and having heard it, Bloomgarden refused to accept the finality of his illness, began radiation treatment, and went on with his work and future plans.⁵⁵

He had already begun to develop aphasia, which resulted in garbled, almost incomprehensible speech--a devastating blow

for this man who did so much of his work on the telephone. His mind remained as lucid as ever, but the inability to communicate resulted in almost unbearable frustration, since he was still running Equus, and the show was at a point in its run when important decisions had to be made. Richard Burton was coming in, the ticket demand was building quickly, and Bloomgarden wanted to raise the prices. After Burton's short engagement, Anthony Perkins would take over, and the ticket sale might well hold for this now prominent star.

Soon, however, the radiation treatments began to take effect, and the aphasia disappeared. In addition, the tumor had stopped growing temporarily. From the onset of the illness, Bloomgarden had refused to go to the hospital, and his son feels that this might be because of his earlier experience, when he contracted hepatitis. Now that he was feeling better and in control of his speech, he was anxious to get back to work.⁵⁶

He had heard about a workshop production of a new play by the Czechoslovakian playwright Pavel Kohout. It was called Poor Murderer, and was playing at the acting studio of Herbert Berghof, a noted director and teacher. Berghof was giving the first American production of this work, which for political reasons had not yet been performed in the playwright's homeland, though it had received productions in several major European cities.

Bloomgarden asked John to see it, and receiving a very favorable report, went to see it himself. The drama takes place in a mental hospital where an actor, confined because of

a brutal murder he has committed, calls together his whole acting company, and assigns each of them a part in a play which he has written to explain the motivation behind the killing. Bloomgarden, too, liked it enormously, and approached Berghof about doing it on Broadway. The latter agreed to direct it, and they began to secure the rights for a commercial production.⁵⁷ Because of the sensitive issue of Kohout's political standing (he was then considered a non-person in Czechoslovakia), it took many months to obtain the production rights, and by the time rehearsals neared, it became obvious that Bloomgarden was desperately ill. The tumor was growing once again, and nothing more could be done. John called Herbert Berghof and explained the critical nature of the illness, but Berghof chose to go ahead. They continued raising money, with John doing most of the work, while Berghof cast the show, since Bloomgarden was unable to do so.⁵⁸

Poor Murderer opened on October 20, 1976, with the two Bloomgardens listed as producers, along with a man named Ken Marsolia, about whom nothing else is known at present. It starred Maria Schell and Lawrence Luckinbill. Walter Kerr wrote that it was not well-constructed, and cited the "raggle-taggle plotting." He added, "It is not so much incoherent as uninteresting."⁵⁹ Clive Barnes, who felt quite different, said, "What is important about the play--and I recommend the work most strongly--is the manner in which, by using the metaphor of acting as a symbol for madness, it leads the spectator quite hypnotized into the antechambers, rooms and dungeons of madness." He concluded his review with the

following:

This is a play that brings distinction to our season. To me it was a total surprise and it deserves to do well. In passing I must remark that it will be the last production that will have the name of the late Kermit Bloomgarden attached to it. It is a totally fitting farewell--exciting, unexpected and life-giving. Poor Murderer is going to be one of the highlights of our season.⁶⁰

John Bloomgarden feels that the play suffered greatly from his father's absence during the pre-production work. The defects were easily seen, but John was not experienced enough to offer solutions or demand changes from the much older and rather dominating director. Thus, there was a dreadful set and some very questionable casting, particularly Luckinbill in the leading role, a carryover from the workshop production at Berghof's insistence. This led to poor word-of-mouth and a run of only eighty-seven performances, in spite of Barnes' eloquent review.

Bloomgarden never saw his last production. As Clive Barnes noted in his review, the producer died while the show was in rehearsal. This indomitable man had continued to live at home with only daytime help until four days before his death, at which time his sons came to be with him. His family was with him at the end, which came on September 20, 1986, and they honored his request that he be cremated and no funeral service be held.⁶¹

Kermit Bloomgarden was one of the last, and certainly one of the greatest independent producers of this century. The quality of his productions, and the immaculate nature of their

presentation, remain hallmarks of what is possible in the theatre. As a commercial producer, Bloomgarden was an excellent business manager who kept a firm hand on the budget, refusing to yield to the notion (which now appears to be endemic) that excessive spending can effectively cover up the lack of inner content. He was also a great risk-taker and produced works he believed in, no matter how unpopular their subject matter might be. There was Deep are the Roots, with its chilling theme of racial injustice hiding behind a genial mask of paternal liberalism. It was produced in 1945, years before civil rights became an issue for the national conscience, and Bloomgarden must have known that picking this play for his debut as an independent producer was making a statement as to the kind of work he would be doing. He chose to do Death of a Salesman, a play which probed the coming apart of a family destroyed by the corrupting power of the American dream of success, in 1949, a time when the general post-war feeling in the nation was one of optimism and of unquestioning belief in our historic traditions. The Diary of Anne Frank, in 1955, confronted a theatre audience with the realities of the Holocaust in a way that could not be denied--the destruction of innocence and the haunting possibilities of life and joy in the midst of death, was what they saw, and it was unforgettable. And Bloomgarden's favorite play, The Lark, also produced in 1955, was another affirmation of human potential, with its heroine who combined such extraordinary courage with ordinary human fallibility.

Not all of Bloomgarden's plays were worthy of

production, yet when he did make mistakes, as in Woman Bites Dog, in 1946, or The Night of the Auk in 1956, he always assumed the responsibility, never blaming others for his poor decisions. Twenty-nine of his forty plays were serious dramas whose commercial viability was never assured, and on several occasions, such as the productions of The Children's Hour, in 1952, and Moon on a Rainbow Shawl, in 1962, good notices failed to attract an audience. However, his productions won thirty Tony Awards, eight New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, four Outer Circle Awards, and three Pulitzer Prizes.

Bloomgarden's critical abilities were an enormous asset to his career. The critique of Anyone Can Whistle, (Sideshow), the comparison between the two versions of The Crucible, and the letter to Jean Anouilh (all to be found in the Appendix to this work), certainly attest to this, and they are but three of the many to be found in his Archives. In addition, the letter to Anouilh includes an unusually frank and revealing statement of how Bloomgarden viewed his own career, and of the standards he set for himself. His integrity, his pride in his work, and his commitment to doing only the best are evident throughout.

Bloomgarden's belief in and support of the playwrights he sponsored never wavered, even at the possible cost of his own career. Thus, he chose to produce Hellman's The Children's Hour and Miller's The Crucible, in the mid-fifties, when each was a distinctly risky venture. He also took chances on new young talent, bringing fame to performers Patricia Neal, Barbara Bel Geddes, Anthony Perkins, Susan Strasberg, Karen Black, and directors Martin Ritt, George Roy Hill, and Herbert

Ross, among many others.

Because he rarely discussed his failures or indicted others for his mistakes in judgment, it is difficult to pinpoint one single cause for the disastrous decline of Bloomgarden's career in the early 1960's. It was probably a combination of circumstances, some of which were his fault and others which were emblematic of that time in the theatre. Certainly, his production choices were erratic. The Gay Life in 1961 was a total financial loss, and the next year, another expensive musical, Nowhere to Go But Up, also failed. In 1963, Hellman's My Mother, My Father, and Me, which had a large cast and many scene changes, went under, and in 1964, Anyone Can Whistle opened and closed in one week. Finally, The Playroom opened late in 1965 and only ran for a few weeks. Few producers could survive five such expensive failures, but they cannot all be attributed simply to poor judgment. A new musical based on a previously successful comedy, and with a lush score by Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz, another musical written by Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents, both of whom were eminently successful at that moment, the new Lillian Hellman play--these would have been attractive and seemingly fool-proof ventures for any producer. In addition, the disappearing investor and the swift escalation of producing costs made it extremely difficult for an independent producer to survive even one costly failure.

But Bloomgarden did persevere and ultimately prevail, possibly because beyond his business abilities, his daring, his commitment to serious drama, and his personal integrity, there

was something more--a passionate love of theatre that led him far beyond the producer's supervisory role. It was this devotion that led him to cross the boundary between business and art, to become a participant in the creative process. His critical judgments, his artistic taste, the people he selected to bring the plays to life, these were his contributions, and the rightness of his instincts added lustre and beauty to so many of his productions.

Bloomgarden's need to produce, to be a part of his plays, was the obsessive compulsion of an artist. When there was no work for him on Broadway, it drove him to tiny Off- and Off-Off-Broadway theatres, where fledgling companies were given the same thoughtful attention and guidance that he brought to his great Broadway productions.

Kermit Bloomgarden never made a great fortune in the theatre, and there were times late in his career when he was desperately short of money, but he left a legacy of brilliant productions and dedication to artistic excellence that truly define the art of producing.

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APPENDIX A

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1.

Letter from Bloomgarden to Jean Anouilh, dated 12 May 1954. The subject is preproduction work on The Lark and particularly misunderstandings with Anouilh's agent, Jan Van Loewen. For discussion, see Chapter IV above.

May 12, 1954

Dear M. Anouilh:

So much time has passed since I saw you, so much has been going on, and so little accomplished, that I felt in fairness to both of us you should get a picture of what has taken place.

As you know, when I left London I left with Jan's letter (Jan Van Loewan, Anouilh's agent) approving Miss Hellman and William Wyler as adaptor and director. While the approval for the adaptor was not necessary, I felt in so important a venture as this, and as in all the things I've ever done, that there should be mutual agreement as to all facets of the production, and at the same time to show your interest to Miss Hellmann.

Since then we have gotten into the kind of misunderstanding which has never happened to me in all the time I have been producing plays in the theatre.

I have the same high standards as a producer, as you do as a writer. There are many plays offered to me which are acceptable to other producers, but which I could not see myself doing because I do not feel strongly about them as a personal thing, and without this strong conviction I would not want to do them, knowing I would not bring my best to them. When I decide to do a play, it is because I think it has great merit, and far surpasses in my eyes the many plays of questionable merit that pass for plays in our theatre, and no doubt in yours. I am sure that there is no need for me to set down my standards, artistic purpose, and integrity as a producer. I would not do so if the situations that have arisen since our early agreement had not cast, unintentionally perhaps, but nevertheless definitely, one question after another on my right of determination and judgment, and the spirit of my intent. I would have imagined when you entered into negotiation with me, that you were as pleased to have someone of my caliber as your producer, as I was to have you. This kind of agreement comes to me, or at least it has always seemed to me until now, to

betoken much more than the written words on paper that bind us; a mutual respect, cooperation and consideration. I sometimes feel from the flow of letters from Jan that I am the Enemy-- rather than the man who has taken on the job here of giving your play the very best possible production, under the very best circumstances I will see to obtaining. I don't understand my suggestions and wishes being treated so lightly and summarily--as if all that mattered were the kind of manners observed in a court of law. That was not my intention when I decided that I wanted to do your play, and when I persuaded Lillian Hellman to do it with us.

And I have never been put in the position of having any production I intended doing treated as if it were some subsidiary diversion, a secondary added attraction.

I cannot reject all my experience in the American theatre, and go along with ideas that I know would be harmful to your play, and to my production. I cannot discount my conviction that previous adaptations of your plays did not do justice to your original work. The adaptors, in some instances, while highly distinguished and notable, were not playwrights of stature in their own right, as directly related to the American scene. I cannot dismiss my strong conviction that this was prejudicial to your reception in America. It was a mistake not to have had Lillian Hellman adapt your play, and I should not have permitted it to happen.

I would like, at this time, not knowing how much or how little Jan has told you, to state for you as clearly as I can what has been my understanding in relation to our contract, and why it has been so, because I want you to understand my position for what it is, and to rid it of any possible misconstruction.

When the contract was drawn up, we felt that a dramatist of standing commensurate with your work, could not be obtained unless such provision was made for his or her share in your share of the picture rights, in the event that any such interest developed. I did not ask that this be put into the contract for any other reason than that this was a customary procedure. After long discussions in my attorney's office with Jan, this was done, and it is so stated clearly in the contract.

Subsequently, when we were discussing terms for Miss Hellman's adaptation, Jan raised the question of the adaptor sharing in the picture rights. You must believe that I was surprised, to put it in the politest way I know, to have this point, which we had agreed upon and put into the contract, now raised in this way and at this time. It is superfluous to mention that my attorney, his associate attorneys, and an outside attorney, are unequivocal in their judgment that the contract calls for the adaptor to share in the picture rights.

I did not enter into this relationship lightly, and I do not expect to be treated lightly. Much valuable time has been lost already, and the more I try to clear up the situation, the more obstacles seem to be put in my way to prevent my functioning. I must set a director. I must set the stars. I must set the other actors I think best for the play. There are innumerable other things that must be done. I don't have to tell you how important it is to exercise choice in the selection of your theatre, rather than settling for what is available, or to have the time and the people to do more than the ordinary routine publicity, and to be able to give some semblance of responsible attention to interested theatre party people and audience membership groups. It is sheer waste to allow so much valuable time to go down the drain. It is unreasonable that I should be held up unnecessarily in producing your play, and to be in the position I am now, of having no adaptation, no adaptor, and therefore no ability to make commitments of any kind, because I can give no assurance of when I will go into rehearsal.

I cannot understand your or Jan's attitudes in fostering such an untenable situation. I cannot understand it solely related to the Broadway production, and I am certainly at a loss to understand it in relation to the eventual picturization. I would imagine that we would all want the finest production on Broadway that could be done. Perhaps I am wrong. I would imagine that a long successful run would make interest in the film run even higher. Again, perhaps I am wrong, and this goes by reverse logic. I think too much stress has been placed on the picture. I understand your desire to sell the picture, and to have John Huston do it, and I am all for it, but I cannot understand the disproportionate emphasis which has greatly interfered with our proceeding on my production of the play.

To go on: Jan informed me that he had obtained Christopher Fry to do the adaptation, and that Fry's agent would communicate with me to work out a deal. I find, instead, that I am not to deal with Mr. Fry, but that I must work it out with Mr. Beaumont [the British producer of The Lark]. But put that aside for the moment. According to Jan, Christopher Fry's adaptation will not be ready until September 1st. We talked in Geneva, if you remember, about the peculiar temperamental differences between American and European audiences, and the restless, impatient American habit of dismissing a masterpiece because, in the Americans' words, it is "too talky, too many words." Whatever you and I may feel about such an attitude, it exists and must be coped with. Assuming that I accept Fry's adaptation, I cannot set a director until I have the script in hand, and then, when all these arrangements have been concluded, more time will be needed for the director to go over the play with this in mind. I had hoped to be in rehearsal by October 1st. Under these circumstances, I don't see how I can. For me to be ready by October 1st, I would have to have the play by August 1st at the latest. I had hoped to have a full

season on Broadway, but if I cannot get one, then I may have to face delaying for another season to get the star and director I want for your play.

I am greatly disturbed at the course and tone of events. It is hard for me to believe that a venture which I entered into with such wholeheartedness, and where I believed the same was felt about my participation, could have assumed its present character. I want very much for us to put an end to this kind of thing, and I beg you to help me in accomplishing this.

With warmest regards,

Sincerely yours,

KERMIT BLOOMGARDEN

2.

This critique compares the published version of The Crucible, taken from the first stage production which had been shortened during rehearsals, with the original (and longer) script which Bloomgarden hoped to use in the proposed Off-Broadway revival.

The Crucible
by Arthur Miller

COMPARISON BETWEEN ORIGINAL AND PUBLISHED VERSIONS

ACT ONE

TO THE ENTRANCE OF PROCTOR (page 20, published version, page 17, original version.)

The published version is shorter, more concise to this point. Mr. Putnam is introduced here in the published version.

In the original, the Putnam daughter is brought in in a catatonic state. More by-play among the girls--Mercy has had an affair with a boy (Tom Bayley). Mary Warren is also in love with John Proctor, and has shared a love potion with Abigail.

I prefer the original version with some changes, i.e., would prefer the Putnam child to be off-stage (as in published version), and Mr. Putnam to be in the scene (as in published version.)

FIRST SCENE BETWEEN ABBY AND JOHN PROCTOR (to page 24, published version, to page 20, up to Parris' entrance in orig.)

In the published version Mercy Lewis, Mary Warren and Betty are on stage with Abby when John enters. Mercy and Mary leave almost immediately, leaving Betty "asleep."

In the original version both Betty and the other stricken child have run off with Mercy after them, before John enters. Mary leaves at once and Abby and John play their scene alone.

There is more softness in John in the original--he admits that he and his wife miss Abby, that she did her work well. The essential content of the scene is the same, but the original is fuller, juicier. I prefer the original, except that it seems arbitrary to have the two stricken children run off stage. Would prefer Betty to remain on stage.

TO THE ENTRANCE OF REV. HALE (to page 32, published version, to page 31, original version.)

The scene is substantially the same in both versions--there are line cuts, rearrangements of lines in the published version. Some of these are good and some are not, when they lose flavor.

TO THE END OF ACT ONE (to page 48, published version, to page 48, original version.)

I feel the published version is better in this scene than the original is.

1. Hale plays a more prominent part.
2. Giles is integrated into the action.
3. Giles' revelations about his wife are better early in the scene (as in the published version) rather than late (original version.)
4. Having all the children come in (original version) detracts from their later use in the play.
5. Abigail's denunciations are better motivated and more convincing in the published version.
6. The whole scene from Hale's entrance to the curtain builds more dramatically in the published version and the curtain is much better.

ACT II

TO THE ENTRANCE OF HALE (published version) to page 63.
TO THE ENTRANCE OF FRANCIS NURSE, etc. (orig. version, pages 2-21.)

In the published version Elizabeth knows that John saw Abigail (in the first act), and that Abigail told him there was no witchcraft in Betty's sickness. Elizabeth urges John to tell this to Cheever, clerk of court. He refuses, saying he has no proof, and Elizabeth realizes he was alone with Abigail, and accuses him of still wanting her. This brings on John's charge that Elizabeth is cold, righteous, etc. When Mary Warren comes in and says that Elizabeth was accused in court, John says he'll go to Abigail and call her whore, and let her know that he would not marry her even if Elizabeth were dead.

In the original version, Elizabeth does not know John saw Abigail. Their argument (Elizabeth is cold, righteous, etc.) comes because Elizabeth suspects she has been accused in court by Abigail, and she wants John to go to Abigail, etc. He refuses, and it is only after Mary Warren confirms that Elizabeth was accused, that he agrees to confront Abigail.

The published version seems more logical in the development of the situation between John and Elizabeth, and his final determination to confront Abigail. However, the

original has so much more flavor, beauty and a strong sense of its own inner logic, that I would give up the obvious logic of the published version.

FROM HALE OR NURSE ENTRANCE TO END OF ACT (published version, page 81, original, page 2-47.)

In the published version, Hale comes to investigate the Proctors, since Elizabeth was mentioned in court. Giles and Francis Nurse come in, saying their wives have been taken. Cheever and the officers come to take Elizabeth. The poppet with the needle is found, etc. Mary Warren tells the truth about Abby. John threatens Mary and says he will take her to court, and force her to repeat the truth.

In the original version, Mr. and Mrs. Nurse, and Mrs. Corey come in, asking John to sign a statement made by Mrs. Lewis, that Abby said all the accusations were "sport." John refuses to sign. Cheever and officers come in and arrest Mrs. Corey, Mrs. Nurse, and Elizabeth. Same use of poppet, etc. and curtain the same.

In the original version, Hale drops out as a character in Act II. Cheever plays a more important part, and is more fanatical, showing dramatically the temper of the town and the people.

The cumulative effect of the arrests in the original version builds powerfully, but deflects the story from Elizabeth. However, it certainly demonstrates the madness in Salem better than just reporting the arrests.

In the original version there seems to be extraneous material about the judges, Boston versus Salem, etc., which could be cut. (John Greenleaf [one of Bloomgarden's play readers] does not agree on this point.)

In the original version John Proctor vacillates considerably in deciding what stand, if any, he will take. This might be simplified.

I like the more sympathetic use of Giles Corey in the published version, since he is so important in the last act.

I also feel that Hale should be used in the second act (as he is in the published version.)

ACT III

Scene 1 of the original (to page 3-1-18) does not appear in the published version. This scene, the confrontation of John and Abigail in the woods, is a very good scene, and an important one in the development of the play. Certainly it should be kept.

ENTIRE ACT III OF PUBLISHED VERSION TO PAGE 120)
ACT III, SCENE 2 OF ORIGINAL

In the original version Abby interrupts John's beginning accusation of her by turning the blame on Mary, saying Mary lusted for John. This is not in published version. It is good and should be kept.

In the original version Proctor confesses, hoping to save his life. His wife despises him for his confession, and clings to the truth. He refuses to name others, and is told that confessing for himself alone is not enough--he will hang unless he gives names. In the published version he does not confess at this time. I prefer the published version in this respect--he should not yet confess.

In the original version, Rev. Hale does not denounce the court and leave, as he does in the published version. I think he should make the denunciation.

ACT IV PUBLISHED VERSION (to page 145)
ACT III, SCENE 3, ORIGINAL VERSION (to page 3-3)

In the published version, the events since the preceding scene are reported among Danforth, Parris, Hale, etc., including Giles' death.

In the published version, the action seems much more arbitrary, (people being brought on and off when needed, etc.,) less affecting, colder, more talk than action. John's refusal to let his name be nailed to the church door (though he is willing to confess) seems quixotic, and artificial--a device.

In the original, the action is more direct, and therefore, much more effective. Having the group of accused (Giles, Martha, Rebecca, Elizabeth, and John) all on stage, witnessing Giles' writing of his will, and very nearly witnessing his death, adds great dramatic impact.

Scene 3 of Act III in the original version is greatly to be preferred to Act IV of the published version, with a few changes:

1. John should not make his first confession in the preceding scene, but save it for this final scene.
2. I like Hale as he appears in the final scene of the original, but feel he should have denounced the court at the end of the preceding scene (as in the published version).
3. I feel that much of the dialectical material regarding good and evil, and these elements in John's character, should be cut.

4. Cuts throughout the scene are needed.

I certainly feel that the play should be in three acts as in the original, rather than in four, as in the published version.

3.

During the preproduction work on Anyone Can Whistle, which at that time was still called Sideshow, Bloomgarden was quite troubled by the fact that the book was still confused and unclear, with no discernible point of view. This critique was evidently an effort to pinpoint some of the unresolved issues.

June 3, 1963

SIDESHOW
by Arthur Laurents and
Steve Sondheim

K. B. Notes

I feel the use of the name Cohen is a kind of red herring, and I feel uncomfortable about it. If you want a common name, you could use something like Smith.

- Page 1-18 If they are afraid to have the Cookies take the waters, fearing the Cookies' non-cure would expose the "miracle", why not then refuse it to others suffering from other disabilities. The same logic would apply to them.
- Page 1-22 How did everybody get the tickets? The only explanation from Cooley is that the tickets were stolen. If so, who stole them? If it was the nurse, how did she get hold of them?
- Page 1-24 I believe that the flashes of lightening and thunder make something out of Hapgood's entrance that should not exist. The song says that he won't be coming on a clap of thunder. Also, it gives the feeling of a fairy tale. Why does Fay sing that a hero will come? Does she believe in miracles?
- Page 1-26 What is the reason for the guard to be with Hapgood? He has nothing to say and does nothing? Why doesn't he have some purpose? He would at least know where the Cookie Jar is. He would also know that Hapgood is the 50th Cookie.

It seems to me that Fay's reappearance in the second act in wig and disguise needs to be helped. We've lost her for a good deal of time before her reappearance, and therefore there must be some reference to the fact that they can't locate

her. This would keep her alive for the audience.

Page 1-45 I suggest that it would be better in "The opposite of dark is bright, the opposite of bright is dumb, so anything that is dark is dumb" to have these lines come from the negro, as a comment on the stupidity of society, rather than from Hapgood which might look like a slur on Negroes.

Page 1-46 Speech by Penny is quite confusing--unless you mean it to be confusing.

Right into the second act there must be references to "we can't find Fay."

Why is Hapgood a popular hero suddenly? What did he do?

Why does Fay take the name of Cohen, since that is not her name?

It seems to me that there are too many changes in Hapgood in the third act and we learn too many things about him too late. For example, he has been a practicing idealist; then he doesn't want to be one anymore, and would rather enter the Cookie Jar; then finally he abandons the idea of being committed and wants to be a practicing idealist again. This seems too much in such a short space of time.

The audience should know very clearly from the beginning that Hapgood has been committed to the Cookie Jar.

Page 3-14 Hapgood is a practicing idealist who wants to stop being one and says the hell with it, he'll be nuts.

Then something happens to make him want to take up the fight again. He decides to go back to the world again and Fay at first refuses to go with him. What is it that happens to make him do this?

Fay not being able to whistle is used as a symbol of her inhibitions, and I feel that her inability to whistle should be established early in the play.

Fay giving the names of the real Cookies doesn't seem justified in this context. We see her earlier freeing everybody who has been put into the van, both Cookies and Pilgrims alike. What then happens to force Fay to give the true names? It seems to me, by freeing everybody before, she destroys the validity of her reasons for giving the names. It is another thing if the crooks start arresting Cookies and Pilgrims alike and rather than see innocent people put into the Cookie Jar, she is forced to name the names or pick out the Cookies.

Page 3-14 Where is Hapgood going? Why does he leave Fay?

Page 3-19 Why does Hapgood come back?

Page 3-22 After Fay frees the innocent who were arrested
willy-nilly after she says there is no
miracle,
they want to hang her. Then she gives names.
Why?

Page 3-23 Of course Hapgood could stay.

I don't understand the idea of the new miracle. From here on
to the end, the play is confusing to me. Who are the Cookies
really? What is the degree of their insanity? Are they just
non-conformists?

APPENDIX B

A Chronology of Plays Produced
by Kermit BloomgardenBroadway Productions

1. Heavenly Express by Albert Bein. Opened at the National Theatre on 16 April 1940. Directed by Robert Lewis. Featured John Garfield, Aline MacMahon, and Harry Carey. Sets and costumes by Boris Aronson. 20 performances.
2. Deep Are the Roots by Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow. Co-produced with George Heller. Opened at the Fulton Theatre on 26 September 1945. Directed by Elia Kazan. Featured Gordon Heath and Barbara Bel Geddes. Sets by Howard Bay. Costumes by Emeline Roche. 477 performances.
3. Woman Bites Dog by Bella and Sam Spewack. Opened at the Belasco Theatre on 17 April 1946. Directed by Coby Ruskin. Featured Eda Heinemann and Frank Lovejoy. Sets by Howard Bay. Costumes by Mary Grant. 5 performances.
4. Another Part of the Forest by Lillian Hellman. Opened at the Fulton Theatre on 20 November 1946. Directed by Lillian Hellman. Featured Percy Waram, Mildred Dunnock, and Leo Genn. Sets and lighting by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Lucinda Ballard. 182 performances.
5. Command Decision by William Wister Haines. Opened at the Fulton Theatre on 2 October 1947. Directed by John O'Shaughnessy. Featured Paul Kelly and Paul McGrath. Set and lighting by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Julia Sze. 409 performances.
6. Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller. Opened at the Morosco Theatre on 10 February 1949. Co-produced with Walter Fried. Directed by Elia Kazan. Starred Lee J. Cobb. Set and lighting by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Julia Sze. 742 performances.
7. Montserrat by Lillian Hellman. Opened at the Fulton Theatre on 29 October 1949. Co-produced with Gilbert Miller. Directed by Lillian Hellman. Starred Emlyn Williams. Set by Howard Bay. Costumes by Irene Sharaff. 65 performances.

8. The Man by Mel Dinelli. Opened at the Fulton Theatre on 9 January 1950. Directed by Martin Ritt. Featured Lillian Gish. Set by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Julia Sze. 92 performances.
9. The Legend of Sarah by James Gow and Arnaud D'usseau. Opened at the Fulton Theatre on 11 October 1950. Directed by Benn W. Levy. Featured Marsha Hunt and Tom Helmore. Sets by Ralph Alswang. Costumes by Ben Edwards. 29 performances.
10. The Autumn Garden by Lillian Hellman. Opened at the Coronet Theatre on 7 March 1951. Directed by Harold Clurman. Starred Fredric March and Florence Eldridge. Set by Howard Bay. Costumes by Anna Hill Johnstone. 101 performances.
11. The Children's Hour by Lillian Hellman. Revival. Opened at the Coronet Theatre on 18 December 1952. Directed by Lillian Hellman. Featured Patricia Neal and Kim Hunter. Sets by Howard Bay. Costumes by Anna Hill Johnstone. 189 performances.
12. The Crucible by Arthur Miller. Opened at the Martin Beck theatre on 22 January 1953. Directed by Jed Harris. Featured Arthur Kennedy and Walter Hampden. Sets by Boris Aronson. Costumes by Edith Lutyens. 197 performances.
13. Wedding Breakfast by Theodore Reeves. Opened at the 48th Street Theatre on 20 November 1954. Directed by Herman Shumlin. Featured Lee Grant and Anthony Franciosa. Sets by William and Jean Eckart. Costumes by Edith Lutyens. 113 performances.
14. A View From the Bridge by Arthur Miller. Opened at the Coronet Theatre on 29 September 1955. Co-produced with Whitehead-Stevens. Directed by Martin Ritt. Starred Van Heflin. Sets by Boris Aronson. Costumes by Helene Pons. 149 performances.
15. The Diary of Anne Frank by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Opened at the Cort Theatre on 16 November 1955. Directed by Garson Kanin. Starred Joseph Schildkraut. Sets by Boris Aronson. Costumes by Helene Pons. 717 performances.
16. The Lark by Jean Anouilh, adapted by Lillian Hellman. Opened at the Longacre Theatre on 11 November 1955. Directed by Joseph Anthony. Starred Julie Harris. Sets by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Alvin Colt. 229 performances.
17. The Most Happy Fella by Frank Loesser. Co-produced with Lynn Loesser. Opened at the Imperial Theatre on 3 May

1956. Directed by Joseph Anthony. Starred Robert Weede. Sets by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Motley. 676 performances.
18. The Night of the Auk by Arch Oboler. Opened at the Playhouse theatre on 3 December 1956. Directed by Sidney Lumet. Starred Claude Rains, Wendell Corey, and Christopher Plummer. Sets by Howard Bay. 8 performances.
 19. Look Homeward, Angel by Ketti Fring. Co-produced with Theatre 200, Inc. Opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on 28 November 1957. Directed by George Roy Hill. Starred Anthony Perkins, Jo Van Fleet, and Hugh Griffith. Sets by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Motley. 564 performances.
 20. The Music Man by Meredith Wilson. Co-produced with Herbert Greene, in association with Frank productions, Inc. Opened at the Majestic Theatre on 19 December 1957. Directed by Morton Da Costa. Starred Robert Preston. Sets by Howard Bay. Costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois. 1375 performances.
 21. The Gang's All Here by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Co-produced with Sylvia Drulie. Opened at the Ambassador Theatre on 1 October 1957. Directed by George Roy Hill. Starred Melvyn Douglas. Sets by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Patricia Zipprodt. 132 performances.
 22. The Fighting Cock by Jean Anouilh. Opened at the ANTA Theatre on 12 August 1959. Directed by Peter Brook. Starred Rex Harrison. Sets and costumes by Rolf Gerard. 132 performances.
 23. Toys in the Attic by Lillian Hellman. Opened at the Hudson Theatre on 25 February 1960. Directed by Arthur Penn. Starred Jason Robards, Jr., Maureen Stapleton, and Irene Worth. Set by Howard Bay. Costumes by Ruth Morley. 556 performances.
 24. The Wall by Millard Lampell. Co-produced with Billy Rose. Opened at the Billy Rose Theatre on 11 October 1960. Directed by Morton Da Costa. Starred George C. Scott and Marion Seldes. Set by Howard Bay. Costumes by Noel Taylor. 167 performances.
 25. The Gay Life by Fay and Michael Kanin. Lyrics and music by Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz. Opened at the Shubert Theatre on 18 November 1961. Directed by Gerald Freedman. Starred Walter Chiara, Barbara Cook, Jules Munshin. Sets by Oliver Smith. Costumes by Lucinda Ballard. 113 performances.

26. Nowhere To Go But Up by James Lipton. Co-produced with Herbert Greene. Music by Sol Berkowitz. Opened at the Winter Garden Theatre on 10 November 1962. Directed by Sidney Lumet. Starred Tom Bosley and Martin Balsam. Sets by Peter Larkin. Costumes by Robert Fletcher. 9 performances.
27. My Mother, My Father and Me by Lillian Hellman. Opened at the Plymouth Theatre on 23 March 1963. Directed by Sidney Lumet. Starred Ruth Gordon, Walter Matthau, and Lili Darvas. Sets by Howard Bay. Costumes by Dorothy Jeakins. 17 performances.
28. Anyone Can Whistle by Arthur Laurents. Co-produced with Diana Krasny. Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Opened at the Majestic Theatre on 4 April 1964. Directed by Arthur Laurents. Starred Lee Remick, Angela Lansbury, and Harry Guardino. Sets by William and Jean Eckart. Costumes by Theoni V. Aldredge. 9 performances.
29. The Playroom by Mary Drayton. Co-produced with Trude Heller in association with Max Youngstein and David Karr. Opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on 5 December 1965. Directed by Joseph Anthony. Featured Karen Black. Sets by Jo Mielziner. Costumes by Theoni Aldredge. 33 performances.
30. Ilya Darling by Jules Dassin. Music by Manos Hadjidakis, lyrics by Joe Darion. Opened at the Mark Hellinger Theatre on 11 April 1967. Directed by Jules Dassin. Starred Melina Mercouri. Sets by Oliver Smith. Costumes by Theoni Aldredge. 319 performances.
31. Equus by Peter Shaffer. Opened at the Plymouth Theatre on 24 October 1974. Directed by John Dexter. Starred Anthony Hopkins and Peter Firth. Sets and costumes by John Napier. 1209 performances.

Plays Which Did Not Come Into New York

1. A Certain Joy by Irving Ravech. Co-produced with Thomas Hammond and Peter Glenn. Set by Howard Bay. Costumes by Edith Lutyens. Directed by Daniel Mann. Featured Margo, Walter Mathau, Joe De Santis and Ruth Warrick. Opened at the Playhouse Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware on 13 February 1953. Closed after one week.
2. Maiden Voyage by Paul Osborn. Directed by Joseph Anthony. Starred Melvyn Douglas. Opened at the Shubert Theatre in Philadelphia on 28 February 1957. Closed after one week.

Off-Broadway Productions

1. Moon on a Rainbow Shawl by Errol John. Opened at the East 11th Street Theatre on 16 January 1962. Directed by George

Roy Hill. Featured Vinette Carroll and James Earl Jones. Sets by Lloyd Burlingame. Costumes by Charles Gelatt. 105 performances.

2. Next Time I'll sing To You by James Saunders. Opened at the Phoenix Theatre on 27 November 1963. Directed by Peter Coe. Featured James Earl Jones and Estelle Parsons. Sets by David Hays. Costumes by Patricia Zipprodt. 23 performances.
3. Hello and Goodbye by Athol Fugard. Opened at the Sheridan Square Playhouse on 18 September 1969. Co-produced with Commonwealth United Entertainment, and Jonathan Burrows. Directed by Barney Simon. Starred Colleen Dewhurst and Martin Sheehan. Sets by William Ritman. 45 performances.
4. The Golden Bat by Yutaka Higashi. Co-produced with Arthur Cantor. The show came from Japan, and was originally produced by La Mama ETC. After a limited engagement there, Bloomgarden and Cantor re-opened it at the Sheridan Square Playhouse on 21 July 1970. 152 performances.
5. The Hot 1 Baltimore by Lanford Wilson. Originally produced by the Circle Repertory Company. Co-produced with Roger Ailes. Bloomgarden and Ailes took it over and opened it on 22 March 1973 at the Circle in the Square Theatre. Directed by Marshall Mason. 499 performances.
6. The Sea Horse by James Irwin. Presented at the Circle Repertory Company theatre. Directed by Marshall Mason. Featured Conchata Ferrell and Edward J. Moore. Set by David Potts. Costumes by Jennifer von Mayrhouser. 84 performances.
7. Ionescapade by Robert Allan Ackerman, who also directed. Music and lyrics by Mildred Kayden. Co-produced with Roger Ailes. After a brief initial run at Theatre Four in January of 1973, under the aegis of Ackerman, Bloomgarden and Ailes reopened it there on 26 April 1974. 13 performances.

Road Tour Only

The Shrike by Joseph Kramm. Directed by Jose Ferrer. Starred Van Heflin. Set by Howard Bay. Costumes by Edith Lutyens.

Posthumous Production

Poor Murderer by Pavel Kohout. Co-produced with John Bloomgarden and Ken Marsolais. Opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on 20 October 1976. Directed by Herbert Berghof. Starred Maria Schell, Laurence Luckinbill, Kevin McCarthy. Bloomgarden died before this production began casting, but remained on the masthead as producer.

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Max Allentuck

John Bloomgarden

Don Doherty

Virginia (Bloomgarden) Chilewich