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A HISTORY OF THE MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1986

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A HISTORY OF THE MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

by

JOHN WILLIAM PEREIRA

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.

1986

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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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people whom I wish to thank for their help, direct or indirect, in the completion of this study. First and foremost among them is my mentor, Professor Stanley A. Warren, who, from the very beginning provided me with advice, support and encouragement, without which this study would never have been completed. I am forever grateful to Professor Stanley Kauffmann, both because he suggested that I undertake this project, and because working with him has provided me with a model of scholarship as well as of graciousness and courtesy. I owe a great debt to Professor Daniel Gerould for his constant support during the length of my doctoral studies and for vastly broadening my understanding of dramatic criticism.

I would like to thank Ms. Lynne Meadow for the time she was able to spend with me on this project, as well as Mr. Barry Grove, who was extremely generous with his time and extraordinarily helpful. I am very grateful to Mr. Jonathan Alper and Mr. Thomas Bullard for sharing their knowledge about the past and current activities of the Manhattan Thea-

tre Club, as well as to Mr. Michael Bush and Ms. Jennifer Ober for their assistance.

I am extremely grateful to those persons whom I interviewed whose knowledge of the early days of the Club proved invaluable, particularly Mr. Albert E. Jeffcoat, Dr. Gerald Freund, Mr. Austin Pendleton, Mr. A. Joseph Tandet and Ms. Peregrine Whittlesey. I appreciate the openness of Mr. Mortimer Levitt in discussing a particularly painful episode in his life, and thank him for his willingness to open closed doors.

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor Albert Bermel, who, in a lengthy chat on theatre in Britain and America, managed to resolve for me a particularly potent episode of writer's block, as well as to Professors Harry Carlson, Raymond Gasper, Margaret Knapp, Vera M. Roberts and Susan Matthews for helpful discussion and advice.

I would like to thank Ms. Linda Masson, whose research on Lynne Meadow as a director was conducted concurrent with my research for this history, for confirming many of my observations and serving as an attentive listener.

I also wish to express my thanks to Mr. Merrill Silverstein, whose Saturday morning phone calls often raised interesting intellectual questions which helped motivate both

research and productivity. For providing encouragement and support I wish to thank Ms. Mara Bovsun, Ms. Sue Corsino, Ms. Pearl Fread, Dr. Rose Jackson, Mr. Mitchell Levenberg, Ms. Phyllis Mirsky, Ms. Carlene Price, Dr. Gertrude Schneider, Ms. Pat Stansfield, and Dr. Roberta Thornton.

I dedicate this work to my family--my three uncles, Frank, James and Thomas Miller, and my aunt, Madeline Miller--whose encouragement and emotional support I appreciate more than I can adequately express.

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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

"The New York theater is beset with economic, sociological, journalistic and even real estate difficulties," wrote Otis Guernsey in his review of the 1970-1971 theatrical season. "It is caught in a tide rip of violent artistic change at a moment when the quiet backwaters of the comfortable past offer not even the illusion of safety from the turbulent present. Our theater is in all kinds of difficulty except the worst kind of all: stagnation."¹

Dissatisfaction with the commercial theatre in New York was widespread during the 1970-1971 season. It was a season which, Guernsey noted, emphasized nostalgia. On Broadway, the revival of the 1920s musical No, No, Nanette was rivalled in terms of popularity with Broadway audiences only by Follies, a musical about reminiscences. The season also included revivals of straight plays, with Hedda Gabler and A Doll's House attracting considerable attention as showpieces of the talent of actress Claire Bloom. Productions of plays

¹ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1970-1971, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1971), p. 37.

by John Arden, Bertolt Brecht, Noel Coward, Arthur Miller, as well as Molière and Shakespeare completed the schedule of revivals.

New foreign plays dominated the Broadway scene, including Anthony Shaffer's Sleuth, David Storey's Home and Christopher Hampton's The Philanthropist (which, interestingly, would be seen in revival fourteen years later at the Manhattan Theatre Club). New American dramas, however, were at an all-time low, with only eight new plays by American authors being produced under full Broadway contracts.² Off Broadway had become the home, temporarily, of American playwrights, with thirty-nine new plays being offered as part of the season. These included Father Daniel Berrigan's play about resistance to the Vietnam War, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine, Bruce Jay Friedman's Steambath and John Guare's The House of Blue Leaves.

Off Broadway audiences tended to be more discriminating and demanding than audiences on Broadway, and, as a result, Off Broadway offerings generally reflected greater intellectual depth and relevance to contemporary issues. Off Broadway theatres sought to be venturesome, while Broadway sought the common denominator among audience members.

² Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1970-1971, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1971), p. 5.

The Off Broadway sector originally developed in response to Broadway's refusal to produce more challenging material, and in 1970, still part of a period of political, social, racial and ethical upheaval in the United States, and certainly not a time marked by passivity, the reaction to Broadway's lack of daring did not cease.

On Manhattan's Upper East Side, Albert E. Jeffcoat chose to register his dissatisfaction with the current theatrical commercial bill of fare by organizing a theatre of his own. The Manhattan Theatre Club was incorporated in 1970 by Jeffcoat and a group of acquaintances, with the intention of providing an alternative to the kind of theatre seen on Broadway. What began as a form of community theatre for the Upper East Side of Manhattan developed into a major performing arts center, within a relatively short period of time, under the guidance of Lynne Meadow.

Meadow, a student of the Yale School of Drama, came to New York with hopes of working as a freelance director. She was hired as the Executive Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1972, and set about transforming the Club into a prolific producing organization and theatre laboratory. She was assisted in her efforts by colleagues from Yale, and, beginning in 1975, by which time she had been named Artistic

Director, she took on partner Barry Grove as the theatre's Managing Director. Since 1975, Meadow and Grove have worked together to ensure the survival and strength of the Manhattan Theatre Club.

The purpose of this study is to compile a history of the Manhattan Theatre Club, to document its achievements and contributions to the theatre in New York, and to investigate the reasons for its success. The study will focus on the achievements and failures of the theatre, the shaping of its artistic policy, the importance of subsidization, and the role of commercial success by a non-commercial theatre in New York City, certainly the American theatre's center of commercial production. The assets and liabilities of commercial success, as well as the impact of recognition by the commercial sector on the theatre's artistic policy and long range goals will also be addressed.

The "urgent voice" of a playwright is claimed to be the deciding factor in the selection of works produced at the Manhattan Theatre Club. Through a review of the plays which comprise the Club's production history, this study will focus on the basic criteria used in play selection, and will explore for the existence of a thematic connection among productions.

The fundamental questions to be addressed are: in what ways has the presence of the Manhattan Theatre Club contributed to theatrical activity in New York City, how has the theatre managed to survive, and what does the theatre's course of future development appear to be?

The greater portion of material used in researching this project has come directly from the archives of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Interviews with significant figures in the Club's history have been heavily relied upon, and critical reviews of selected productions have also been utilized. Financial documentation was provided by the Manhattan Theatre Club, with additional material obtained from the New York State Department of Charities Registration, the New York State Office of the Attorney General and the Internal Revenue Service.

Chapter II

BEGINNINGS, 1970-1972

In his own rather terse but interesting account of the development of the Manhattan Theatre Club, Albert E. Jeffcoat, founding chairman and president of the Club from 1970 through 1981 states, "The MTC was a new concept brought forth by a small group of business and professional people concerned about the lack of serious theatre in what was then a rather barren New York theatre scene."¹ The creation of the Manhattan Theatre Club, inspired by the Arts Club of London, was intended to provide a place where a variety of entertainment, ranging from serious dramatic scripts, to poetry readings, to musical events, to operas, could be produced based solely on their artistic merit. The first statement of purpose described the concept as follows:

Unlike the LaMama, which is dedicated to experimental theatre and new playwrights, or the Classic Stage Company, which produces revivals, the theatre club will not confine itself to any one field of drama or entertainment. Consistent with its objective of encouraging frequent attendance by members, it will attempt to offer over

¹ Albert E. Jeffcoat, The MTC: A Private History, (Internal document), p. 1.

the years a rich variety of entertainment the only common denominator of which will be quality.²

While the Manhattan Theatre Club cannot be described as a "rebellious" organization, its creation was, in fact, an act of rebellion--rebellion against a commercial theatre which again had begun to be perceived, as it has so often been over the years, as tired and stale. Without question, the leader of this particular rebellion was Albert E. Jeffcoat.

Jeffcoat, who for a time was the London correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, has never himself been a theatre practitioner. Nevertheless, he admits to holding exceptionally high standards, as a member of the paying audience, against which he judges theatrical productions. "The average theatregoer doesn't look at the stage the way I do," he says, "Audiences generally will be overwhelmed by a good acting performance, or good staging, fast or exciting staging and things like that. . .and I'm. . .thinking, what a godawful play this is."³

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 9.

Jeffcoat's views on the theatre were shaped largely by his experience in London. During the 1950s, the time of his stay, London theatre was inexpensive to attend, and the quality of the productions remarkably high. As a result, he became an avid theatregoer. After becoming a member of the London Arts Club, he became more and more impressed by the practice of bringing artists and audience together in a "social milieu" to discuss productions. "The whole idea of mixing artists with the audience. . . I thought was very enjoyable for both, and certainly was enjoyable for the audience types like me who don't normally get a chance to meet playwrights and directors and so on."⁴

The intimacy of the London Arts Club, the variety of its entertainment, and its popularity with its subscription audience made a strong impression. When the Manhattan Theatre Club was created, officially on October 3, 1970, it was created as a private club, but open to anyone willing to pay small annual dues. The structure of a club was chosen to encourage the membership to become more actively involved in the working of the theatre, to strengthen the link between the audience and the organization.

⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

During the early years, membership in the Manhattan Theatre Club entitled a subscriber to reciprocal benefits with the Arts Theatre Club of London. While this possible arrangement was apparently never undertaken by any of the Club's members, it reinforces the importance of the London Arts Club as the prototype for the Manhattan Theatre Club.

After his experience with the London theatre, Jeffcoat expressed more than mild disappointment with the commercial theatre in New York, "When. . .I came back to New York. . .I literally walked out of about three successive plays because I thought they were so terrible."⁵ He was not alone in this feeling, and out of this shared sentiment was born the idea of the Manhattan Theatre Club.

The Club was created almost as the result of a "dare." The setting was a cocktail party where the conversation focussed on the decrepit state of the theatre in New York. Jeffcoat recalls that he challenged all the guests present to form a theatre of their own, and thus the germ of the Manhattan Theatre Club was sown in mid-1969. In following months, Jeffcoat held a series of informal meetings with individuals who later formulated the articles of incorporation for the theatre club.

⁵ Ibid.

The initial discussions regarding the creation of the Club took place between Jeffcoat and Margaret Kennedy. Their meetings served to solidify the purpose of the organization: to provide a facility where new and adventuresome plays, which otherwise would have very little chance of being produced in New York, could be given quality productions.

In the fall of 1969, Margaret Kennedy approached A. Joseph Tandet, a lawyer involved in the arts to discuss the legal aspects involved in creating a theatre organization, and to get Tandet's input on the viability of such an organization, based on his experience as a theatrical producer. It was determined that to make a theatrical producing organization viable in New York City would require a permanent home, a physical structure. This led to the decision to secure a location.

In the spring of 1970, the location was found by Margaret Kennedy. The National Bohemian Hall, at 321 East 73rd Street, had been the cultural center for Czechs, Slovaks and Moravians in New York for several decades. In 1970, the Hall housed Stage 73, a theatre managed by David Nillo and Jack Shaul, which presented small plays and musicals, such as the production of Best Foot Forward with Liza Minelli.

Stage 73 was also the home of the premiere of Fortune and Men's Eyes. During the late 1960s, however, the theatre had fallen into disuse, probably caused mainly by the Equity Off-Broadway contract which makes 199 seat theatres less attractive than 299 seat theatres. The building was also in poor condition. Responsibility for upkeep of the property had shifted from the owners to whomever was occupying the space at the time. Except for the space used by Stage 73, the most functional space in the building, the majority of the rooms were cluttered with rubbish and in total disarray. mess.⁶

The terms of the lease with the Bohemian organization provided that maintenance and renovations were to be paid for by the tenant. The tenant was also responsible for payment of all utilities, water, elevator service and heat. Given these conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that Nillo and Shaul were receptive to the idea of turning over the space to the Manhattan Theatre Club. In fact, after the transaction was made, Shaul remained on salary to manage the facility for roughly a year.

⁶ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 4.

Despite the clutter, the site selected for the Club seemed perfectly suited for the kind of intimate theatre that Jeffcoat hoped to design. The amount of space afforded the possibility for several activities to be presented simultaneously, such as a play reading concurrently with a fully mounted production. More importantly, as stressed by Eli Wallach, a friend of Philip Barber, who by now was actively involved with the project, unused space could be rented out for rehearsals of Broadway shows. On this advice, three floors were rented for the Manhattan Theatre Club, more space than could conceivably be used by a fledgling organization with limited funds. Nevertheless, Wallach's advice turned out to be quite correct. The shortage of rehearsal space in New York City had theatre and film producers lined up in the hope of utilizing available space at the Manhattan Theatre Club. Between \$30,000 and \$50,000 annually was derived from renting rehearsal space to outside organizations during the early stages of the Club's development.

As might be expected, however, given the physical condition of the building, maintenance was a major expenditure. By 1972, the operating budget was approximately \$75,000, with roughly half of that amount going directly back into

maintaining the structure, not including the cost of utilities.⁷ During the first two years of its existence, the Manhattan Theatre Club was meeting expenses almost on a day-to-day, month-to-month basis, and was beginning to incur a cumulative deficit. Nevertheless, the expenses of the Club were covered by fundraising activities or by members of the Board directly.

Negotiations on the lease had begun by late 1970. Initially, the attempt was made to secure a fifteen year lease, but the first lease obtained was limited to five years.

With a space almost secured and a growing body of interested parties involved in the project, the Manhattan Theatre Club was yet to be made into a legally defined organization. It was soon incorporated as a non-profit rather than a commercial institution in order derive support from foundations. Tandet prepared the original certificate of incorporation, and several of the subscribers to the certificate met at the Harvard Club on September 22, 1970 to affix their signatures.

The articles of incorporation defined the purpose of the Manhattan Theatre Club to be:

⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82. p. 5.

To promote quality American theatre as an art by the following means:

- a. To produce new plays written by contemporary playwrights (sic).
- b. To commission new plays by contemporary playwrights (sic).
- c. To foster new ideas in theatre.
- d. To promote the advancement of theatre as an art by obtaining membership which will sustain production of plays through membership fees and contributions.
- e. To promote the art of children's theatre by the production of quality plays for children.
- f. To broaden the base of theatre attendance by establishing a fund to supply free tickets for deserving students who evidence unusual interest, or talent for, the theatre, and to make theatre available to underprivileged persons.
- g. Said corporation shall not be operated for pecuniary benefit or financial gain.
- h. Said corporation shall be a Type C corporation under section 201 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law.

The document was signed by Albert E. Jeffcoat, Margaret Kennedy and A. Joseph Tandet, the prime movers of the project so far, and nine other individuals now committed to the undertaking, only four of whom were involved with the theatre professionally.

Philip Barber, a close friend of Tandet's, had a long history of working in the theatre. He had been involved

with the Group Theatre, working as a technical director and play consultant. During the 1930s he directed the WPA's Federal Theatre Project in New York. Later, he was to become technical director of the Yale University Theatre under George Pierce Baker. He was the author of the New Scene Technician's Handbook, a definitive technical manual published in tandem with John Gassner's Producing the Play. At the time of his involvement with the Manhattan Theatre Club, he ran the Music Inn in Lenox, Massachusetts as part of the Tanglewood Festival. For a time, he headed the school of jazz which was a part of the Tanglewood Festival, and in 1970 was a partner in the public relations firm of Barber and Barr.

Barber brought with him to the project three other theatre professionals. Gene Frankel, well known theatre director; George Tabori, the actor/playwright married to the actress Viveca Lindfors, whose son, Kristopher, was to later perform at the Club in a production of Mark Medoff's The Wager, which was to gain the first substantial recognition for the theatre club; and the playwright William Gibson, best known for his plays, The Miracle Worker and Two for the Seesaw.

The other signers included Barbara Hirschl, the wife of Norman Hirschl, partner of the Hirschl-Adler Art Gallery on the upper East side of Manhattan; Gerard L. Spenser, an affluent businessman; and Peregrine Whittlesey, who was to become very actively involved with the day to day functioning of the theatre.

Roughly two weeks after the signing took place, the Manhattan Theatre Club was officially incorporated. The date was October 3, 1970. Shortly thereafter, on November 9, 1970, Tandet filed the necessary papers to apply for a tax exemption for the theatre, and by processing the documents through New York offices rather than Washington's, cut short the usual six month wait to three weeks. At the same time, negotiations were taking place with the managers of Stage 73 and the owners of the National Bohemian Hall. Those negotiations were concluded in January, 1971.

While the primary model for the Manhattan Theatre Club was the London Arts Club, the initial style of management was patterned after an American organization, the Theatre Guild.⁸ The management of the theatre was to consist of a producing board made up of playwright William Gibson, drama critic Harold Clurman, actors Eli Wallach and George Tabori,

⁸ Jeffcoat, MTC's Beginnings, p. 2.

director Gene Frankel, and Philip Barber.

Barber was named the first Artistic Director, by virtue of his extensive theatre experience. His concept of a producing board was, however, to prove unworkable. The members of the board had too little time to devote to the non-profit Manhattan Theatre Club, as they were involved in profit-making ventures in film or the commercial theatre. Barber, too, had limited availability as his primary commitment was his work at Tanglewood. It became clear that the responsibilities of an Artistic Director of a newly formed theatre organization demanded no less than a full-time commitment to that organization, and Barber was forced to resign the position. However, he did remain a member of the Club's board of directors. The initial attempt to install an Artistic Director was not realized, and subsequent attempts were also to prove problematic.

The position was next offered to Nikos Psacharopoulos, the Artistic Director of the Williamstown Theatre. While very enthusiastic about working with the Manhattan Theatre Club during the period he was not at Williamstown, it soon became apparent that this, too, was an unworkable match. Psacharopoulos, who helped found the Williamstown Theatre in 1955 and who was termed by the New York Times to be "the

moving spirit of Williamstown,"⁹ was used to lavish productions requiring large budgets. His association with the Club was short lived. The board of directors simply found it impossible to "provide salary and employment guarantees that he felt he would require in New York."¹⁰ Tandet explains, ". . .as it turned out, the kinds of things he wanted to do in terms of productions required an enormous amount of money. . .and we just didn't have the funds and so we came to an amicable parting of the ways."¹¹

The board intensified the search for an artistic director and, after many interviews, settled upon a theatre manager who had been recommended by New York art dealer, Alan Frumkin. Frumkin and Tandet had both gone to Cornell University. He was recruited by the Manhattan Theatre Club board for fundraising purposes, and he indicated that his decision to accept that role could be influenced if the board were to accept his recommendation for an Artistic Director. His recommendation was Robert Sickinger, who was credited with creating the Hull House theatre in Chicago, and who was highly praised by all those in Chicago theatri-

⁹ Undated publicity flier on Williamstown Theatre Festival.

¹⁰ Jeffcoat, MTC's Beginnings, p. 2.

¹¹ Interview with A. Joseph Tandet, 6/28/83, p. 3.

cal circles whom the search committee contacted. Frumkin knew Sickinger and had had dealings with him in Chicago.

Sickinger's track record appeared impressive, and along with Frumkin's recommendation, a letter of reference was sent on Sickinger's behalf from the president of Paramount Pictures, Frank Yablantz.¹² On the strength of these recommendations, Sickinger was hired as the third Artistic Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club. His one-year contract was negotiated in September, 1971.

The board had been impressed by Sickinger's promise to raise money for the theatre; a promise which had given him greater weight as a candidate. Sickinger was, however, to surprise the board on several occasions. Tandet recalled one notably embarrassing incident:

I negotiated his contract and, unfortunately, he became a joke. . . . I went to a couple of meetings with Sickinger at the Ford Foundation, which I will never forget because he appeared in a boy scout outfit, complete with hat. It was really quite a joke. . . . It was a riot. It was just he showed up in this posh office . . . (with) . . . leggings, like from World War I--it wasn't a current boy scout uniform. . . . Anyway, so then he capped the year by doing a production on Charles Manson.¹³

¹² Ibid., p. 4.

¹³ Ibid.

The production referred to was titled 22 Years and was written and directed by Sickinger. The play was about the life of Charles Manson, the murderer convicted in the sensational West coast killing of actress Sharon Tate and companions.

Kevin Sanders' review of the production for ABC-TV described it as "powerful and disturbing." The review continues,

It begins in the courtroom in a series of flashbacks of the actual testimony. We reconstruct through various interviews of people who have met and known Manson--and his first encounters with girls who later formed his family. All of it leading up to that chilling night in the home of Sharon Tate. . . .

At the end of this play, the audience is left facing the same kind of unsettling and uncertain questions that faced the jury in this case: Did Manson actually order these killings or was it Tex Watson operating without Manson's knowledge or authority and what would account for such an extraordinary crime anyway? Was it the drugs, the hedonistic lifestyle or the individual background of the people concerned? Or does the answer lie in the title of the play itself, 22 Years. That's the total length of time Manson spent in state institutions institutes of correction and federal prisons. Well, of course, the only person who can answer these questions is Charles Manson himself.

Those two eminent attorneys F. Lee Bailey and Melvin Belli were talking about this very case and both of them said that they didn't think that Manson should be executed and that we should study him and find out why he did whatever he did, and I think it was Bailey who said you can't learn much from a corpse, and that apart from anything else seems to be the point being made by Robert Sick-

inger, who wrote and directed this powerful and disturbing play.¹⁴

If the play was disturbing to Kevin Sanders, it was much more so to the Manhattan Theatre Club board. Tandet described it as "an abomination" which the audience found offensive, largely because it portrayed Manson as an innocent victim of society. When the subject matter of the play became known to the board, Sickinger was warned not to proceed with the production, but as Jeffcoat explained, ". . . it was a mania with him to produce that play--and I told him that I thought he was making a very poor judgement to start his career with us to produce a play that he had written himself, and he went on and did it anyway, so I had to fire him."¹⁵

Once again, the Manhattan Theatre Club was in search of an Artistic Director. But while the Club was by no means rooted firmly in 1971 and was beset by both managerial and financial difficulties, fundraising activities continued and community outreach was sustained. The Club was to be a "community" theatre, not in a geographic sense but in the sense of a group of individuals who shared the need for the-

¹⁴ Kevin Sanders, ABC-TV Review of 22 Years, December 18, 1971.

¹⁵ Jeffcoat interview, p. 2.

atrical experiences which were intellectually and emotionally challenging or inspiring. As it turned out, that group did share the same geographic location--the Upper East Side of Manhattan--and this, in large part, was responsible for the Club's continued survival.

The Upper East Side, while it did have Stage 73, was without a major, actively producing theatre. This in and of itself made the location a prime area for establishing a new theatre. In addition, the area was one of the safest neighborhoods in Manhattan at a time when the Broadway theatre district was plagued with crime. Also, the location of 321 East 73rd Street is situated only three blocks from the FDR Drive, making it accessible from Queens, Westchester and Long Island, with parking garages in abundance in the area. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Upper East Side has one of the highest concentrations of theatregoers in New York City.

To some of its residents, the East Side was a kind of cultural wasteland in relation to the performing arts. While the Upper West Side had Lincoln Center, midtown had Broadway and downtown there was the activity of off-off-Broadway, there was nothing comparable available to East-siders. Therefore, the stirrings of the Manhattan Theatre Club attracted attention.

Affluent residents of the Upper East Side did not hesitate to support the Club and its stated goals. Money was raised on an ad hoc basis. Members of the Board solicited wealthy people to arrange cocktail parties on behalf of the Manhattan Theatre Club, at which the goals of the organization were discussed. Approximately \$50,000 was raised in this way during the early part of 1971, before a single production was mounted. In addition to outright contributions, the Club had over 500 members in 1972, each of whom paid an annual subscription fee of \$30. Clearly there was an audience here for the right theatre.

Special events were arranged to raise money including play readings by Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson and Kevin McCarthy. Mildred Dunnock also contributed her talent for several play and poetry readings. During the first quarter of 1971, the Club managed to keep afloat with events that were produced free of charge by members of the organization. There were, in addition to play and poetry readings, chamber music recitals, film showings by new filmmakers, children's theatre and dance classes. The Club was functioning as a theatre attempting to serve the needs and desires of the community. Because the community was the Upper East Side and the goals of the organization were artistically virtu-

ous, its Artistic Council began to expand. By 1972, Cheryl Crawford, Philip Langner, Alan Jay Lerner, Terence McNally and Stephen Sondheim had joined. In addition, the Club was making connections with other established theatres, including the Long Wharf in New Haven, the Trinity Theatre in Providence and the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. A public relations flier issued during the "season" of 1971-1972 describes this relationship:

Directors of each of these three theatres have agreed to cooperate in offering their most transportable works as "guest productions" for the Club. The Eugene O'Neill Foundation has become one of the Club's antennae for identifying promising new scripts for its Playwrights' Workshop. Beyond these links, we hope in the long run to organize or associate with theatre clubs in other cities which could cross-fertilize each other with ideas and properties - and members.¹⁶

The arrangement with the O'Neill Foundation was facilitated by the fact that George White, the organization's Executive Director, was also a member of the theatre club's board. Although it appeared to be an attractive proposition, the arrangement with the O'Neill Foundation was never put into effect. Furthermore, while productions were imported from other theatres, no formal relationship to transfer plays from any other theatre to the Manhattan Theatre

¹⁶ "The East Side Gets a Theatre Center," (Undated public relations release), p. 5.

Club was ever established.

During 1971-1972, the financial instability of the Club caused plans for many productions to be scrapped. The first three productions which the Board considered reflected the goal of the Manhattan Theatre Club to be a "serious" theatre. Michael Weller's Moonchildren was still running in London when it was selected to open the Club's first season. The Manhattan Theatre Club had secured an option on the play and had a director, but did not have the needed funds when time came to sign the contract. The production of Edward Bond's Early Morning with original incidental music written by folksinger Noel Paul Stookey of the group Peter, Paul and Mary, was also undercut by financial difficulties, as was the plan to move Micki Grant's Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope then in a workshop production directed by Vinnette Carroll at the Urban Arts Center. The final budget for Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope was set at \$9,000, which was hardly unreasonable when compared to the average \$100,000 cost of a musical produced off-Broadway. A straight play cost \$40,000.¹⁷

¹⁷ Otis L. Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1971-1972, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1972), p. 29.

The Board of the Manhattan Theatre Club was finding it difficult to meet the monthly rent of \$3,000, plus the other expenses. For several months of the first year, Jeffcoat paid the Club's rent while other members of the Board covered the operating expenses. There was simply no money available for mounting a major production, so the Manhattan Theatre Club continued to survive on a string of theatrical events rather than fully mounted productions. And where the audience would not come to the theatre, the theatre club was more than willing to come to the audience.

Among the ideas that Robert Sickinger brought with him to the Club, and which had impressed the Board, was the Chamber Theatre program. Initiated at the Hull House Association in Chicago by Sickinger, Chamber Theatre involved play readings by professional actors in private homes, usually as the highlight of a dinner party. The concept was extremely successful in Chicago with five hundred bookings a year, helping to support five theatres, touring five states.¹⁸ Post-reading discussions, often led by luminaries selected by Sickinger, were an intrinsic part of the Chamber Theatre program. The concept fitted in nicely with Jeffcoat's goal of creating a "social milieu" for artists-----

¹⁸ Tom Hamlin, "Manhattan Theatre Club" in "ABEL," January, 1972. p. 32.

audience discussions.

While the program did receive some recognition with a full-page article in the New York Times, covering a Chamber Theatre event at the home of Board member Mortimer Levitt, the concept of theatre in the home did not have the appeal in New York that it had had in Chicago. While the Chamber Theatre program continued through 1974, the nature of the program changed, and performances were held at the Manhattan Theatre Club.

There exist two diametrically opposed schools of thought on the function of the board of directors of a theatre. The first, which was the philosophy adopted by the managing board of The Theatre Guild, believes that only a superman is capable of running a theatre alone, that the combined efforts of a group of individuals is required. The other school believes that it is the function of the board to provide support, financial and otherwise, to the institution, but that control of artistic policy must fall entirely to the artistic director. This is the philosophy held by Robert Brustein and which informed his work as Director of the Yale Repertory Theatre and Dean of the Yale School of Drama, from which was to come Lynne Meadow, the future Artistic Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Brustein records his feelings of controlling boards in his book on his experience at Yale, Making Scenes. He writes, "I expressed my suspicion of such boards, even when they helped to raise money for a theatre. Almost all of them wanted to help determine artistic policy, and they invariably counseled safe, conventional choices. We had managed to survive twelve years at Yale without a board. . .

¹⁹

Similarly, M. Edgar Rosenblum, Executive Director of the Long Wharf Theatre which was also started by two graduates from Yale,²⁰ states,

a theatre controlled by a manager or a board of directors instead of an artistic director is a second-class theatre at best. With very few exceptions, the first-class theatres in this country are those where the last word belongs to the artistic director.²¹

From the very beginning of her association with the Manhattan Theatre Club, it was clear that Lynne Meadow shared in the belief that a theatre requires an autocratic artistic director in order to establish and maintain a di-

¹⁹ Robert Brustein, Making Scenes A Personal History of the Turbulent Years at Yale 1966-1979 (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 300.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

²¹ Arvin Brown and M. Edgar Rosenblum, Artistic and Administrative Policy at the Long Wharf Theatre, Connecticut, (New York: FEDAPT, 1981), p. 12.

rection. The arrival of Lynne Meadow was to change the environment of the Club, to give greater focus to the goals of the organization, and to shift the emphasis from MTC, a community theatre, to MTC, a professional theatre laboratory.

Chapter III
THE ARRIVAL OF LYNNE MEADOW

While Albert Jeffcoat must be credited with setting the wheels in motion for the creation of the Manhattan Theatre Club, the development of the Club into a viable producing organization was the work, primarily, of Lynne Meadow.

"I am a very strong combination of contradictions," Meadow says in describing herself,

I am extremely pragmatic, very practical and . . . very aware of . . . parameters, reality parameters, on the one hand. On the other hand, I am a total dreamer. I mean I am completely optimistic, I have no sense that something is impossible.¹

This combination of traits, the realistic coupled with the idealistic, and particularly the sense that all things are possible were precisely the leadership qualities the Manhattan Theatre Club needed in 1972.

Meadow appeared at the Club following an informal invitation by Robert Sickinger to work there.² She had arrived in New York from New Haven intent on following in the foot-

¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 14.

² Ibid., 10/18/82, p. 8.

steps of her colleagues from Yale who were now actively working in the professional theatre. Aware that the Manhattan Theatre Club was renting space for productions, and further aware that Tom Bullard, a classmate of Meadow's at Yale, had used the Club's facilities for a production of Gombrovich's The Marriage earlier in the year, Meadow came to the theatre club in July of 1972.³ She rented space there to direct a production of her friend and drama school colleague, Anthony Scully's play, All Through the House, a production which was to provide Lynne Meadow with an opportunity which she certainly had not anticipated.

The production quality of All Through the House was impressive enough to attract the attention of Manhattan Theatre Club board members Gerald Freund and George White, members of the search committee for a new artistic director. Jeffcoat recalls,

I had asked Gerry Freund and George White to form a committee to look for someone new, and very shortly after that they went to see this play and were very impressed--we all were impressed at the play--it was very well staged--and they said, "we think you really ought to meet this tall girl from Yale who directed it, she may be who we're looking for, and that's how it all happened."⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Interview with A. E. Jeffcoat, 9/10/82, p. 2.

Meadow's intention had never been to run a theatre, let alone the several theatres in the Manhattan Theatre Club complex, but rather to direct in New York on a free-lance basis. Nevertheless, when the opportunity presented itself, she did not ignore it. She accepted a three-month contract as the new Executive Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club in September, 1972. "I was naive enough and eager enough," she says. "(The board) liked my energy and, God knows, that's what Off Off Broadway is all about."⁵

In addition to her naivety, eagerness and energy, the fact that she had been a student at the Yale School of Drama was certainly an asset. Also, she had studied with Nikos Psacharopoulos during her time spent at Yale.⁶ Certainly, this association further impressed the Board, given that they had approached Psacharopoulos with the position just months earlier.

Looking back at the conditions she inherited at the Club when she arrived, Meadow expressed some amazement that the position of artistic director had ever been offered to Psacharopoulos,

⁵ William Harris, "On-on Target Off-Off-Broadway," The Press, vol. 4, no. 4., 1976, p. 1.

⁶ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 14.

. . . the thing that's amazing is that Jeff (Jeffcoat's nickname) had this idea that he wanted to have a theatre, but he wasn't a professional, of course, and they brought in certain things, but they didn't know how to produce. And they brought in Nikos, who was then an established person, and they didn't offer him any money.

You know, if someone were to get in touch with me now and say, "would you like to go set up a theatre?" I'd say, "what's the budget?" I wouldn't do what I did when I was twenty-five years old, say, "sure, whatever you have is fine with me." And that's to the credit of Gerry Freund, who was. . . at that time, the Dean at Hunter College, and he said, look, you've got to get somebody young, who can grow up with this organization.

And so Nikos . . . was just in negotiations with them really. And it wasn't the right thing for him to do. He was an established figure in the theatrical world. They needed somebody like me.

There was, however, hesitancy on the part of the board to hire Meadow, she recalls,

. . . because I was twenty-five, a woman. . . (but) in fact, (they) needed somebody (with). . . the zeal of youth, because. . . a few years later, reality sets in and you'd never do it because the odds are so impossible. . . . But. . . on the part of the board there was great reluctance to hire this woman, although Jeff, I think liked me. I think they were very scared, probably understandably, and it was Gerry Freund who was extremely insistent.

⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 1.

At the time, Meadow was not the only candidate for the position of Artistic Director. A number of other individuals had been interviewed, including Steve Aaron who was then running the New Theatre Workshop on East Fifty-Fourth Street and Gene Walsk, a general manager and producer.⁹ Board member A Joseph Tandet recalls,

. . . we had been talking to a number of other people, not just. . . (those) two . . . and we were struggling . . . but, also, whatever she says about her own attributes, we have to have the credit for choosing someone who was young and with no experience. . . . another organization may have said, "oh, for goodness sake,¹⁰ a young girl like this, we might as well fold up.

At the urging of Gerald Freund, Meadow was appointed; however, the Board's uncertainty of her abilities was reflected in her first contract which covered a period of only three months--an unusually short period, given the nature of the position. "I couldn't think much more than three months (ahead) anyway, at the time," she recalls. "Actually, it seemed fine to me to have a three month contract. I wasn't really insulted." However, adding, "Now as I think about it, I think, wait a minute . . . the nerve of them to. . .
 ."¹¹

⁹ Interview with A. Joseph Tandet, 6/28/83, p. 10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 9.

In 1972, Meadow's experience in the professional theatre was limited, but she did have solid training from two years at Yale School of Drama. She had worked at the Williamstown Playhouse, heading that theatre's Apprentice Workshop. She had also directed a production of Ubu Roi off-off-Broadway at St. Clement's Theatre. And she had studied with Jean Louis Barrault in Paris. More significant, however, was her passionate desire to work in the theatre.

Meadow claims to have had a "love affair" with the theatre which began in her childhood. Born November 12, 1946 and raised in New Haven, she had continuous exposure to the arts through her mother, Virginia Ribakoff Meadow, an amateur writer and performer. Very actively involved in community affairs, Virginia Meadow would often audition for roles at the Yale School of Drama, frequently accompanied by her daughter.

Actor Austin Pendleton recalls that while an undergraduate at Yale an original musical was produced each Spring, and each Spring, "a big woman with a very deep voice" came to audition, "and she was the mother of Lynne Meadow." He remembers she ". . . was a very hearty, outgoing kind of person--a terrific woman--very talented and very interested

in the students."¹² The students, in turn, all came to know Lynne; many would eventually come to work with her at the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Lynne Meadow recalls,

At the time--this was the late fifties--there were no women at Yale and they would use local women and girls to be in their shows. . . .

When I was in the seventh grade I was in a . . . musical that was written by Richard Maltby and David Shire, and it starred Gretchen Cryer and Austin Pendleton was in it . . . Nancy Ford was in it. . . . it was a very talented group of people who were at Yale at the time.¹³

While he came to know Lynne Meadow only slightly during this production, her constant presence at rehearsals left an impression with Pendleton. He recalls that she would quietly observe the rehearsals from the wings of the theatre and would quite frequently attend performances. She appeared introverted, in sharp contrast to the personality of her mother. He remembers, "Lynne was very quiet . . . very quiet and shy; kind of intense in a low-keyed way."¹⁴

Meadow's taciturnity was, she claims, caused by the sense of wonder that she experienced as she watched productions evolve through the rehearsal process. She recalls one

¹² Interview with Austin Pendleton, 9/12/83, p. 1.

¹³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 3.

¹⁴ Interview with Austin Pendleton, 9/12/83, p. 1.

occasion which epitomized this sense,

. . . there was a man at Yale named Bill Francisco, who is a director now. He was a very, sort of, powerful figure; everybody really admired him. . . . And I remember watching him.

When I was ten I was in a play that he directed, and he was such an important figure to me . . . and what he did was so interesting. So I guess somewhere an idea was planted. . . .

I remember very distinctly a moment of him walking--they were doing a sort of musical interlude and there was no dialogue--and I remember watching him go up on stage and talk to a few people, organize a few things and sit down. The whole thing transformed. And I was enchanted, enraptured I guess there was something about standing in the back, walking down, talking to a few people, going back and having the whole thing change that was very inspiring to me.¹⁵

Meadow's childhood experience at Yale apparently made a strong impact on her. She claims to have resolved early in her life that she would attend the Yale School of Drama and, furthermore, that she would eventually work in the professional theatre. Throughout elementary and secondary school, her interest in acting and directing intensified as she worked on directing projects of her own. Her intention was to attend Northwestern University as an undergraduate acting major; however, her single-mindedness about working in the theatre worried her parents who urged that she consider a broader-based liberal arts education.

¹⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 3.

She applied to Bryn Mawr and was accepted, intending to major in English literature. However, by her second year as an undergraduate she had begun to find the academic environment stifling. Unexpectedly, she was presented with an opportunity to study in France as part of a program administered by Smith College. With the benefit of a single undergraduate course in French, she prepared to complete her junior year abroad. The decision to do so had significant influence upon her, as she recalls,

(I arrived) . . . and realized what I'd got myself into. I mean I really didn't understand much of what anybody said for about three months. I was in a cloud. But it was a very, very important thing for me and it became an important thing in my life, actually--just submerging myself in another language . . . and being away from this country and having a chance to just look at myself and look how I'd grown up. It gave me a real sense of independence.

And so, when I came back to Bryn Mawr, I mean I could have majored in English . . . it's just, it didn't matter that much. I wanted to be in the theatre, and I wanted to finish Bryn Mawr. . . . There weren't any theatre courses there . . . so I majored in French and applied to the Yale Drama School, which was where I wanted to go since I was, you know, ten.¹⁶

Lynne Meadow submitted her application to Yale School of Drama in 1968, never seriously entertaining the possibility that she would not be accepted into the program. Each year, the drama school receives a flood of applications from

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

which are selected the relatively small number of students who make up the first year class. Nevertheless, Meadow considered her acceptance a certainty, the only possible outcome in a scenario she had been developing for herself over the preceding twelve years.

"I was devastated when I was turned down," she remembers, "I was made an alternate, a first alternate or something . . . I was incredulous because I wanted it so badly."¹⁷ Her inability to accept Yale's decision brought her to the administrative offices of the School of Drama, where she hoped to learn the facts that led to the admission committee's determination in her case. Encountering the standard bureaucratic response that the school had received a great number of applications, she met with a member of the committee and raised the question of whether any women had been accepted into the directing program.

This really was pre-liberation. . . . (He) said, "well, no." . . . I said do you think I was turned down because I'm a woman. Do you think that maybe you were a little nervous that I can't be a director because I'm a woman? He certainly didn't say, "yes, that's what we thought, that's why we turned you down. . . ." (But) I will never forget him saying these words . . . he said, "Well, I must tell you that we haven't had much luck with the women here." And it's like there are certain words that you hear in your life that you can just never forget. And I will never forget those words

¹⁷ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 13.

kind of ringing in my ears: "we haven't had much luck with the women."¹⁸

Following her interview, Meadow composed an emotional letter in which she stated her case. In retrospect, she admits the letter was "naive," although it was in step with the burgeoning feminist movement. "(I talked) . . . about myself as a woman, and why as a woman I had the ability to be a director. . . . it was so impassioned."¹⁹ The letter worked, however, and she was accepted as a member of the entering class of the Yale School of Drama; the only woman in her class.²⁰

While awaiting the final decision on her application to Yale, Meadow sought to gain additional practical experience by working at the Exit Coffee House Theatre, run enthusiastically by several students from Yale, under the direction of Stefan Rodnicki,²¹ himself a third-year student. During the summer of 1968, Meadow's "survival job" was working as a secretary in a Dean's office at Yale; a form of employment which left her feeling less than satisfied. Her work at the Exit Coffee House Theatre provided a kind of ballast

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 5.

²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

for her, as she explains,

I still hadn't been accepted at Yale. I was still on the waiting list. So, I was working there in the Dean's office, being a secretary during the day . . . it was quiet, it was the summer (and) I sort of located this (theatre). . . .

I directed a production of a new Shaffer play, and I acted in a couple of things; I guess I couldn't bear the idea that I was going to be a secretary in the Dean's office . . . my mother was a secretary in a Dean's office for many many years (but) I really so wanted to be involved with the theatre.²²

Now twenty-one years old, Meadow's perspective was somewhat more idealistic than worldly. Raised in the usually quiet community of New Haven, she seemed to be less concerned with the relationship between theatre and mounting political tensions than with simply producing more of the kind of theatre to which she had been exposed all her life; theatre of the type which, rather than confronts reality, tends to ignore it.

Nineteen-sixty-eight was a turbulent year in the United States. Political tensions were high. Establishment policies were being challenged more and more openly by a questioning generation of college students, who in 1968 numbered six million.²³ They were more aware of events and less

²² Ibid.

²³ The Sixties: The Music, the Madness and the Magic, (CBS Television documentary, aired 1984).

fearful of authority than in the past.

Racial tensions remained high, as the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King, Jr. was giving way to the militant Black Power movement led by Stokely Carmichael.²⁴ Writing about the explosive race riot in the Watts ghetto of Los Angeles in 1965, the Kerner Commission concluded that "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal."²⁵

Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968. Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles on June 5th. Chicago, the site of the Democratic Convention which nominated Hubert Humphrey, was also the site of a bloody riot between anti-Vietnam War demonstrators and police and national guardsmen on August 28th. Here, "the madness of the decade," writes Milton Viorst in his chronicle of the events of the sixties,

seemed to crystalize before a disbelieving, and mortified, television audience. Long-haired youths, and many young men and women with tidy hair and neat clothing, stood their ground before the flailing billy clubs of frenzied policemen. . . . "The whole world is watching, the whole world is watching," the crowds chanted as the cameras turned, and hundreds of millions of spectators

²⁴ Milton Viorst, Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), p. 379.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 423.

wondered what had happened to America.²⁶

Vietnam was a burning issue, and by year's end American troop strength there was 540,000--higher than at any other time during America's involvement in that conflict.²⁷

In January of 1966, the Selective Service System eliminated student draft deferments,²⁸ an action which brought the war much closer to home for many men of college age. In 1968, some 300,000 college students were drafted.²⁹ Student opposition to the Vietnam conflict expressed itself through increasing numbers of strikes and riots on college campuses. In April and May, violent confrontations occurred between students and police at Columbia University, before television cameras which spread the message of unrest. "Not since the Civil War era," writes Viorst, "had American life seemed so whimsical, arbitrary, confusing and so murderously violent, as it did in 1968. . . . (It) was the year in which a society that had traditional values, deep roots and serious concerns seemed genuinely in danger of being washed

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History, (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), pp. 679-683.

²⁸ Viorst, p. 401.

²⁹ The Sixties (CBS TV).

away."³⁰

Yale was not unaffected by these political and social developments. At the Drama School, Dean Robert Brustein was expecting trouble.³¹ His welcoming address to the incoming class reflected his awareness of the existing tensions and his belief of a "contagion" that was "spreading throughout the world (and) to which nobody was immune."³² With reference to the approaching 1968 Presidential election, and candidates Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, he told the new class,

We are confronted with a choice between two faceless party hacks, both sharing the policies of a discredited President. The young are caught between a loathesome war and the absence of regular channels through which to express dissent. Dissent itself is in real danger of a coming repression. Violence and racism seem to be our only inheritance; black grievances are being ignored; the sentiment of the country against the war is being squelched. . . . As a result of these tensions, it is inevitable that many of you will become more alienated or more radicalized. Frustration and anguish will mount, and any authority will seem to be corrupt or malevolent. But the sign of your maturity is the ability to distinguish those who support your legitimate aspirations from those who do not. . . . Those of you who are in revolt are rebelling not only against something, but on behalf of certain values-- courtesy, decency, gener-

³⁰ Viorst, p. 423.

³¹ Robert Brustein, Making Scenes, (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 65.

³² Ibid.

osity, peace. It is crucial that no matter how beset you may become,³³ you try to maintain those values in yourselves.

For the Yale Repertory Theatre under Brustein's direction, the theme for the season was "violence, examined in its revolutionary, racial, official and random phases,"³⁴ a theme which, he describes in retrospect, as having been lived in action during 1968-1969, Lynne Meadow's first year at Yale.

Reflecting on the atmosphere of the school, she recalls,

What was happening at Yale was a microcosm of what was happening in the whole country . . . the cliché is "student unrest:" lots of questioning of authority and questions about form. . . . the same political questions that were bugging everybody pertained to the Yale Drama School in that students were saying, "Why are we doing this? What meaning does this have to the society?" Lots of questions about the value of social drama . . . discussions about Brecht, and doing plays that could affect political change. (Practically) within the first ten minutes³⁵ that I was at Yale, the Living Theatre arrived.

If the Yale School of Drama was something of a tinderbox that year, the visit by the Living Theatre was the spark to set it ablaze. Julian Beck and Judith Malina, who led

³³ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 1.

the Living Theatre, were returning to America following four years of self-imposed exile in Europe. In 1964, they left the United States following a trial on income tax evasion by their company, a trial which they used as a vehicle to dramatize their conception of American injustice. While the government's charges against the company were dismissed, the histrionics they engaged in during the trial resulted in their receiving short prison terms for contempt of court.³⁶

During their time in Europe, they formed a company "of gypsies and nomads" and "it was said that the company had discovered an entirely original style,"³⁷ which Brustein believed would be worth presenting to the students of Yale. Their arrival, during the unpleasantly warm summer of 1968, instantly sparked Brustein's concern, for

It was obvious immediately, as soon as the company arrived, that the Living Theatre had come to the United States not only to revolutionize the American stage but to start disruptions in American universities and civic centers. The Becks had always been anarchists in theory; now the social and political conditions of the time had turned them into activists. As a result, they were no longer primarily concerned with creating coherent theatrical productions. What possessed them now was their missionary program. . . . evangelizing the young for a special kind of nonviolent revolu-

³⁶ Brustein, p. 66.

³⁷ Ibid.

tion.³⁸

Draped out in a fascinating array of unconventional and scanty attire, Beck, Malina and the other members of the Living Theatre moved in among the students, preaching the need for self-expression, freedom, love and brotherhood. At the very least, the presence of the Living Theatre during September of 1968 provided an element of excitement which the students found attractive. With the majority of students coming from middle class families, the Living Theatre also provided a glimpse of an alternative lifestyle and an unconventional approach to the theatre. Brustein writes,

In four short years, the Living Theatre had almost totally abandoned text; written language was now considered an obstacle to breaking down the barriers between life and art. . . . Now there was virtually no trace in their work of a playwriting intelligence. . . . The Becks believed that anything blocking your personal freedom, including written language or characterization, was psychologically repressive, if not politically authoritarian; . . . any theatre antiquated enough³⁹ to produce written plays was ripe for destruction.

The Living Theatre was soon to show the students of the Drama School, as well as the community of New Haven, its idea of theatre with its production of Paradise Now. As

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

³⁹ Ibid.

Brustein describes,

In that work the Living Theatre virtually abandoned any effort to create an artistic imitation. Audiences were invited over the footlights to join the performers; other performers in the house wandered among the spectators. The actors proclaimed their inability to travel without a passport, to smoke marijuana, or to take their clothes off--all to a mass of Yale undergraduates who, seeing the actors peel down to loincloths, thereupon stripped down to their underwear, and lit up joints. Mass love zaps and petting parties materialized on stage among couples of various sexes and sexual inclinations; and after the endless, loveless, sexless public groping was finally over, everyone was exhorted to leave the theatre and convert the police to anarchism, to storm the jails and free the prisoners, to stop the war and ban the bomb, and to take over the New Haven streets in the name of the People. . . .

Within twenty minutes the performers and spectators--having swarmed out of the theatre in their loincloths and Jockey shorts--encountered a few astonished New Haven policemen, who thereupon took ten of them into custody for indecent exposure. Following a minor scuffle, Judith Malina and Julian Beck, plus a few others in a similar state of undress, were led off to the county jail for the night.⁴⁰

The impact of such a spectacle upon the generally reserved New Haven community was dichotomous. Some saw the event as "the bright hope of the future" for Yale, while others, like Julian Dedman, writing for the Yale Alumni Magazine, saw the visit paid by the Living Theatre, "a group that specializes in nudity, writhing bodies and clutching genitalia," as a disgraceful episode in the history of Yale

⁴⁰ Brustein, pp. 68-69.

University.⁴¹

In any case, the Living Theatre created quite a stir in New Haven. After the Becks were released from jail, on their own recognizance, the excitement generated by Paradise Now resulted in a demand for tickets that simply could not be met. As somewhat more than 1,800 people queued up to enter a theatre that held 670 spectators, tensions began to mount. As the show began, a chant of "The theatre belongs to the People" was begun by those awaiting entrance, and tempers were becoming strained. Intervention by the campus police, in a somewhat comic fashion with officers fitted in porkpie hats, yelling "The theatre belongs to the People" averted a potentially dangerous situation, and the run of the Living Theatre continued without disruption.⁴²

Lynne Meadow observed the Living Theatre production and its aftermath, but, she states emphatically, "I was not a participant in the orgy. I did not swarm out into the streets. I was not so inclined."⁴³ Even if only observed, the visit by the Living Theatre was significant for Meadow, for it helped to engender an understanding of alternative

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁴² Ibid., p. 69.

⁴³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 1.

theatrical forms.

"It was very upheaving," she recalls, "suddenly I was confronted with why are you doing theatre? what is the value of theatre in society? what is the value to anyone's life? . . . it was very provocative."⁴⁴

Having been raised on a theatrical diet of more or less commercial plays and musicals, all served by Yale, the bill of fare offered by the Living Theatre surely must have seemed quite exotic to the school's only aspiring woman director. "I'd grown up with a very provincial view of the theatre," she admits,

and suddenly to see Judith Malina and Julian Beck stomping around naked and saying, you know, "I'm not allowed to travel without a passport,"--calling that theatre--my horizons were tremendously opened up.⁴⁵

To Robert Brustein, "The Living Theatre visit had performed an unintentional service by marking the territory beyond which it was fruitless and unproductive to tread."⁴⁶ Based on the theatrical fare that has made up the offerings of the Manhattan Theatre Club under Lynne Meadow's direction, the Living Theatre's visit may have influenced her in -----

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Robert Brustein, The Culture Watch, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 38.

a similar way.

The departure of the Living Theatre did not result in a decrease in tensions on campus. A series of episodes followed which provoked the ire of Black and politically radical groups. The Yale Repertory Theatre's first offering of the season was a production of Jules Feiffer's God Bless, a satire on contemporary political upheavals which includes scenes in which the Washington Monument is destroyed and the White House is overrun by members of the radical left and Black communities who then vie for the greatest amount of television air time. The groups portrayed, verbally attacked the production and the actors in it, and threatened to bomb the theatre as well.⁴⁷

Soon another conflict arose regarding the opening of the Yale Cabaret. At issue was the question of who controlled the programming of the Cabaret. The administration claimed authority, while a contingent of students demanded that it be fully student run. The administration won this battle simply by citing relevant passages in the University Guidelines, but it later became clear that the students were annoyed more because they felt they were not performing as often as they believed they should be, rather than from any

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 71.

need of controlling power.

Problems were surfacing in the directing program, under the supervision of Gordon Rogoff, which were adversely affecting the morale of the acting students. Student directors had been instructed to produce projects in three different styles but, perhaps because of the influence of the Living Theatre visit, as Brustein notes, "the very notion of 'style' was being rejected as an externally imposed, therefore inhibiting, concept."⁴⁸ Lacking proper supervision, projects were not being completed, acting students were left without parts to study, and tensions were mounting.

Lynne Meadow was not a part of the directing students' rebellion. As a first-year student, she was restricted to directing scenes rather than full-length projects. Nevertheless, she expressed no dissatisfaction with the concept of "style;" her taste and approach were, in fact, becoming more eclectic. She was, however, aware of growing tensions at the school and of a developing political radicalism:

I think there definitely were certain feelings about people in (the program). I didn't have them. I was interested in working all kinds of different material, but . . . my colleagues in the class--there was one guy who wasn't interested in doing anything that wasn't the most radical, political statement.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

As a kind of steam valve, a grievance committee, the Committee of 21 (so named as there were three years in each of seven disciplines in the School), was created which relieved pressure temporarily, but which had no influence on the next provocative issue. The scheduled production of Sam Shepard's play, Operation Sidewinder, to be directed by Jeff Bleckner, seems, in retrospect, somewhat ill-timed, given the nature of the play. In it, black revolutionaries attempt to poison the water supply of the U. S. Army with LSD. The reaction against this portrayal of black militancy was understandably more poignant than that against the Feiffer play, and after a series of heated meetings, and amidst rumors that the theatre was again in danger of being bombed, the production was cancelled.

The next significant event at the Yale Drama School came in December of 1968, when Dean Brustein informed Gordon Rogoff, whom he had appointed as head of the directing program, that his contract would not be renewed. Rogoff had advocated an ensemble approach, as head of the directing program of which Lynne Meadow was a part, which placed "emphasis on the slow evolution of group creation,"⁵⁰ but

⁴⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Brustein, Making Scenes, p. 80.

which Brustein saw as antithetical to formal acting training and the importance of engaging in textual analysis of scripts. Brustein's desire was to keep uniformity in the approaches taken by the Yale Repertory Theatre and the Drama School, and so Rogoff's dismissal seemed essential, at least from Brustein's point of view. His decision, however, was not placidly accepted by the students. Petitions were signed, and students left the program in protest, but Rogoff's contract was, nevertheless, not renewed. His position was filled by director Andre Gregory.⁵¹

"I was convinced by the members of my class that an injustice had been done," says Meadow, recalling her reaction to Rogoff's dismissal,

and I was in a state of outrage, I think, because everybody was in a state of outrage. I was not personally close to Gordon--and I don't even know what happened or why it happened. I just know that everything took on greater meaning. People would get behind causes, and Gordon became an enormous cause celebre.⁵²

Rogoff's departure provided Meadow with another opportunity for exploring alternatives to the more traditional theatrical forms. Rogoff, she remembers, "philosophized about the theatre." He spoke of Brecht and Artaud, and ad-

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 1.

dressed the question of the nature and purpose of theatre in thought provoking discussions.⁵³ With the arrival of Andre Gregory, to whom Meadow became closer than she had been with Rogoff, she was again forced to evaluate the purpose of the theatre.

She remembers that Gregory conducted his classes in a rather distinctive but exciting fashion,

I think mostly they were dialogues with Andre. . . . It was as if I was having my moorings removed and just being sent out to sea again. Somebody like Andre, with whom I was friendly, made me think about what the . . . different possibilities of doing theatre were, (made me aware) of different forms. . . . for a while . . . I remember saying I'm not interested in text anymore. I couldn't even find a text that I thought was suitable.⁵⁴

While perhaps amusing in retrospect, the fact that Meadow had gone from being solidly rooted in the conventions of popular drama with its emphasis on artifice and the clever manipulation of language, to a point where text seemed to be no longer worthy of artistic consideration, is evidence that the instructors at Yale were widening Meadow's perspectives as to the role of theatre. It is very unlikely that the Manhattan Theatre Club would have exhibited any longevity as an Upper East Side showplace of conventional commercial

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

plays.

In his memoirs, Brustein labels 1968-1969 as the time of the Yale Drama School's "Armageddon."⁵⁵ Battles between students, faculty and administration raged on the Yale campus, as they did on campuses all across America. Rather than diminishing the effectiveness of the Yale Drama School, however, these confrontations seemed to strengthen it, as it forced Brustein into a position of either defending his goals for the School or abandoning them.⁵⁶ Brustein's choice of demanding absolute artistic control and unquestionable authority exhibited itself in a speech before the student body which, ironically, was intended as a resignation address. Commenting on the recent uprisings, he said,

We have reached a point where decision-making at this School is being influenced not by reason and counsel, but rather by threats, coercion, disruption. We are heading toward anarchy and chaos, when there will be nothing on our stage but empty noise. I came here to try to make works of art; I believed that most of you wanted to make works of art too. That is now proving impossible, and the reason is your infatuation with power politics. I don't think I am going to tolerate this anymore; the tail has begun to wag the dog. You have not, as a body, supported me on a single important issue, and for all your vaunted idealism, you have not been able to recognize a major point of principle, without which there is no sense remaining either in the theatre or the university. You are

⁵⁵ Brustein, Making Scenes, pp. 63-90.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

an intellectually precocious generation, but you have serious ethical blind spots. You have been overindulged and overpraised for qualities that on close examination are not altogether praiseworthy. I, for one, intend to indulge you no longer. Either there will be a radical change in your behavior, or there will be radical change in mine. That's all I have to say at present . . . and no more discussion!!!⁵⁷

This tirade, which to Brustein's surprise, brought overwhelming support from those under attack--the students--was, in many ways, similar to the stand Lynne Meadow was forced to take several years later when her authority as Artistic Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club was challenged by a member of the Board of Directors. The demand for absolute artistic control was to prove a pivotal issue for the Manhattan Theatre Club, as it had for the Yale School of Drama. Similarly, as Brustein discovered that the School "settled down when I took a strong position,"⁵⁸ Meadow was to reinforce stability when she stood her ground in the face of threats several years later at the Club.

Animosities at the Drama School were beginning to find more constructive outlets during the Spring of 1969, as more and more productions were materializing. A proud Brustein remarked to his students that Spring, "In spite of our dis-

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

sensions, or perhaps because of it, we have entered an exceedingly fertile and imaginative period in our history as a school."⁵⁹

To Lynne Meadow, the first year at Yale proved an exhilarating experience. Artistically, she was developing as a result of exposure to the diverse methods of those who taught at the school. Gordon Rogoff's approach had been focussed on ensemble acting; his successor, Andre Gregory, showed more concern for the demands of repertory style performance. Paul Sills conducted a workshop in improvisation. He was responsible for the creation of Story Theatre, in which actors portrayed characters from Grimm's fairy tales. Story Theatre proved quite popular with New Haven audiences. Brustein notes, "Sill's direct, presentational Story Theatre style was to have a more lasting influence on our acting and directing students than the techniques of any of the performance groups, including the Living Theatre."⁶⁰

Meadow, a student in Sill's class, recalls,

(It) was very inspiring. Again, (he) talked about breaking down your idea of what the theatre was about, . . . from the most conventional (approach). (He was a) very, very inspiring teacher, working with . . . a lot of exercises and improvisations for the theatre. . . . I was very

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

intrigued by his work.⁶¹

Nikos Psacharopoulos was another significant influence, teaching Meadow "a tremendous amount about the theatre, a lot about aesthetics."⁶² Of great importance, too, was the appearance of a guest company led by Jean-Louis Barrault, with whom Meadow was to work in Paris two years later. She was also influenced by her colleagues. "People tend to influence each other in a training situation," she says. "Artists create standards among themselves."⁶³

On a practical level, Yale was also providing Meadow with contacts in the private network that controls the professional theatre. Writing about conservatory training in the United States, Jennifer Dunning notes, "It does help to be part of the Yale and Julliard circles. . . . a number of students admit that their aim in enrolling was to make the best contacts possible in the tight little world of the theatre."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 2.

⁶² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 14.

⁶³ Jennifer Dunning, "The New American Actor," New York Times Magazine, October 2, 1983, p. 72.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Meadow admits that being part of the "Yale Mafia," as it is sometimes called, "opened some doors for me, just to get in and see people,"⁶⁵ as well as giving her training as a director:

(Yale) introduced me to people. I made acquaintances there, and I definitely learned something. I was very influenced by Nikos Psacharopoulos . . . and I'm very devoted to him. . . . my horizons were completely opened up by people coming in and out of the school--Paul Sills, Andre Gregory--and by being influenced by people in my class. So it was a very positive experience for me, and it also allowed me to begin to think of myself as a director, and to call myself a director. . . . I wouldn't have been able to come to New York and begin directing plays (without it)

Then something happened. . . . my first year was very exhilarating, then after a bit it was no longer the atmosphere for me to be in.⁶⁶

At the end of her second year at Yale, Meadow sought an escape from the campus in New Haven by writing to Jean Louis Barrault, who had appeared at Yale the previous year with Madeleine Renaud in a production of Samuel Beckett's Happy Days, and a production of Words and Music from the Court of the Sun King Louis XIV.⁶⁷ "My encounter with Barrault was really limited," she notes,

⁶⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁷ Brustein, Making Scenes, p. 330.

I think I had admired his work, and I think I mostly admired the fact that he was in France . . . and when I went there . . . I attended some rehearsals, basically, and observed what was going on. But I think at that point in time I was really . . . more interested in doing than I was in observing. And I went and set up my own group at this place, The American Center in Paris.⁶⁸

At the American Center in Paris, under the direction of Henry Pillsbury, Meadow taught classes, utilizing the experience she had gained from Yale and her experience from working with actors in other settings. She was now an apparently tenacious 23 years old. While twelve years later she would admit, "I taught classes. I don't know what I knew, but I taught,"⁶⁹ it is very unlikely that she would have used such self-deprecating words at the time. In 1970, Meadow had a missionary zeal which seems to be a pre-requisite quality of candidates for the position of artistic directors of newly formed theatres.

Following her experience at the American Center in Paris, she returned to New Haven and to Yale, only to become acutely aware that she did not wish to return to the drama school. "I went down to the school to enroll," she recalls, "and I just didn't want to go there."⁷⁰ After conversations

⁶⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 2

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

with trusted friends and advisors, Meadow opted to extend her leave of absence from the drama school, and pursue a professional career in New York City, as had her colleagues, Jeff Bleckner and A. J. Antoon, who were now working at the New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public Theatre.

While she did not graduate from the Yale School of Drama, Meadow had two years of academic/professional training from the school. Her decision to abandon the School which, earlier, she had seen as her destiny was brought about, apparently, by a combination of personal restlessness and clashes with her instructors. She recounts,

You know, I'd always been so in love with the theatre; at the end of my second year at Yale, I really faced the prospect that maybe I didn't love it so much anymore. It was terrifying to me. Yale was really a very harrowing, grueling kind of experience. And suddenly I thought, "God, is this what I love?" And (I) basically looked around, you know, stood back and looked at myself--and I came back at the end of that year determined to move forward . . . and I feel, in some ways, I didn't stop from that time.

It was as if I'd found something in myself, and I was on my way back to Yale to finish up my third year, and I felt great. I was so high, and the year away had done me so much good, and I took a look at Yale and I thought, "not for me."⁷¹

Meadow states that she was never "one of your more stellar academics,"⁷² and it may have been that she had

⁷¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 10.

⁷² Ibid., p. 13.

begun to find Yale as stifling as she had found Bryn Mawr, although Nikos Psacharopoulos remembers that she had been "having a real tough time at Yale with a couple of her instructors,"⁷³ owing primarily to personality clashes. Whatever the reason, Meadow did not complete the program at Yale, but chose to take a leave of absence and join her ex-colleagues, who were now working in theatre in New York City.

The first person she contacted was her friend from Yale, A. J. Antoon. Antoon, a Jesuit brother, has been described by Brustein as having been one of Yale's most promising directors, noted for "staging a blazing production of Strindberg's Dance of Death, and for his Story Theatre production of stories by Chekhov and Tolstoy."⁷⁴ In New York, he gained recognition for his direction of Subject to Fits, by Robert Montgomery, a graduate playwright from Yale, at the Public Theatre. In reviewing the production, Stanley Kauffmann wrote,

A. J. Antoon's direction shows lovely, strong gifts for using the stage. . . . But there's something more, something primary. . . . it's this sense of communicated spirit that I got from his cast, and the sense that he has a spirit to communicate. The actors are mostly adequate, but he

⁷³ Interview with Nikos Psacharopoulos, 1/21/83, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Brustein, Making Scenes, p. 99.

has lifted them . . . into otherness, into largeness.⁷⁵

He was developing a reputation for, a year later, Antoon was to gain the respect of theatre critics with his production of Jason Miller's That Championship Season, which also began at the Public Theatre and was then moved to Broadway. John Simon wrote of that production,

A. J. Antoon's staging is as meticulous as it is resourceful, creating an elaborate choreography of movements that first delight us by their unexpectedness, then delight us again for their absolute rightness.⁷⁶

Interestingly, Antoon had also left Yale, "in bitterness,"⁷⁷ after his Story Theatre production was ridiculed by an instructor.

Meadow sought Antoon's advice on getting started as a director in New York City. She had worked with Antoon at Yale and, together, they had been a part of the Exit Coffee House Theatre for a while in New Haven.⁷⁸ His advice was for her to get experience by working off-off-Broadway and to

⁷⁵ Stanley Kauffmann, Persons of the Drama, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, p. 218.

⁷⁶ John Simon, Uneasy Stages, New York: Random House, 1975, p. 473.

⁷⁷ Brustein, Making Scenes, p. 168.

⁷⁸ Kenneth Cavender, "Manhattan's Supermarket of the Arts," The New Haven Register, October 29, 1972, p. 2.

make herself known to the various theatres that were producing off-off-Broadway, particularly St. Clement's. Recounting the experience eleven years later she said,

I was really very fortunate, you know, in my timing--just coming to New York at a time when so much was blossoming. . . . There was such a flurry of activity. You know, there was more money to be had, more people; there was a reaction, I guess, to the theatre itself. (It) was not as vibrant and a lot of people were trying to create other modes. It seemed like everywhere you turned there was some small theatre.

When I first came here, A. J. (Antoon) said to me, well, just go around and talk to all these people. So I went around to, you know, a dozen theatres anyway, and I talked to Marshall Mason over at Circle Rep. I went to see Bob Moss at Playwrights' Horizon. I went to this theatre downtown, the Only Theatre, and I went to the W.P.A. . . . There was a feeling and a reality of tremendous activity. ⁷⁹And you could start a theatre and have no money.

Meadow faced a dilemma, however, so common to people who work in the theatre. When she arrived in New York, without money, she was offered a position at the French Embassy; a job which at least guaranteed a steady source of income. The position, however, was far removed from working in the theatre. She recalls how she arrived at a decision,

A very dear friend . . . said, "what do you want to go work in the French Embassy for? You want to be in the theatre, go be in the theatre." So that's what I did. I went to St. Clement's, and I directed this play, and I ran out of money. . . .

⁷⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 18.

The play she directed was Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi, with Yale graduate Henry Winkler in the title role. The money she ran out of was provided by a small foundation which gave her a personal grant in the amount of \$1,000, a sum which temporarily solved her financial difficulties. "That (\$1,000) was an extraordinary thing," she recalls, "because it meant I didn't have to take the job. It was a mandate to go ahead."⁸¹

The production of Ubu Roi, Meadow's first directing project in New York, was less than brilliant and, in many ways, was a director's nightmare; nonetheless, the vitality and enthusiasm which would later animate the Manhattan Theatre Club was evident. Meadow (who is quite tall) recalls,

What a mess it turned out to be. The leading lady quit--or I fired her, I don't even remember what--or it was a mutual separation after the first performance. So I had a roommate--I had gone to college with this woman from Bryn Mawr. I was then living in an apartment with five women on West 82nd Street--it was an eight room Upper West Side apartment, one of those ones where you can go next door and say, "could you be in a play?" The real gypsy life. And so I put my roommate into the main part because she was there, so we could stay up all night and I could give her the lines, and I took her part, so I actually acted in the play--which I would never do again

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10/18/82, p. 6.

⁸¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 9.

I actually had staged . . . this thing for a very small person. She dies and this guy drags her around the stage, this sort of dead weight. Well, I had to take over the part, so this poor guy was dragging me around. It was just a mess, but it ⁸²was really, "the show must go on," so I went on.

When Ubu Roi closed in December of 1971, Meadow was left again with the predicament of securing an income. With the assistance of a friend who was employed by Harper and Row, she was interviewed for and was hired as an editorial assistant. She was now twenty-five years old, with limited professional directing experience, and now the practical demands of living were at odds with the idealism of being an artist. "I guess, for a moment," she admits,

I had this vision that I could really go and read manuscripts and, I don't know, be an editor. But it was so quiet. It was so subdued, there was never a crisis. . . . I liked best talking on the phone with the writers and, you know, sort of dealing with the people. . . .

I remember trying to read a ⁸³manuscript about wildflowers. It was not for me.

The position with Harper and Row lasted for three months and, characteristically, Meadow conducted the interviews for her own replacement. "Clearly, I was better at interviewing people than I was at being (an) editorial as-

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 6.

sistant," she claims.⁸⁴

Once again, Meadow received a personal grant, from the same foundation as the first, this time in the amount of \$750.⁸⁵ This sum, along with savings accumulated from Harper and Row, permitted her to make preparations to direct Anthony Scully's play, All Through the House at the fledgling Manhattan Theatre Club. It was, of course, this play which truly launched Meadow's career as a director; a career which, in turn, elevated the standing of the Manhattan Theatre Club as a theatrical producing organization.

Following the successful production of All Through the House, Meadow was faced with her continuing dilemma. She jokingly recalls,

So I did Tony's play, and then I was going to have to go back to work again because I'd run out of money again. And I lived on 82nd Street, near Zabar's (speciality store), and I'd pass by there, and I'd go in and ask if they had a job in the cheese department.

So finally I got this job that I really wanted in Zabar's, in the cheese department. And then the Manhattan Theatre Club made me this offer, so I really had to think.

Oh, there was one other offer that I guess I was really tempted to do. . . . I knew these people in France who were running a workshop in Tunisia. So this guy . . . asked me to come and run this workshop in Tunisia. . . . So I was going to do (that)--it was either that or go to Zabar's--

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

and then the Manhattan Theatre Club came along. And I laughingly have said I wonder if I made the right⁸⁶ decision: I could be running Zabar's now.

Meadow, at the age of twenty-five, was now given the opportunity to create a theatre of her own. On a more practical level, however, she was being challenged to find a way to prevent the demise of the Manhattan Theatre Club. "I was at once intimidated at the idea of running my own theatre," she acknowledged in an interview shortly after accepting her new role,

On the other hand, I felt--why not?

It's frightening, but I realized when I came to New York that you can arrive and decide this is such a huge world--I can't do anything, or you can decide it's not impermeable. A breakthrough is possible. I looked around, I saw people I knew had started to work, so I thought, if I wanted to work I could. It must be possible to find four or five actors, out of the⁸⁷ 17,000 who are starving here, to take the risk.

"You could create any kind of a theatre any place, frankly," claims Nikos Psacharopoulos, "provided that you have enough time to get your audience to grow."⁸⁸ This observation by Meadow's mentor may have helped to motivate the new Executive Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Cer-

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Kenneth Cavender, "Manhattan's Supermarket of the Arts," The New Haven Register, October 29, 1972, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Interview with Nikos Psacharopoulos, 1/21/83, p. 10.

tainly, it seems apparent that Meadow had learned an important lesson from Psacharopoulos. "A theatre is like a store," says Psacharopoulos, "you've got to decide, number one, what store you need right there."⁸⁹ With the complex of rooms at the Manhattan Theatre Club, located in an area which had no other major theatres, Lynne Meadow decided what was needed was "an intimate supermarket of the arts,"⁹⁰ as she was later to describe it. However, trying to stock this new supermarket was going to require a great deal of work and the assistance of several equally dedicated people.

To begin a theatre is difficult in and of itself, as the Board of the Manhattan Theatre Club had learned, but Meadow faced an added disadvantage for, by the time she arrived, the Club had accumulated a \$30,000 debt.⁹¹ Before funds could be raised for productions, the debt had to be eradicated; and Meadow was fully aware of the difficulties which she faced,

I didn't think we'd make it. . . . There was never a sense when I first came--I really thought . . . month to month. The theatre had been incorporated, but unfortunately there were lots of impracti-

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Don Nelson, "An Intimate Supermarket of the Arts," The New York Daily News, September 27, 1977.

⁹¹ August Becker, Jr., "The Manhattan Theatre Club," The City East and West, January, 1973, p. 6.

calities . . . there was a big deficit . . . and . . . there was a business manager who worked here for about a month--she left, she took another job--she said, "Lynne, it's just--I don't know how you're going to make it float."

And then I had hired an Artistic Director at the time, not realizing that I was the Artistic Director; really an associate. I hired a fellow who I'd gone to Yale with, named David Chambers, who also left after a couple of months; and I remember a conversation with him. He said, "Lynne, get out of there, it's a sinking ship." And I didn't disagree; . . . 92 I just wasn't ready to throw in the towel yet.

In 1972, Meadow's title was Executive Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club, an administrative title, and the people with whom she surrounded herself were mostly from the Yale School of Drama. David Chambers, the Club's first official Artistic Director under Meadow's leadership, received his M.F.A. from Yale and had worked as an assistant professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he directed the Center for Theatre Research and Performance Laboratory.⁹³ Tom Bullard, the General Manager, was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Middlebury College, and a directing student at Yale, where he founded the touring Yale Theatre Ensemble.⁹⁴ The first Business Manager, Carol Lawhon,

⁹² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 7.

⁹³ He remained at the Manhattan Theatre Club for only three months and then returned to teaching in Buffalo. Manhattan Theatre Club Public Relations Release, October 3, 1972.

stayed for only a month, convinced that the theatre was not going to survive. She accepted a position with the now defunct Chelsea Theatre,⁹⁵ and was replaced by Susan Chase, a graduate from Yale with an M.F.A. in theatre administration.⁹⁶ Chase, who received her B.A. in Medieval history from Brown University, came with experience as a publicity director for both the Tappan Zee Playhouse and the South Shore Music Theatre. Steve Lawson, the first Promotion Manager, was the only member of the production team who was not from Yale. A cum laude graduate from Williams College, he had worked at the Williamstown Theatre in the capacity of publicity director for four years, and had just finished directing with the inaugural season of the Second Company there when he was hired as a member of the theatre club staff.⁹⁷ Together, Meadow, Bullard, Chase and Lawson came to form the nucleus of the Manhattan Theatre Club administration.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 9/19/84, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Manhattan Theatre Club Public Relations Release, October 3, 1972.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ August Becker, Jr., "The Manhattan Theatre Club," The

Work commenced for the Club in July, 1972,⁹⁸ two months before Meadow was officially contracted, with a series of fifteen hour days during which the staff labored to improve the physical conditions of the theatre complex, formulated whatever contacts in the professional world they could, and called upon those contacts which were already established. "All of the staff, despite their youth, had considerable experience and contacts in the theatre and no old or partial acquaintance was left uncontacted," notes August Becker, Jr. in his 1973 article about the theatre. "Playwrights, actors, directors, designers, teachers of theatre, even an ex-actor turned janitor, were invited over to see the Club's facilities and offered use of the space for a worthy project."⁹⁹

Meadow's dedication to her newly acquired role was evident in a letter which she wrote to Neil Bell, a colleague from Yale and the Williamstown Playhouse, in July of 1972. "David Chambers is working with me here," she wrote, "and we are honestly trying to set up a healthy and joyful laboratory right here in the Big Apple."¹⁰⁰ In a letter composed

City East and West, January, 1973, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Lynne Meadow to Neil Bell, dated 7/26/72.

the same day to Jeff Wanshel, an old friend whose play, Auto Destruct, was presented at the Club in April of 1973. She wrote,

If this whole Manhattan Theatre Club becomes more of a reality than just this letterhead, then I would be very excited to have one of your plays done here. . . .

Let me just say, for the record, that I would honestly like to see this place implement some of the ideas that Yale set out to do, i.i. (sic) setting up a laboratory, but which they got too hung up to do in a sincere way. And once again, I would love to give you a place to continue to grow and work. I really mean that, Jeff, and just hope that we can get it all off the ground.¹⁰¹

Idealism is apparent in these comments. Along with this idealism, however, Meadow possessed keen intelligence, pragmatism, drive, and a sharp business sense combined with a winning personality which was effective in attracting established talent to an unestablished theatre.

Austin Pendleton recalls that his first association with the Manhattan Theatre Club was the result of a chance encounter. One evening during the summer of 1972, he met Meadow at the Hudson Bay Inn on 72nd Street and 2nd Avenue in New York City,

and she said, "I'm starting the Manhattan Theatre Club this fall. Is there a play you want to do?" and I said, "well, yeah, there's two one acts I'd read by Joanna Glass," . . . and she sort of said,

¹⁰¹ Letter from Lynne Meadow to Jeff Wanshel, dated 7/26/72.

well, send them around; but the atmosphere of it was, "if they're any good at all, we'll do them," you know, very kind of laissez faire.¹⁰² . . . the doors were kind of being thrown open.

The Joanna Glass plays, Canadian Gothic and American Modern, directed by Austin Pendleton, opened on November 16, 1972, the third offering of the Manhattan Theatre Club under the leadership of Lynne Meadow. It had been preceded by Anne Roby's Well . . . Fair, directed by David Schweizer, another colleague from Yale, which opened on September 27, 1972, and a musical revue, called The Revue, by Avery Corman, Edward Kleban and others, directed by John Pleshette, which opened on October 19th.¹⁰³

The three-week run of Canadian Gothic and American Modern was well received, and Pendleton made the suggestion that the plays be done again at a later time. Meadow's reaction, he recalls, showed "how very laissez-faire everything was in those early days, . . . (for) she got up on the stage at the end of the last performance and said to the audience, 'I think we're going to do these again in the Spring,' and we did."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Interview with Austin Pendleton, 9/12/83, p. 1

¹⁰³ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1972-1973, p. 401.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Austin Pendleton, 9/12/83, p. 1.

In fact, with three theatres to fill, and substantial additional rehearsal space, Meadow was very receptive to any suggestions of interest. " It was just sort of a place to hang out and do what you wanted to do," says Pendleton,

You would run into actors and directors on the street in those days, and they'd say, "let's do a play . . . let's see if we can do it at the Manhattan Theatre Club" . . . and very often you could. . . . if you called up and asked Lynne in time, if the project at all appealed to her she'd say, 'sure' ¹⁰⁵

Given the design of the Manhattan Theatre Club multiplex, and given Meadow's experience at Yale Drama School during a notably active period in its history, it is perhaps not surprising that making the theatre club into a kind of laboratory theatre was a main goal of the developing artistic policy. In a 1972 interview, Meadow noted that, "In some ways (Yale) was a model for the kind of multiple theatre activity I hope the Manhattan Theatre Club will represent."¹⁰⁶

The physical layout of the building was certainly conducive to multiple, simultaneous activities; a benefit which was taken full advantage of during Meadow's second season in an arrangement with the New York Theatre Strategy. However,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Cavender, "Manhattan's Supermarket of the Arts," The New Haven Register, October 29, 1972, p. 2.

given the financial predicament of the theatre, mounting full productions was an unfeasible idea. Using the facilities to nurture the work of new playwrights was a viable alternative, and certainly a good deal less costly.

In many ways, the goals of the Manhattan Theatre Club were parallel to those of the English Stage Company when it commenced work at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956. The Manhattan Theatre Club was being structured as America's "Playwrights' Theatre,"¹⁰⁷ a theatre where new dramatic works could be produced and nurtured.

The goal was to make the Manhattan Theatre Club "a total performing arts center,"¹⁰⁸ and the thrust of the artistic policy was

to make it possible for theatre artists to do something virtually unique in New York--allow their work to evolve from first reading to complete production, via workshops, studio performances and showcases, free of the usual overpowering pressure of time and space, and to do all this in an atmosphere that involves the community as audience, helper and benevolent critic.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ The name accorded to the English Stage Company by Terry Browne in his book, Playwrights' Theatre, London, 1975.

¹⁰⁸ Meadow's letter to membership for the tenth anniversary season, 81-82.

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Cavender, "Manhattan's Supermarket of the Arts," The New Haven Register, October 29, 1972, p. 2.

The obstacles which stood in the way of realizing this goal were substantial. The theatre was in debt and funds did not appear to be forthcoming. There was no money available to pay anyone to work at the theatre, outside of the administrative staff who, themselves, "worked without pay more than once simply because they believe(d) in the Club."¹¹⁰ Understandably, it was difficult to attract established talent to this new theatre with no achievement record, headed by a twenty-five year old woman director. "I would beg," Meadow recalls, "I would--that's the word--I would just beg."¹¹¹ As unrealistic as it seemed, she set about to attract only high quality talent, and, owing to her persistence, was successful much of the time. She remembers,

I guess I was very forthright. . . . even to get scripts, to get directors and to get actors . . . good, really good actors to come and work here, there was a lot of personal effort that had to be put in . . . but I was extremely eager, and I think people sensed that. I really wanted good people to come and work here,¹¹² and I wanted them to have a good experience here.

¹¹⁰ August Becker, Jr., "The Manhattan Theatre Club," The City East and West, January, 1973, p. 6.

¹¹¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 20.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 21.

Another major obstacle was attracting an audience, particularly a subscription audience, in an area known for cinemas but not Off Off Broadway. "I used to beg the audience to come too," she says, "I used to go out . . . into the street, and I would ask people to just sit in the chairs because I was so humiliated for the actors."¹¹³ Once inside the theatre, the audience member would be proselytized by Meadow to purchase a subscription. "It was a like running a lemonade stand," she said, but "the main idea was to develop an audience . . . one that would come here if we presented 'Rolodex' starring Telephone."¹¹⁴

In this comment by Meadow, one can hear an echo of Nikos Psacharopoulos who, in describing the strategy he employed with the Williamstown Playhouse said,

Slowly, we keep building an audience, better audiences. We build a better audience, we improve our plays, we improve the quality of our plays. So eventually, when that area that you get to carry gets bigger and bigger and bigger, you have a wider radius--we are pulling from there, from there, from there.¹¹⁵

 113 Ibid.

114 Mel Gussow, "A Top Bargain For Theaterlovers," The New York Times, December 3, 1976, p. C3.

115 Interview with Nikos Psacharopoulos, 1/21/83, p. 10.

Another aspect of the strategy Meadow employed seemed influenced by the experience of Psacharopoulos.

Secondly, you decide what kind of audience you're talking to--it's like a store, like a restaurant. You don't go to an Italian restaurant and ask for French food. You have to decide the kinds of actors you're going to use, the designers; the kind of theatre you're going to have and . . . you stick with it for three or four years. . . .

And then, one of the biggest things, of course, is how is this thing presented? . . . People don't necessarily want plays; people want events.¹¹⁶

Indeed, the community which surrounds the Manhattan Theatre Club was to witness an event during the 1972-73 season. In collaboration with the New York Theatre Strategy, the Manhattan Theatre Club played host to some sixty-five productions in the course of one season, and attracted the attention of the community and critics as well. With this event, the Club finally gained positive recognition as a leading Off Off Broadway theatre. Under the leadership of Lynne Meadow, the Club was beginning to grow.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11

Chapter IV
DEVELOPMENT OF ARTISTIC POLICY, 1972-1977

"It strikes me that the quality and the range of material have been both improved at the Manhattan Theatre Club since a new administration headed by Lynne Meadow took over," wrote Michael Feingold in his Village Voice review of the 1972-1973 season.¹

Feingold was not alone in his praise of the Manhattan Theatre Club during its first relatively successful season since its inception. Harry Reasoner, in a review broadcast over ABC radio station commented, "The Manhattan Theatre Club, under Lynne Meadow's direction, has been doing its best to encourage theatre aspirants. The country needs about ten thousand more organizations just like it."² For the New Yorker, Edith Oliver wrote, "As a theatre complex, the Manhattan Theatre Club is one of the most active and agreeable in town."³

¹ 1972-1973 MTC Fact Sheet.

² Ibid.

³ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, April 28,

The Manhattan Theatre Club was starting to gain the recognition it needed. Both Meadow and the MTC were beginning to receive credit for offering important contributions to the professional theatre; Meadow, because she was creating an environment at the Manhattan Theatre Club which encouraged creativity by the artists who worked there, as well as for her own work as a director, and the Club because of its artistic policy.

"Dramatically," wrote Marilyn Stasio in Cue magazine, "the most interesting aspect of this community-oriented multi-theatre center is its policy of 'evolution'--a show can grow from staged reading to workshop to full production."⁴ The aim was to make the Manhattan Theatre Club into a theatre laboratory which fostered creative growth and which also involved the community of which it was a part. The initial statement of purpose under Lynne Meadow's leadership describes the direction she intended for the Club:

The Manhattan Theatre Club is an active producing theatre center that is integrally involved in the life of its immediate community while also designed to fill an important need in the development of American theatre.

To the East Side Community, the MTC offers the only local theatre center in which the audience can observe and participate in the evolution of

1973. (Reprint).

⁴ Ibid.

theatrical activity from staged readings to experimental workshops to full productions. The MTC bridges the gap between artist and audience by offering discussions, panels and a Cabaret designed to provide an atmosphere in which the artist and the audience can mix informally.

To the artist, the MTC offers a unique laboratory situation in which the successive stages of a work may be investigated.

Our varied physical layout on three spacious floors facilitates work beginning as a staged reading (Cabaret) and, if it seems artistically promising, moving on to showcase production (Stage 79) and finally to full production in a well-equipped off-Broadway house (Stage 73). This developmental progression, virtually impossible to find anywhere else in New York, provides a rare opportunity for playwrights, directors, designers and actors to grow with a work in an atmosphere conducive to active theatrical research. Thus, the MTC is a home for serious theatre artists where the ⁵customary time and space pressures are minimized.

Clearly, the major thrust of the artistic policy was the nurturing of new plays from new playwrights, and the majority of productions done at the theatre club have been in keeping with this policy. However, while the primary interest was focussed on untried material from contemporary writers, the policy did not exclude the possibility of producing the works of more established or even classical writers. As noted in the Statement of Purpose,

The MTC will not limit itself to new plays: discussions are under way for productions, developed in the same spirit of investigation, of lesser known works by such playwrights as Marlowe, Ibsen,

⁵ MTC 1972 Statement of Purpose.

O'Neill, Chekhov and others.⁶

In fact, in the history of the Club only four works by the playwrights named were ever produced: Henrik Ibsen's Little Eyolf, in a production directed by Austin Pendleton in 1974, a reading of Eugene O'Neill's A Touch of the Poet, in the same year, and Anton Chekhov's The Seagull in 1975 and The Three Sisters, directed by Meadow in 1982. Nevertheless, the fact that such a statement was included in the 1972-1973 Statement of Purpose illustrates the eclecticism which was, and remains, a fundamental component of the Club's artistic policy.

"We don't operate from a doctrinaire artistic policy," states Meadow in discussing her vision of the goals of the Manhattan Theatre Club, "we don't do plays just about one particular subject--we are obviously open to any kind of script."⁷

Scripts waiting to be produced are plentiful in New York City, and by 1975 the Club was receiving approximately 750 offerings per season. During the first season, however, the figure was not nearly that high, as the Manhattan Thea-

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Robb Baker, "Manhattan Theatre Club: Three Levels of Theater Where the Bohemians Used to Dance." The Soho Weekly News, September 25, 1975, p. 24.

tre Club was a relatively unknown organization located in an area of the city not associated with theatrical institutions. To help remedy this state of affairs, Meadow turned her efforts to creating an association with The New York Theatre Strategy.

Created in the Spring of 1972, The New York Theatre Strategy described itself as

a group of 23 American playwrights, who represent a diversity of style and philosophy and fifteen years of experience in the experimental theatre. These playwrights have received peer recognition, critical acclaim and grants from scholarly groups, and their works have received extensive publication. They have now organized to establish a Playwright's Repertory Theatre, exclusively designed for the presentation of experimental, innovative work on a quality professional level. The Strategy feels that such a theatre, serving as an alternative to the commercial theatre industry, is crucial to the survival of the American theatre. Strategy members include: Kenneth Bernard, Julie Bovasso, Ed Bullins, Rosalyn Drexler, Tom Eyen, Maria Irene Fornes, Paul Foster, Robert Heide, William M. Hoffman, Adrienne Kennedy, Charles Ludlam, Murray Mednick, Leonard Melfi, Terrence McNally, John Ford Noonan, Rochelle Owens, Robert Patrick, Sam Shepard, David Starkweather, Ronald Tavel, Megan Terry, Jean Claude van Itallie and Lanford Wilson.

Aware that the goals of the New York Theatre Strategy were fundamentally similar to those of the Manhattan Theatre Club, and further aware that the Club had a wealth of space

⁸ New York Theatre Strategy/Manhattan Theatre Club publicity flier, 1973.

available for use, Meadow, accompanied by Club Board Member George White, met with Julie Bovasso, representative of the New York Theatre Strategy.⁹

Meadow recalls,

The New York Theatre Strategy . . . was something that I had heard about, and that I tried to get for us because I thought it was a collection of the best writers that I could really produce at the time, and I felt that I wanted to make contact with those people. I had read their work and I was interested, and . . . I thought from an artistic point of view it would be extremely valid, and I also thought from a pure promotional point of view it would be great to have this event happening at the Manhattan Theatre Club since it was our first season.¹⁰

It was also the premiere Festival of the New York Theatre Strategy, and its organizers, Maria Irene Fornes and Julie Bovasso, were anxious that the event be successful. Meadow's attitude apparently inspired confidence as the initial proposal of producing five plays at the Club¹¹ expanded to permit the presentation of twenty-three one-act plays¹² in repertory over a five week period. A formidable task, to be sure, it was made even more difficult given the fact that

⁹ Sandra Bertrand, "New York Shines," Los Angeles Weekly News, January 11, 1974, p. 10.

¹⁰ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 25.

¹¹ Bertrand, p. 10.

¹² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 25.

Meadow was working with a staff of only three.

The New York Theatre Strategy, however, brought with them workers and the cooperative venture ran smoothly. "They wanted to have a certain artistic autonomy," recalls Meadow, "they wanted to be able to cast their own plays, choose their own directors, and that was fine with me at the time. I respected all of them and I certainly didn't have the means of going about doing that."¹³

In the symbiotic relationship between the New York Theatre Strategy and the Manhattan Theater Club, the latter proved to be a generous sponsor. More than \$14,000 of the Club's limited budget was allocated to the project, and it was agreed that sixty percent of the box office receipts would be returned to the Strategy for disbursement among the actors.¹⁴ "We were practically penniless but we went out of our way not to act like a scheister (sic) organization,"¹⁵ says Meadow.

In preparation for the Festival, all other operations at the Club came to a halt. The Club's facilities were cleaned or renovated in order to make maximum use of the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bertrand, p. 10.

¹⁵ Bertrand, p. 10.

space available. "Somehow we just made theatres everywhere," Meadow remembers, "we made a theatre in (Rehearsal Room) 38, and the theatre; we used Stage 73, and we used the Cabaret. Everywhere there was something going on. It was great."¹⁶

In addition to the financial contribution of the Manhattan Theatre Club, a \$10,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, \$5,000 from the Kaplan Fund and \$1,800 from the Drama Guild, the project was made viable through the efforts of volunteers, especially on the part of the technical staff.¹⁷ In many ways, the Festival was more a labor of love for the theatre than anything else, as evidenced by the net income of \$4,800 that the five-week run produced.¹⁸ Restricted by the Equity Workshop Code, donations of \$2 for one show, \$3 for two and \$4 for three kept income low, although Meadow claims, "the interest was such that we could have run for months if only we'd been allowed to charge."¹⁹ While being one of the first episodes where the Manhattan Theatre Club and Actors' Equity were at odds,

¹⁶ Interview with Lynne Meadow 10/18/82, p. 26.

¹⁷ Bertrand, p. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

it was certainly not the last, as the Club was to be a major proponent of reforms in the regulations governing Off Broadway productions in years to come.

The New York Theatre Strategy Festival, out of sheer numbers, brought attention to the Manhattan Theatre Club. In the season of 1972-1973, the Club boasted some sixty-five productions: twenty-three new American one-act plays as produced by the Strategy, "and also we did a lot of readings," explains Meadow, "We had no money to produce plays, so we would do readings of plays."²⁰ Returning to the metaphor of the theatre club as a "supermarket for the arts," Meadow succinctly summarized the impact of the New York Theatre Strategy Festival for the MTC: "You get a brighter package, more to choose from."²¹

The theatregoer had a lot to choose from at the Manhattan Theatre Club during the period beginning October, 1972 and continuing through August, 1973. In this interval, the Club sponsored approximately five hundred performances which played to over twelve thousand people.²² During 1973, the Manhattan Theatre Club, owing to the New York Theatre Strat-

²⁰ Interview with Lynne Meadow, p. 26.

²¹ Bertrand, p. 10.

²² MTC 1973-74 Statement of Purpose, p. 1.

egy, became the home of works by such playwrights as Ed Bullins, with It Has No Choice, Terence McNally, with the world premiere of Bad Habits, and Sam Shepard, with Chicago and The Unseen Hand. Bullins and Shepard, incidentally, were to be represented again at the Club; Shepard with his play, Geography of a Horse Dreamer, directed by Jacques Levy in 1975, and Bullins with his In the Wine Time, directed by Robert Macbeth in 1976.

Included in the number of performances were operas, cabaret revues, and poetry readings, all in keeping with the goal of making the Manhattan Theatre Club a performing arts center.

In the 1973-74 Statement of Purpose, it is noted that the Poetry Series had proven quite successful and would continue. Later to become the "Writers in Performance Series," it pre-dated the arrival of Lynne Meadow, but was, nonetheless, developed by a Yale Drama School graduate.²³ The series was the brainchild of Honor Moore, who approached Meadow's predecessor, Robert Sickinger, with the idea in 1971.²⁴

²³ David Kaufman, "Reading Writers Turn on the Public." East Side Express, March 3, 1983.

²⁴ Ibid.

Moore was put in touch with Peregrine Whittlesey, who was at the time producing a Monday night program which included poetry readings. Together, using their own funds, Whittlesey and Moore produced the first season of the poetry series. The following year, Whittlesey left the Manhattan Theatre Club to work at the Theatre Development Fund, and Moore took over full control as producer.²⁵

Given permission to use space at the Club for the program, Moore was given very little else of practical value, as she recalls,

It was beyond casual . . . I mean I could do anything I wanted. But there wasn't any money. I was responsible for everything, including raising the money, and I even threw in some of my own . . . Not only did I do the fliers myself, I also ran around and put them up on trees in the Village. It was a mess. I mean I really didn't know what I was doing, and I could never be sure that there wouldn't be someone in the room when we had scheduled poetry readings, so I always had to arrive at 5:30 and make sure the coast was clear.²⁶

Because of the success of the series, it was continued after Meadow assumed the executive directorship, although, for a time, there was some question as to whether the series would be permitted to go on. Peregrine Whittlesey recalls, ". . . it took some meetings with her (Meadow) to persuade her that -----

²⁵ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

it really was important to continue to do it. . . . Honor and I, together, went to talk to Lynne when she was becoming Artistic Director, and the question was would she suffer this program to be continued for another season, and the answer finally was yes."²⁷ Today, the series remains a vital part of the Manhattan Theatre Club's program.

In 1974, Honor Moore left control of the series to Janet Sternburg, in order that she might pursue her own writing projects. Sternburg, a writer and filmmaker, refined the series from 1974-1980, introducing programs which were unified thematically, such as the 1974 program Estadio Chile, which combined Chilean music, masks and the writings of Pablo Neruda in an evening of "theatrical poetry reading."²⁸ Sternburg also broadened the program to include readings of fiction, and "Tributes," to deceased writers of merit, designed to prevent their artistic legacies from being forgotten by the public.²⁹

Having succeeded Sternburg as acting director in 1980, Jana Harris, a poet and novelist, today sees as the purpose of the series to be,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

to add a third or fourth dimension to literature; to familiarize the public with good but not necessarily well-known authors; to help build a readership for them, and especially lesser known authors in general. And to making writing appear to the public³⁰ as more than just what exists on the page.

Like the Manhattan Theatre Club itself, the Writers in Performance Series has grown from extremely modest and precarious beginnings to become a staple of the Upper East Side theatre-going community. Over the years, it has attracted such luminaries as Zoe Caldwell, Stockard Channing, John Houseman, Erica Jong, Stanley Kauffmann, Darren McGavin, and Susan Sontag as participants, to name a few of the hundreds who have given of their talent to the series.³¹ In the early seventies, however, when the series was called, "Poets and Other Performing People," the offerings were more reserved and the participants less well known; nevertheless, the aim of the program was as it is today, "to bring poetry as a performed art to the attention of the New York public."³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Poets and Performers," Manhattan East, November 16, 1971.

In the 1973-74 season, plans were also made to continue the production of operas at the Club, following the positive reception of the Yale Repertory Theatre import of the Bertolt Brecht/Kurt Weill work, The Little Mahagonny, directed by Michael Posnick. Reviewing this production, Alan Rich of New York Magazine wrote, "It is wonderfully vivid and stylish, and is also the best job of Englishing a Brecht musical text that I have heard."³³

Attracting an audience for operas at the Club was, however, apparently not very successful. For the 1973-74 season production of Francis Poulenc's Les Mamelles de Tirésias, which cost \$8,300 to produce, box office receipts amounted to \$1,000.³⁴ Without a sizable audience, the production of operas was discontinued, but while the operas produced at the Club over the years have been few in number, that any were done is testimony to the fact that Meadow's aspiration was to make the Club more than simply a play-producing organization.

³³ Alan Rich, New York Magazine, April 30, 1973. (Reprint).

³⁴ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Jacques Nordeman, October 23, 1974, p. 4.

The Manhattan Theatre Club was clearly gaining strength and recognition, and efforts were planned to continue this trend during Meadow's second season. "In 1973-74," records that season's Statement of Purpose, "major efforts will be made to (a) involve the immediate community more closely with the Club's activities, and (b) increase the responsibilities and involvement of MTC membership."³⁵

While the 1972-73 season had proven successful, particularly in gaining an audience and attracting talent, making it so took considerable effort and strained the theatre's small staff. To help alleviate the situation, an internship program was established in connection with Hunter College and Finch College, providing interns with academic credit in exchange for services in such areas as promotion, technical direction, and stage management.³⁶ Over the years, this internship program has been broadened to include additional colleges, and has attracted a growing number of students; however, in its infancy it was unable to significantly lighten the burden of demands inevitable in running a theatre.

³⁵ MTC 1973-74 Statement of Purpose, p. 3.

³⁶ Ibid.

Producing plays and, at the same time, monitoring the day-to-day operations of a theatre is a gargantuan undertaking, and problems were becoming apparent in the running of the house. Jonathan Levy, a playwright whose one-acts, Charlie the Chicken and The Master Class were presented at the Manhattan Theatre Club in early 1973, and which received very positive reviews from Dick Brukenfeld of The Village Voice,³⁷ whose own play, The Big Broadcast on East 53 Street, had been produced at the Club earlier in the year noted in a friendly letter to Meadow what he perceived as notable problems. Among these were the fact that telephones were not answered to take reservations during scheduled hours, that the literature about the Club contained excessive typographical errors, and that publicity and press releases were not carefully proofread. Additionally, commenting on house management, he noted that theatre programs were undersupplied, that there were distractions in the house and, reflecting on a personal experience at the Club added, "Saturday night was scary--we had more like a mob than an audience."³⁸

³⁷ Dick Brukenfeld, "The coop de grace," The Village Voice, March 1, 1973.

³⁸ Letter from Jonathan Levy to Lynne Meadow, March 3, 1973.

In discussing what he termed "human relations" at the Club, however, Levy pointed up what he thought to be the solution to these problems. Praising Meadow's role in connection with the production of his plays, he wrote,

Lynne M. You are a lover, which is not only a terrific thing to be in itself, but it is a big reason I have such high hopes for the Manhattan Theatre Club. You encouraged the cast; when there was static in the air, you made a point of talking it out; you were available; and your notes, remarks and observations all along were most helpful. For you, my dear, I have nothing but admiration and thanks. But one footnote: perhaps you take on a bit too much, spread yourself a bit thin (which perhaps is the pendant defect to loving enthusiasm). It is, God knows, curable; and I'm sure will be cured when you have a larger staff and a fat budget. Could you assign someone . . . as what? acting producer for each show? So that each director, author, etc. could go to them with the daily, small potatoes stuff . . . and save you the crises? I think if you could delegate the routine staff you would a) give the periferal (sic) people in the office a sense of involvement and responsibility, which would be good for them and b) most important, conserve your time and energy.

From the description Levy provides in his candid letter, it would appear that Meadow was assuming total responsibility of all aspects of the Club's functioning. As a result, her strongest asset, as Levy implies, the ability to work with actors and directors in fostering creativity, was being compromised by the business of managing the theatre.

³⁹ Ibid.

In fact, correspondence from the period, as well as comments made in response to audience surveys, indicate recurring problems in the way in which the theatre was managed and maintained. On the other hand, there is little evidence of dissatisfaction on the part of artists who worked at the Club during this time. In fact, most artists described their experience at the Club in positive terms, as did playwright Israel Horovitz who said, "The Manhattan Theatre Club since the entrance of Lynne Meadow as director, has become a receptive, pleasant place to work."⁴⁰

Meadow was aware that to maintain absolute control on all fronts was impossible in the long term. Clearly, the idea of securing the assistance of a partner had crossed her mind, for in a letter dated April 12, 1973, Jonathan Levy wrote, "I have an idea for someone who might be right for your co-director. Let's talk soon."⁴¹

With a successful first season under her direction, Meadow had scored a personal victory of sorts; her decision not to "throw in the towel" had been correct. Through her efforts, the Manhattan Theatre Club had produced, and under her direction, the theatre could continue to grow. Her vic-

⁴⁰ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1973-74, p. 47.

⁴¹ Letter from Jonathan Levy to Lynne Meadow, April 12, 1973.

tory was not without anxiety, however, as she admitted in looking back at the season,

. . . I remember I would type of these grant applications . . . I would sit writing this prose, and really chuckle to myself because I would say what the game plan was. I would say it was our goal to establish a fully professional resident theatre, and I would . . . think, "we're never going to be able to afford to do this," but I would write and--I mean it wasn't that I was lying, it's just that I didn't quite believe that what I was saying would happen. And yet, I guess, you know, it was as if everybody was doing everything to make it possible, but somewhere in the recesses of my mind I thought, "this is crazy." And yet, maybe to a certain extent, I still think it's crazy. You know, it feels so fragile to me. It has always felt very fragile to me.⁴²

Working to build a theatre on what she perceived to be such unsteady foundation may have made Meadow guard her authority more intensely; certainly it made for extreme caution in the selection of a partner. What was clear was that the Manhattan Theatre Club was to be the result of her efforts, her vision. "I wanted to have the name of the theatre mean something to people," she says, ". . . I want this to be a landmark. And, obviously, my own name, within the business, is associated with this theatre. It has to be, this is--it's my baby."⁴³

⁴² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 7.

⁴³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 14.

The hierarchy that Meadow had established for the theatre was clear. All decisions needed the approval of the Executive Director; and in this, the influence of Nikos Psacharopoulos, once again, is apparent. Recounts Meadow,

I remember Nikos . . . said to me once--we were talking about how places were run, theatres were run--he said to me, "There's an old Greek proverb: if you want to find out if a fish is rotten, smell the head." And, you know, he made⁴⁴ me see that everything goes from the top, down.

Actually, the question of administrative and artistic control had become an issue when Meadow first began work at the Club. During 1972, in the absence of an Executive Director, the Board of Directors had delegated responsibilities for various projects to different individuals. With her arrival on July 15, 1972, Meadow found it necessary to stress the authority of her position in terms of decision-making. In a letter, dated July 20, 1972, to June Plager, who had been contracted by the Board six months earlier to create and manage the Club's Cabaret, Meadow wrote,

For the past four days, several members of the Board of Directors and I have spent many hours speaking with possible patrons and foundations about contributing money to the Club. We are in very serious financial difficulty at present. I have asked for these contributions in the name of the Manhattan Theatre Club of which I am the Executive Director, and these potential contributors have been assured by the members of the Board that

⁴⁴ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 16.

the artistic direction of the Club is now in my hands. For this reason it is imperative that I approve of any and all programs that are to take place at the Manhattan Theatre Club, the Cabaret, of course, included. I realize that you must be able to implement any prior commitments that you have made. I ask simply that no new programs be engaged without my approval.⁴⁵

Plager, whose contract with the Board gave her artistic control of the Cabaret, of course, objected; all the more strenuously as she had worked to create the Cabaret at no salary.⁴⁶ The matter, which appears to have been handled with less than delicacy, was decided in Meadow's favor, as Plager recorded,

On August 30th, Mr. Jeffcoat handed me a letter, giving me notice for having breached my contract in a variety of ways. He did not state in what ways.⁴⁷

The Board's decision to support Meadow in regard to the authority of the Executive Director seems to have been a fairly easy one in this instance, but during the 1973-74 and 1974-75 seasons, the matter surfaced once again, this time the challenge coming from a member of the Board of Directors.

⁴⁵ Memo to MTC Board of Directors and Artistic Council, from June Plager, September 26, 1972, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

It was apparent that the number of plays produced during the 1972-73 season would not be replicated during the 1973-74 season, but the goal remained to make the theatre as productive as possible. To that end, Board member Mortimer Levitt offered a proposal. He recalls, "They had four theatres at the Manhattan Theatre Club, . . ." referring to the spaces then called Stage 73, the main stage; Stage 79, a seventy-five feet showcase theatre located on the third floor; Stage 72, actually more of a working classroom than a theatre; and Cabaret 73. "I took her to lunch at the Plaza," Levitt continues,

and I said, "listen, Lynne, you have an impossible situation, because you have four theatres to fill, and there just is not that much product available." . . . And I said, "I would suggest that you use one theatre for the shows that my children never saw."⁴⁸

What Levitt was suggesting was that the Chamber Theatre program, started by Robert Sickinger, be continued under his aegis; and that the original idea of bringing theatre into the home, be changed to make Chamber Theatre a series at the Club which presented staged readings of American and European twentieth century classics.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 2.

Levitt, the founder and sole owner of The Custom Shop Shirtmakers, and a man of great affluence, had been solicited to become a member of the Club's Board of Directors by the founding committee.⁴⁹ Beginning in 1962, he had become involved in theatre and films as a producer. His first investment had been in the off-Broadway production of Leroi Jones's The Dutchman, for which he was also associate producer of the subsequent film.⁵⁰ He was also the producer of the off-Broadway play, The Concept, which had a successful two year run, played the White House on two occasions, and "played all the major universities."⁵¹ By the end of 1974, Levitt had invested approximately \$350,000 in film and theatre projects.⁵² As an active member of the Board since the Club's inception, Levitt was now volunteering to produce the Chamber Theatre series at the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Meadow's reaction to Levitt's proposal was not enthusiastic, but was agreeable, as he recalls, "She said, 'I'm really not interested, but if you would like to do it, that

⁴⁹ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Memo from Mortimer Levitt to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 10/21/74, p. 3.

⁵¹ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 1.

⁵² Memo from Mortimer Levitt to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 10/21/74, p. 4.

would be great."⁵³ Despite Meadow's lukewarm reception, the idea of Chamber Theatre appealed to members of the Board, including Gerald Freund, then Dean of Humanities and the Arts at Hunter College, who in a letter to Albert Jeffcoat wrote, "Frankly, the more I think about it, the more I like Mortimer's idea. Indeed, I would like to see it extended to readings of works in progress. There is a real possibility of cooperation with Hunter in this."⁵⁴

Levitt agreed to underwrite the project, pay royalties on the plays produced in the series, and pay the salary of the project director. The project director, initially Daniel Wilcox, who was later to become a successful television producer, was permitted full artistic control of the productions; however, the selection of plays to be produced was the decision of Mortimer Levitt.

From the beginning, there was a division between the Chamber Theatre series and the other offerings of the Manhattan Theatre Club. While the major thrust of the Club's artistic policy was the production of new and untried plays, Chamber Theatre looked back at works by playwrights who had gained recognition. On a purely practical level, the Cham-

⁵³ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/12/82, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Letter from Gerald Freund to A. E. Jeffcoat, February 26, 1973.

ber Theatre program stood apart from the other activities of the Club because it was independently financed, and was publicized as "Mortimer Levitt presents 'Chamber Theatre.'" In essence, Levitt was merely utilizing the facilities of the Manhattan Theatre Club to produce a series of his own design.

The initial offering of Chamber Theatre, of course, pre-dated the arrival of Lynne Meadow. It was a reading of Venable Herndon's play, Until the Monkey Comes, which was presented in the East Side townhouse of Mortimer Levitt in January of 1972. The event, which was attended by friends of the Levitts', was a black tie affair which received a half page of coverage in the New York Times.⁵⁵ The first Chamber Theatre production to be offered at the Manhattan Theatre Club was a reading of Eugene Ionesco's The Lesson, which opened on May 4, 1973, preceding the New York Theatre Strategy Festival by a few weeks.⁵⁶ Like the readings which were to follow, The Lesson ran for two weekends and a total of ten performances; one performance on Friday evenings, and two performances each on Saturday and Sunday eve-

⁵⁵ Enid Nemy, "Theatre in the Home: Nice Change from the Usual Parties," The New York Times, January 23, 1972, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Chamber Theatre flier, 5/73.

nings. Admission was by contribution, with a suggested price of \$2.50.

The Lesson was followed by Edward Albee's The Death of Bessie Smith, a reading of Leroi Jones's The Dutchman, and Israel Horovitz's The Indian Wants the Bronx. During the summer of 1973, Chamber Theatre presented Tennessee Williams's Suddenly Last Summer, Edward Albee's Zoo Story, and Clifford Odets's Waiting for Lefty. The Odets play, one of the few to be reviewed, was praised by Howard Thompson in The New York Times as having "cutting credibility."⁵⁷ As was characteristic of all of the Manhattan Theatre Club's activities at this time, financial rewards were minimal, but the energy put into Chamber Theatre was great. "The actors and the director," Levitt recalls, " . . . did not want to do readings. They wanted to memorize it. . . . People wanted to work . . . and we did all these plays, and we got publicity and attendance that was remarkable."⁵⁸

Plans for the continuation of the Chamber Theatre series during the 1973-74 season were made following the successful reception of the program's initial offerings. Daniel Wilcox remained the director of the series until the end

⁵⁷ Howard Thompson, "Stage: Odets in Full Cry," The New York Times, August 16, 1973, p. 42.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p.3.

of 1973, at which time he left and was replaced by Barry Moss, a theatre arts graduate from U.C.L.A., with substantial public relations experience in the film industry.

By the end of 1973, however, Meadow was beginning to voice objection to the arrangement made between the Manhattan Theatre Club and Mortimer Levitt's Chamber Theatre. Levitt recalls, "She said, 'Mortimer, we cannot have it any more this 'Mortimer Levitt presents.' If it's changed to 'in association,' 'Mortimer Levitt, in association with the Manhattan Theatre Club' . . . (O.K.) . . . it would have to be all the Club."⁵⁹ Levitt agreed to the change, which took effect beginning August, 1973.

Despite the positive reception of Chamber Theatre performances, and despite the fact that post-performance discussions between the audience and the performers and director, an important aspect of the Club's artistic policy, was integral to Chamber Theatre, tensions were developing between the Manhattan Theatre Club staff and the individuals involved with Chamber Theatre. "She gave us no cooperation whatsoever," remarks Levitt, "and she was very nasty to Barry, who was very cooperative."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

A memo to Barry Moss from "MTC," dated January 10, 1974 indicates, at the very least, less than enthusiastic cooperation:

It is our understanding that Chamber Theatre will commence operations in Room 2 on Thursday, January 17 with a production of SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER. . .

While we want to help in any way we can, we don't have the time right now to spend setting up Chamber Theatre.

It is also understood that you are entirely responsible for the setting up of the stage and the house for all performances as well as for the lighting, props, and costumes for each production. You must check with Tom every day to see if the stage must be struck for the next day. You are also responsible for the front-of-house for all shows. The MTC staff will operate the bar for most performances. If you wish to ask a staff member to sell tickets on an evening we are in the building, you should make such a request at least 24 hours in advance.

All plays and directors must be cleared by Lynne; Susan (Chase) must approve all expenditures; Wayne all technical changes in the room; and Tom all rehearsal space. We will see that Chamber Theatre has Room 2 the evening before the opening of each production but all other rehearsals must be scheduled with Tom at least one week in advance. . .

A notation in Levitt's handwriting made on his copy of the memo reveals his understanding of its meaning: "We won't help you in anything, but you must come to us for every-

⁶¹ Memo to Barry Moss from MTC, 1/10/74.

thing."⁶²

In February, 1974, "The Manhattan Theatre Club, Lynne Meadow--artistic director, in association with Mortimer Levitt"⁶³ presented Garson Kanin's Born Yesterday, directed by Barry Moss. The production, which Mel Gussow of The New York Times described as "basic,"⁶⁴ was notable in that it marked the acting debut of Leonard Harris, arts editor and critic for CBS-TV.

In a letter of appreciation for Harris's efforts, Levitt describes his involvement with Chamber Theatre and what he perceived to be its assets:

. . . I want to thank you for helping us put Chamber Theatre on the map--your presence in the cast brought Chamber Theatre to the attention of people in the theatre who might not know about the work we are doing.

Broadway theatre turned me off many years ago and, excepting for benefits (theatre parties) or the occasional play that receives rave reviews from 90% of the critics, I prefer films. It was quite by accident that I re-discovered the excitement of live theatre. I produced an off-Broadway hit, "The Concept," dealing with the rehabilitation of a drug addict at Daytop Village (I was the Chairman of the Board). Subsequently, we had a party in our home; there were about 60 guests and before

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "'Born Yesterday' is born again--gracefully" Show Business, February 21, 1974.

⁶⁴ Mel Gussow, "'Born Yesterday' Ages Well in Revival," The New York Times, February 23, 1974

dining, we gave a staged reading of Herndon Venable's (sic) "Until the Monkey Comes." Although the play left much to be desired, the response of our friends was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and the discussion with the author, director and cast was, shall we say, "gung ho." It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening--black tie, and the food was good--but it was the fact that the audience and the actors were able to participate in a re-hash of the play that made the evening particularly special. In addition, and in my opinion, this should not be discounted, the intimacy of the performance was a great plus.

Television, crime and high prices have combined to deal a death blow to a theatre that has been slowly ailing for many years. It occurred to me then that Chamber Theatre might be a viable alternative to film and the Broadway theatre. It was also a way of introducing a new audience to the experience of live theatre. Actually, Chamber Theatre serves many purposes. It gives the actors an opportunity to act; directors an opportunity to direct; the public an opportunity to see splendid plays of relatively recent vintage that have already faded from the scene and finally, an opportunity for the audience and the actors to participate, to top off the evening by sharing intellectual⁶⁵ and emotional stimulation through discussion.

He goes on to describe the problems encountered in fostering the Chamber Theatre series and, in doing so, reveals a motive Meadow evidently sensed and felt the need to defend against:

It has been my experience that our audiences have consistently had a good time. Unfortunately, despite the fact that neither the actors nor the directors get paid, Chamber Theatre has been running

⁶⁵ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Leonard Harris, February 21, 1974.

at a deficit of about \$15,000 a year--it should be making \$15,000 a year. If it did, it would be of enormous help to the Manhattan Theatre Club. When the idea was first conceived, I had no doubt that audience response would be overwhelming; that we would be running four shows every night-- we do have four rooms in the building that would be suitable for Chamber Theatre. I was wrong. Unfortunately, audiences respond not only to quality but to fashion. If Chamber Theatre could become, for want of a better word, an "in" place for the beautiful people, then I believe the public would quickly follow (the fashion) because the quality of the plays, the quality of the performances, the quality of the direction, the intimacy of the evening and the participation of the audience combine to make a splendid evening at a price (\$3.00) that is actually less than the cost⁶⁶ of a first-run film in your neighborhood theatre. *(Italics mine).*

While Levitt believed the Chamber Theatre series could prove beneficial to the Club, Meadow apparently did not value it, and there is substantial evidence that she did little to further the project. Kevin Barkhausen, who was hired as Associate Director of the Chamber Theatre series and assistant to Barry Moss, described numerous instances which revealed the lack of cooperation between Meadow and her associates and the Chamber Theatre staff. In connection with the production of Born Yesterday, he writes,

When the production of "Born Yesterday", which, incidentally, was directed by Barry (Moss), proved so successful due to the very favorable review in the NEW YORK TIMES, we asked to extend the engagement and Lynne wanted time to think it over, which resulted in our having only one day's notice.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

This meant an entire set had to be constructed in one afternoon. Although several of the actors offered assistance, Barry and I had to do most of the work, including finding the material. To be quite frank, (it was difficult for) a group of actors and a stage director, . . . to erect a set in one afternoon, while the technical director, the general manager and the treasurer sat in the Cabaret doing nothing and to add insult to injury, found pleasure in ridiculing our lack of expertise. This general attitude of non-concern, while genuine theatre people are desperately trying to mount a production was unfortunately typical.⁶⁷

In a similar vein, Walter Barnett, co-producer of the Chamber Theatre production of The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, described his experience at the Club:

We were originally scheduled to open on October 10. Then we were told that we would open at a later date. We rearranged our schedule for that and then we were told that we would open late in September, giving us only 13 days to put the show together.

After being told that we were being rescheduled, we were unable to pin anybody down to give us new dates. We were told that we had to have a conference with Lynne first; but she initially refused to see us at all, then cancelled two appointments at the last minute. . . .

What (publicity) there was, was of poor quality. Flyers (sic) went out to subscribers after opening night. No press coverage. To my knowledge, no critics were invited. . . .

(The dressing area was) an insult to our cast. It remained filthy and unsanitary despite several requests by me to clean up. Furniture from other shows (was) moved into our dressing area during and between performances, making it exceedingly difficult for our cast to prepare for entrances. Chairs (were) removed from dressing rooms during

⁶⁷ Letter from Kevin Barkhausen to Mortimer Levitt, October 17, 1974, p. 4.

performances, forcing (the) cast to stand during intermissions.⁶⁸

"The following artists," wrote Levitt to Board member Jacques Nordeman,

complained to me directly about the rudeness, the lack of courtesy, and the unavailability of Lynne Meadow either in person or on the telephone:

June Plager, former manager of our Cabaret; Sheldon Patinkin, director of "Waiting for Lefty" and "The Death of Bessie Smith;" Walter Barnett, co-producer of "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie;" Jim Struthers, recommended to Lynne Meadow for a staff position by Board member, Beatrice Straight; Marc Zagoren, playwright and professor of drama at Farley (sic) Dickinson; Olive Deering, an actress who played the lead in Tennessee Williams's "Portrait of a Madonna;" Kevin Barkhausen, stage manager of Chamber Theatre; Ed Bullins, playwright and associate producer of "The Sirens" and finally, Mortimer Levitt, Board member since 1970 and producer of the Chamber Theatre series at the Manhattan Theatre Club.⁶⁹

Towards the end of 1974, battle lines were being drawn between Mortimer Levitt and Lynne Meadow. Levitt, having proposed the idea that Chamber Theatre be done at the Club, and having invested approximately \$11,000 in the project since its inception,⁷⁰ claimed authority over it. Meadow,

⁶⁸ Letter from Walter Barnett to Mortimer Levitt, October 21, 1974, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Jacques Nordeman, October 23, 1974, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Mortimer Levitt's Introductory Statement to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 12/6/74, p. 8.

as Executive Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club, which housed Chamber Theatre, contended the series ultimately came under her jurisdiction. The matter came to a head during October, 1974, by which time Levitt had produced nineteen plays for the series,⁷¹ the majority of which had been executed under the artistic direction of Barry Moss. Levitt noted that by this time, Meadow allegedly had expressed a change of heart about the value of the series,

Lynne has never questioned the artistic merit of Chamber Theatre nor the way the Chamber Theatre was run. On the contrary, Lynne complimented me and Barry again and again for the concept and for the way Chamber Theatre has been handled. Lynne confessed publicly and privately that she had been wrong about Chamber Theatre--saying that in fact, it was so good ⁷² it should be incorporated into the Club's program.

Meadow's view of what should be the focus of the series, however, was quite different from Levitt's, who believed that "Chamber Theatre should be reserved for revivals--revivals being a sure way to build an audience."⁷³ Meadow, on the other hand, whose announced plans for the 1974-75 season included eight new plays, two operas, two musical evenings and eight poetry readings,⁷⁴ wanted all of the planned

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷² Ibid., p. 8.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 4.

fourteen Chamber Theatre productions to be of new plays as well.⁷⁵

The selection of plays presented by Chamber Theatre was a point of dissension; the choice of who would run the series, however, triggered an explosive confrontation. Levitt remembers, "Lynne said, 'you know, Mortimer, you were right. This was an excellent idea and should now be a part of the Club. And you'll have to let Barry Moss go.'"⁷⁶

The reason for Moss's dismissal was allegedly budgetary, as explained in a letter from Jeffcoat to Levitt dated October 1, 1974:

As for the new season, it is the judgement of the MTC Executive Director and General Manager that the MTC cannot afford out of its budget a full-time administrator of chamber theatre in this upcoming season. They advise me that our staff budget for salaries will not permit such an expense without discharging some member of the small, regular staff, which they do not wish to do.

It would be possible for the regular MTC staff to continue chamber theatre without such a full-time administrator. Unless we receive support funds for the administrator, the club management feels that this would have to be our decision.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Flier announcing MTC's 1974-75 season.

⁷⁵ Mortimer Levitt Introductory Statement to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 12/6/74, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Letter from A. E. Jeffcoat to Mortimer Levitt, October

By this time, the regular staff of the Manhattan Theatre Club consisted of eleven people in the following capacities: Artistic/Executive Director, Associate Director, Casting and Literary Director, Managing Director, Technical Director, Assistant Technical Director, Special Projects Director, Public Relations Director, House Manager, Administrative Assistant, and Bartender.⁷⁸ Of these, five were newly created positions which had been filled in the course of 1974.⁷⁹

Jeffcoat's letter goes on to present alternative courses of action regarding the future of Chamber Theatre:

Everyone's preference would be to continue Barry Moss as chamber theatre administrator, if a commitment can be obtained to cover this cost outside of the MTC's presently anticipated revenues. As we explained at our meeting on September 26, the funds we receive from the State Arts Council and the National Endowment, our principal sources of revenue, are earmarked for other activities of the MTC having to do with the cultivation of new playwrights, and cannot be used for chamber theatre.

In view of the above considerations, our first suggestion was to ask you to consider the possibility of guaranteeing the salary of Barry Moss as chamber theatre administrator for the coming season, in the amount of \$7,800. The MTC for its

1, 1974.

⁷⁸ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Jacques Nordeman, October 23, 1974, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

part would provide an assistant to the administrator and would pay for the production costs and overhead of chamber theatre, which total \$24,650.

Our second proposal was for a guarantee of \$5,200 toward's (sic) Barry's salary, with the MTC making up the balance of \$2,600. In this case the MTC would not be able to provide an assistant, and Barry would have to assume the full responsibility. . . .

If neither of these proposals is acceptable, my hope would be that you would remain on our board with no financial obligation other than that of other board members, which is to contribute or raise a minimum of \$3,000 per annum of unrestricted funds for MTC operations.

I do hope that our meetings and this letter will help us to resolve this situation promptly, so that the staff people involved can be informed and so that chamber theatre can continue as in the past as one ⁸⁰ of the most valuable attractions for our members.

At the Board meeting alluded to in Jeffcoat's letter, "the Ad Hoc committee recommended that Artistic Director, Lynne Meadow, have full artistic control"⁸¹ of the Chamber Theatre series. Until this time, Levitt underwrote all costs connected with the program; now, with the decision of the committee, he was apparently choosing to withhold funding.

⁸⁰ Letter from A. E. Jeffcoat to Mortimer Levitt, October 1, 1974.

⁸¹ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 5.

"It was my idea," says Levitt, "I produced it. . . . it was an unfair situation, her taking over that which I had built successfully."⁸² The statement is, however, in some measure ironic as Levitt was now indicating a desire to displace Meadow. Levitt requested and was granted a hearing before a special committee of the Manhattan Theatre Club's Board. His indignation at the course of events intensified when he learned that on October 8, 1974, Barry Moss was fired by Lynne Meadow without notice and without severance.⁸³

"Barry's dismissal is unconscionable, unbusinesslike and seems to indicate that Lynne is more concerned with her own image than with the welfare of the Club," Levitt told members of the Ad Hoc Committee. He continued, "More, I believe that the Board's acquiescence to Barry's dismissal continues a precedent for unconscionable dismissals that began when Jeff agreed to dump June Plager without compensation for seven months of unpaid efforts."⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Alfred Goldfield, October 9, 1974, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Mortimer Levitt's Introductory Statement to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 12/6/74, p. 8.

At the first meeting of the special committee, which was held on October 21, 1974, Levitt began his remarks with a direct attack on Lynne Meadow's qualifications to be Executive Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club:

First, let me say that I appreciate the fact that Jeff appointed this Ad Hoc Committee to give me this opportunity to air the many complaints I have about the way in which Lynne Meadow has managed the Manhattan Theatre Club. It's my opinion that she has proven herself incompetent in several areas and it's my⁸⁵ opinion that her contract should not be renewed.

He then followed this statement with a series of examples of what he perceived to be Meadow's poor business judgement in the areas of direct mail marketing, budgeting, publicity and care of the Club's facilities. About Chamber Theatre he said,

Although Lynne claims to have full artistic control over Chamber Theatre, the fact is that she saw very few Chamber Theatre productions indicating that her artistic control was all form and no content. She did not assist Chamber Theatre; on the contrary, she obstructed Chamber Theatre. She wrote no thank-you letters to our directors excepting for one to Joel Wald, who directed one play along with her assistance. She refused to let Barry Moss invite critics to Chamber Theatre shows and in general, impeded his instincts and professionalism as an experienced pr man. Finally, in claiming that there were not sufficient funds to have Barry Moss on the staff, she insisted that he be laid off despite his qualifications (evidenced by his resume and the creative and pro-

⁸⁵ Mortimer Levitt's Introductory Statement to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 10/21/74, p. 1.

ductive job he did for Chamber Theatre) and his seniority. If she had the Club's best interest in mind, she would have laid off some of the new staff members.

Barry Moss, by virtue of his qualifications, as indicated by his resume, and the energy and long works which he worked at the Manhattan Theatre Club, is in my opinion, better qualified, far better qualified, to be our executive director than Lynne Meadow. However, Barry⁸⁶ is not seeking the job and I am not proposing him.

On one level, much of the Chamber Theatre controversy may be ascribed to divergent philosophies about what the Manhattan Theatre Club should be. Meadow, with her strong artistic orientation, showed far more interest in creating an environment in which actors, directors, playwrights and the others involved in the making of theatre, could freely experiment and produce their best work; far more interest than with the packaging of plays and the neatness of the theatre's dressing rooms. Levitt, a successful entrepreneur, whose business focusses on elegance of appearance, sought decorum in the workings of the Club, and showed less interest in speculation than in making calculated decisions predicated on good business sense. In short, Levitt's orientation was more intensely commercial than Meadow's, and the goals he saw as appropriate for the Manhattan Theatre

⁸⁶ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Jacques Nordeman, summarizing the proceedings of the MTC Ad Hoc Committee meeting of October 21, 1974, 10/23/74, pp. 5-6.

Club stood in sharp contrast to those envisioned by its Artistic Director.

On another level, Levitt and Meadow were engaged in a power struggle, the outcome of which would, in fact, determine the future direction of the theatre. "I think one has to understand," comments Gerald Freund,

that the confrontation arose out of the conventional kind of way in which Mortimer Levitt exercised power on the Board of the Manhattan Theatre Club; secondly, and rather differently, he--I won't say he alone on the Board--had a view of Lynne which . . . certainly I then recognized to be sexist. . . . One needn't ascribe macabre motives to this; ⁸⁷ I mean, it was fairly conventional (at that time).

He continues,

. . . it became a power struggle, . . . it certainly did, but it should be recognized that it wasn't just a question of Lynne versus Mortimer Levitt--as a matter of fact, if it had been that, Lynne would have been out on her ear--it really was also a struggle for the future of the Manhattan Theatre Club. . . . Apart from, but inextricably bound up with, the issue of Lynne or not Lynne was a very fundamental question of . . . who was to determine and maintain its artistic policy. . . . The whole idea that someone as young as Lynne and her colleagues could prevail against an extremely wealthy member of the Board was really--I don't think it was imaginable at the time. ⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Interview with Gerald Freund, 2/20/85, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The Ad Hoc Committee of the Board of Directors was now called upon to make a landmark decision in determining the artistic policy of the Club. The decision was complicated by the fact that neither Levitt nor Meadow would consider any form of concession in the matter, and it appeared certain that the party not favored would leave the Club. It was made even more difficult by the subtle intimation that Levitt would provide additional funding for the Club. "I was in a position to give the Club all the financing it needed, . . ." he confirmed, "I've given away hundreds of thousands of dollars . . . that would have been available under the right circumstances."⁸⁹

"I remember sitting in a cab with Jeff (Jeffcoat)," recalls Meadow, "saying, you know, 'how can you take the money?' and making it very clear that if they wanted the money that I would leave. . . . I think it was very clear that that's how you had to function, otherwise you could be . . . so easily led astray from what your goals were and principles, and I think I'm a person of principle."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 10.

On December 6, 1974, the full Board of Directors convened, and Levitt addressed the Board, opening with the statement,

At our last Board meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee recommended that our artistic director have full artistic control and more, that she also have control over her Manhattan Theatre Club staff. As a businessman, I fully subscribe to this concept. However, this leaves unresolved certain questions and facts that have not been presented to the entire Board. I believe that Board membership involves a responsibility to the State and to the Foundations who have given us their support. The Board should be certain that Manhattan Theatre Club is financially responsible and artistically meritorious.⁹¹

He then cited for the Board an apparent conflict of interest by members of the Ad Hoc Committee, George White and Gerald Freund (who had offered to withdraw from the committee):⁹²

Two members of the Ad Hoc Committee, Jerry Freund and George White, have a clear conflict of interest. George White is president of the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre and many of his plays go directly from the O'Neill Theatre to the Manhattan Theatre Club by way of Lynne Meadow.⁹³ This provides Mr. White with a New York Showcase for his Connecticut shows. Jerry Freund recommended Lynne and is directly responsible for her presence as

⁹¹ Mortimer Levitt's Introductory Statement to MTC Board, 12/6/74, p. 1.

⁹² Mortimer Levitt's Introductory Statement to MTC Ad Hoc Committee, 10/21/84, p. 2.

⁹³ Levitt was apparently alluding to a four week series of workshop readings of four new plays from the O'Neill Theatre done at the Club in March, 1973.

our executive director.⁹⁴

These introductory statements were followed by a detailed presentation proposing sweeping budgetary and staff organizational changes designed to improve the financial outlook of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Levitt concluded his presentation as follows:

I would like to read an excerpt from an editorial in this week's CUE Magazine, dealing with the decision of the Board of the Metropolitan Opera to install a Board member, Anthony Bliss, as executive director while continuing Schuyler Chapin as the general manager:

"What's happened now at the Met is that the Board of Directors has decided to take over the artistic management of the house itself, arguing that art and economics are so inextricably wound up that it's impossible to compartmentalize them any longer. It's a decision that may have been inevitable, but it's nevertheless certain to produce anxiety among those who wish to see the Met not only achieve financial stability but maintain artistic independence and leadership. Impresarios sometimes make good businessmen, but it seldom works the other way around. However, Mr. Bliss has recently demonstrated as board chairman of the Joffrey Ballet that it's possible to run a tight ship and attain a high artistic level. He's a man of ideas, and he's not hesitant to set them forth."

I am not interested in becoming your executive director nor chairman of the board nor president. I feel that I have made important contributions to the Manhattan Theatre Club and request only that you permit me to continue in the same role, and to this end, I would like to make a motion that Chamber Theatre continue to be listed as being pre-

⁹⁴ Mortimer Levitt's Introductory Statement to MTC Board, 12/6/84, p. 1.

sented by the Manhattan Theatre Club in association with Mortimer Levitt.⁹⁵

The motion was not passed, and Levitt, bitter from the experience, left the Board of Directors.

"It was the most unhappy experience of my whole life," he says in reflection, ". . . they were really stupid. I mean . . . I was a goldmine--not just for money--but I'm an idea person."⁹⁶

Chamber Theatre was discontinued at the Club, and it is perhaps somewhat ironic that the next to final production in the series was of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. The program concluded with a presentation of Philip Barry's The Philadelphia Story.

The Board, in deciding the issue in Meadow's favor, was making a clear and firm statement of the absolute authority of the Artistic Director in policy-making decisions for the Manhattan Theatre Club. Without question, the bond of association between the Club and Lynne Meadow was now made stronger than ever.

"It was a real vote of confidence for me," she notes, ". . . there are certain things I think you just have to fight for, but if you are willing to give in . . . what happens-----"

⁹⁵ Levitt Statement to Board, 12/6/74, p. 10.

⁹⁶ Interview with Mortimer Levitt, 6/2/82, p. 12.

pens . . . is just a gradual erosion of an idea."⁹⁷ She continues,

. . . the idea of people on an artistic Board thinking that they can deal with programming--it's not that they don't have opinions, we all have opinions about art, but if you're on the Board of a hospital, you don't ask if you can take out somebody's gall bladder because it interests you. And this was an exact equivalent of that. So maybe there were going to be hundreds of thousands of dollars, but I wouldn't have been here . . .

He didn't understand why I would have to approve casting or choice⁹⁸ of the plays. He simply didn't understand that.

Henceforth, the plays produced, and the manner in which they were to be produced was the final decision of Lynne Meadow.

In terms of the development of the Club, the Board's decision was clearly of the greatest importance, as Meadow stresses,

To say 'no' to him . . . when we were really having trouble paying the rent was a difficult thing, but I think in the history (of the Club) it's very important that we said no. And that a principle existed from day one. And that principle really couldn't be veered from. It had to be strengthened; and it's this thing about artistical tyranny that has to be respected. And I think the Board didn't understand about that, and I think they grew up also and understood what that meant.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 10.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Instrumental in the resolution of the Chamber Theatre controversy was Board member Gerald Freund who, in fact, had been responsible for Meadow's appointment as Artistic Director.¹⁰⁰ As his wife, Peregrine Whittlesey, recalls, Freund addressed the Board having

. . . recognized the situation for what it was. . .
 . . . (He) had enough experience of not-for-profit institutions to recognize what a corruption this really was, to step forward and say you cannot do this; you cannot appoint a young woman to be your Artistic Director and not stand behind her. . . .
 So, in fact, finally Gerry screamed at them, just said you can't do this,¹⁰¹ and finally they heard and, in fact, agreed.

"It was one of the few abuses that have been taken of the Manhattan Theatre Club as a producing organization," comments Whittlesey on concluding days of the confrontation between Levitt and Meadow,

. . . he wanted his program, his type of theatre to be what prevailed at the Manhattan Theatre Club. He didn't care or understand what Lynne was trying to do at all. . . . So it took somebody with some notion of the vision of putting her there to be able to persuade other people that she was worth supporting, and that that vision was worth giving complete support to as opposed to what Mortimer was doing. Not to mention the fact that the whole question of a Board member getting involved to the point of actually having that kind of power over the artistic point of view of the organization is terribly dangerous. . . . It was an example of what Board members should never do

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

again within the organization.¹⁰²

Gerald Freund comments,

I thought the Board was right, and courageously right to, even at that time, reject the money, reject the offers of various kinds from a Board member and, in fact, ask that Board member to leave, recognizing there was no compatability between what this place was going to try to be, and his ambitions toward it.¹⁰³

As the outline of the Club's artistic policy was being formulated, so were the guidelines of the role of the Board of Directors in the management of the Club. Certainly the Chamber Theatre episode was important in establishing that the function of the Board was to support and enhance the work of the artistic staff, not to undercut it by creating programs of its own. The episode was also of great importance in the developing relationship between Meadow and the Board. "It was a seminal time, really," she says in discussing that relationship,

. . . I think that as I've grown and become more confident in what I do, and secure in what I do, I've come to appreciate more what members of the Board do. You know, there inevitably is a relationship that has some tension built in because you're trying to urge people to contribute and do more, and you're trying to make them see what your vision is and what you're asking them to work for. It's a positive tension. . . . And, particularly in the early years of the theatre, there was a

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Interview with Gerald Freund, 2/20/85, p. 4.

more parental relationship because I was younger, so it was the idea, you know, . . . I'm struggling over here¹⁰⁴ . . . I need more help. I need more support.

The Board, largely owing to the influence of Gerald Freund, was now more willing to offer that support.

In spite of all the controversy about Chamber Theatre, the Manhattan Theatre Club remained quite active, producing over twenty productions during the 1973-74 season, including readings, cabaret revues, and an opera. Included among the readings was Michael Sawyer's Naomi Court, which was produced at the Club the following year, attracting attention for providing

two of the season's most keenly-felt, if abhorrent, experiences in a program of two one-acters tied together by their setting, a soon-to-be razed apartment building. The first play showed a lonely woman creating an ideal middle-aged lover in her imagination to relieve her intense longing; the second was an episode of sheer menace with a little burglary and a lot of sex perversion thrown in.¹⁰⁵

The production of Naomi Court was an example of the Manhattan Theatre Club's artistic policy being realized for, as Guernsey notes in The Best Plays of 1974-75, "Naomi Court . . . went from a \$100 reading at the Manhattan Theatre Club

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1974-75, (Dood, Mead and Company, 1975), p. 30.

to a full scale, very well acted \$1,200 production in the same complex and was finally scooped up by David Susskind Enterprises for an eventual film."¹⁰⁶

Also part of the 1973-74 season was a production of Mark Medoff's The Wager, which opened on January 17, 1974. Lynne Meadow was extremely enthusiastic about Medoff's script, and determined to direct the show. "It was a play that I was dying to direct," she explains,

. . . and I really fought hard to acquire the rights. I, in fact, auditioned my directing skills to Mark Medoff and Gilbert Parker. I cast some actors and worked on a few scenes to show them that I could do the work on the play. So in that is contained some of what my incredible zeal was about acquisition, and about trying to prove my own skills as a director.¹⁰⁷

Meadow was, she notes, "hired, as it were, by myself to direct the show."¹⁰⁸ The production was, however, plagued with problems, as Medoff cryptically notes in his preface to the play, "At the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1974, the atmosphere had about it an electricity that, rather than merely sparking magic, threatened electrocution."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Medoff, The Wager, (Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1975), pp. vii-viii.

In order to obtain the rights to the play, and to have the funds necessary to mount the production in the way that Meadow envisioned, it was necessary to take on co-producers. In this instance, the two individuals involved were associated with the Eastside Playhouse, just around the corner from the Manhattan Theatre Club, which, at the time, was running Mark Medoff's When You Comin Back, Red Ryder? Medoff records the difficulties encountered with the production,

The initial circumstances were unfortunate: the producer who had the option on The Wager, who had arranged the (previous) HB Playwrights Foundation production and a Manhattan Theatre Club production, was on his way out and a group of three producers was on its way in. Caught in the middle was the Manhattan Theatre Club, which irrespective of all hard feelings that were to follow, wanted nothing but the best for me and my play.¹¹⁰

The difficulties surrounding the production again had to do with the matter of artistic control. As Meadow was not the sole producer, and had not worked out an arrangement whereby she was granted full artistic decision-making power, all decisions were subject to the approval of the co-producers, including decisions on casting. At one point, at the insistence of the co-producers, Meadow was forced to fire an actress whom she had cast, whom they didn't consider to be at-

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

tractive enough for the part. Peregrine Whittlesey recalls,

. . . Instead of being the sole producer and making all the artistic decisions, she always had these two men in the background making demands. It was absolutely awful . . . and Mark Medoff, who knew where his bread was going to be buttered, fell on the side of the other producers rather than on Lynne's side. He kept saying, "Lynne, . . . I know that your heart is in the right place about this, but these guys . . . put money into this play," and he ended up taking their side.¹¹¹

Medoff writes of the events, " It was an agonizing experience for a lot of people, too many people. Friendships were mutilated, others tested, ideals squashed, the simple reality of New York's 'Bust or Boom' theatrical syndrome made abundantly clear to all of us--including me--to whom it wasn't priorly clear."¹¹²

When The Wager opened at the Manhattan Theatre Club, Meadow did not consider the production to be at a stage of development good enough to be reviewed by the critics. The press was, therefore, not invited, despite the fact that the production cost \$4,400 to produce,¹¹³ an indication that Meadow was, indeed, rejecting "the 'Bust or Boom' theatrical" mentality to which Medoff alludes. In fact, reflecting

¹¹¹ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 11.

¹¹² Mark Medoff, Preface to The Wager, (Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1975), p. viii.

¹¹³ Letter from Mortimer Levitt to Jacques Nordeman, October 23, 1974, p. 4.

back on the experience, Medoff comments, "Bust or boom mentality had nothing to do with MTC. Lynne and the MTC had the development of my work as their first and foremost pre-occupation. . . . I think she's one of the great spirits in the development of new work."¹¹⁴

At the time, such admiration was apparently not shared by the producers, who engaged a new director when the show was moved. "I was not hired to go on to the subsequent production, after doing an incredible amount of work on that production," notes Meadow, "That was their decision, not my personal decision. I would have continued on with the production."¹¹⁵ It was not until the fall of 1974 that The Wager opened officially at the Eastside Playhouse, produced by Richard Lee Marks, Bill Craver and Henry Jaffe,¹¹⁶ and directed by Tony Perkins.¹¹⁷

Both for Lynne Meadow and the Manhattan Theatre Club, the turn of events in connection with the show resulted in consequences which were significant and long-lasting. Without question, the circumstances surrounding the production

¹¹⁴ Letter from Mark Medoff, January 16, 1985.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Mark Medoff, Preface to The Wager.

sharply affected the theatre's policy in regard to the relationship it would share with future outside commercial interests. Meadow emphasizes,

I think that that production, and my work on that production--my work as a director on that production, and my work as a producer on that production--I think were seminal in the development of the Manhattan Theatre Club. I think if I could name a point that was one of the largest turning points that we ever had, I think that was it.

. . . suddenly, there was a commercial interest present at the Manhattan Theatre Club, so . . . (the issue) . . . wasn't simply about my skills as a director, or the value of the play, it was about people who were there on not-for-profit territory who had commercial interests, and who had approvals, and it was a real learning experience in the sense that . . . after the experience with The Wager I was very clear about what the Manhattan Theatre Club's role was in producing a play, and what a commercial producer's role was. After that experience, I limited what a producer's role was at the Manhattan Theatre Club. . . .

Basically the experience of it led me to see what it was to be responsible for my own theatre, and to really take responsibility for the running of the theatre, and to make sure that I made the guidelines very clear about what the intentions of that theatre were. . . .

In the case of The Wager I think I acted as if I wasn't the person in charge. So the reason why it's a seminal event for me, personally, and for the theatre, is because after that moment I decided to take total charge and total responsibility for the theatre. And were that same situation to have happened five years hence, I would have politely asked the people involved to leave my theatre.

I think, most importantly, I learned in a very painful way, because I wasn't hired to continue on

with the show, who was in charge of the Manhattan Theatre Club. I wasn't working for the commercial producers, they were in my theatre--and I don't think that was clear to me until events unraveled as they did. So that was a major point in the theatre's history. It really was.¹¹⁸

As 1974 drew to close, the Manhattan Theatre Club was given the opportunity to become the home of a production of Anton Chekhov's The Seagull, in a new translation by Jean Claude Van Itallie, directed by Joseph Chaikin. Expectations for this production ran high, so much so that an appeal was made to Actors' Equity requesting a relaxation of the showcase code to permit a longer run, in the hope of attracting attention to the Club. The appeal, made to Vincent Donahue of Actors' Equity, reveals the development plan which Meadow foresaw for the Club:

The Manhattan Theatre Club is currently working on a long range growth plan in consultation with FEDAPT (Foundation for the Extension and Development of the American Professional Theatre) to achieve a full Equity theatre operation using a LORT (League of Regional Theatres) or Off Broadway contract similar to the Roundabout or Chelsea Theatres. It was our intention to operate for one more year (our current 1974-75 season) under the guidelines of the Showcase code, before presenting Equity with a growth plan. However, recently we were presented with plans for a production of The Seagull that we feel is of exceptional merit, and which necessitates our taking immediate steps to grow beyond our current relationship with Actors' Equity Association.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 2.

Essentially, what we hope to achieve is a program that will enable us to pay increasing sums to union members over a five year period, until eventually we are able to guarantee full contractual salary for our major productions. . . . We are aware that certain theatres have slowly achieved a fully professional status through the initial use of a seeding process, gradually increasing the number of union members employed. However, operating under the showcase code, we have been able to use professional actors of the highest calibre. We do not wish to reduce this level of quality by interjecting non-professionals into our productions at this late date. We feel strongly that to do so would considerably reduce our current level of excellence, and hamper us from proceeding as quickly as possible on a growth program.¹¹⁹

The requests made of Equity seem to have been modest: increasing the length of the run to thirty performances, instead of the usual twelve; increasing the admission charge from \$2.00 to \$3.50; and increasing the number of seats in the auditorium to one hundred seventy-five. In return for these concessions, the Manhattan Theatre Club offered to pay the expenses of the actors at the rate of twenty-five dollars a week during the three-week rehearsal period, and fifty dollars a week during performances, guaranteeing the sums regardless of box office receipts. As modest as these requests may have been, negotiations between Actors' Equity and showcase theatres were often quite difficult. Knowledge of this is revealed in the tone of the concluding remarks of -----

¹¹⁹ Letter from Manhattan Theatre Club to Vincent Donahue, December 19, 1974.

the appeal to Donahue:

The Management of the MTC is aware that the request for these concessions is extraordinary; however we view it as an initial step in a long range program, not a precedent-setting permission to circumvent the Showcase code.

Additionally, we would like to emphasize that although this request may seem precipitate, we are suddenly faced with an opportunity to take a major first step that we had not anticipated would be possible within this year. Therefore, rather than make an immediate presentation of a multi-year plan, we ask for an opportunity to present The Seagull under the conditions described, . . . and then to evaluate this single project. We feel that we will be better able¹²⁰ to map out a growth plan for Equity's approval.

Actors' Equity Association granted the concessions.

The reviews the production received were mixed and there was little consistency in the evaluation of the merits of the performers, some of whom, in major roles, were not members of Equity.¹²¹ Clives Barnes of The New York Times declared the production to be "a major step toward our future national classical theatre,"¹²² while John Simon began his review in New York magazine with, "The final insult was Chekhov's Seagull as adapted by Jean-Claude Van Itallie

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Douglas Watt, "An engrossing new 'Sea Gull,'" The Daily News, January 31, 1975. (Reprint).

¹²² Clive Barnes, "'Seagull,' a step to Classical Theatre," in The New York Times, January 9, 1975, p. 49.

and staged by Joseph Chaikin."¹²³ As divergent as critical opinions were of the production, which was the third of three productions of The Seagull to open within a span of six weeks (Philip Meister directed a company at the Cubiculo in December, and the Public Theatre became the home of a production by The Manhattan Project, directed by Andre Gregory, in early January),¹²⁴ it was widely reviewed, and the production helped to gain additional recognition for the Club.

As the Manhattan Theatre Club attracted increasing attention from members of the theatrical profession, critics and the public, it became apparent to Meadow that a change was necessary in the administrative structure of the Club. Specifically, the time had arrived for her to find a partner with whom she could share responsibility for the organization. The search which followed was to prove as much a search for a personality compatible with Meadow's as for a competent Managing Director.

¹²³ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, March 3, 1975, p. 109.

¹²⁴ John Gruen, "The Avant-Garde Discovers Chekhov," in The New York Times, January 5, 1975, p. B5.

For the first two seasons, Susan Chase served as the Business Manager and, Meadow comments, "she put tremendous time into the theatre, and really got us out of the hole in terms of paying back a lot of those bad debts. But I realized that it was not going to be with Susan that I was going to build something more lasting. I knew I needed a different kind of partner. . . . It was just not the right chemistry."¹²⁵

Chase left the Club at the end of the second season, and Meadow began the process of interviewing for a new Business Manager. It was George White of the O'Neill Center who recommended Barry Grove as a candidate for the position.

Grove already had considerable and varied experience in professional theatre management. A graduate of Dartmouth College, he had worked, during his freshman year, at the National Theatre Institute set up at the O'Neill Center by Jay Renelli, Lloyd Richards and others. The program was designed to be an intensive student orientation to work in the professional theatre, and was in its first year of operation when Grove, along with twenty-nine other students from various schools, registered to be a part of it.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 8.

¹²⁶ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 17.

"I really had a hard time with it early on in some ways," Grove admitted of this first association with the O'Neill Center, "and in other respects really thrived on it; but it began to quickly sort out for me the difference between working in the theatre because one wanted to belong to a club or for social aspects, and working in the theatre as a business, and the kind of discipline that required."¹²⁷

At the National Theatre Institute, Grove, who considered himself at the time to be a directing student, acted in one play the group was producing and served as assistant director to Jay Renelli. When classes concluded at the end of ten weeks, the group was scheduled to embark on a three-week, one night stand bus and truck tour, and despite the fact the he "didn't even know what a company manager was at the time,"¹²⁸ Grove volunteered for the job.

"I found there were a lot of parts of it that I really liked," says Grove of the experience, and clearly he showed competence in the execution of his duties, for soon afterwards he was was contacted by Jay Renelli with an offer to work as assistant to Melvin Bernhardt on the Broadway production of Paul Zindel's And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little,

¹²⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 17.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

with Julie Harris and Estelle Parsons. The production, part of the 1970-71 Broadway season, created for Grove, in his sophomore year, the first of several interruptions in his studies at Dartmouth. In fact, it created a potential threat towards the completion of his academic degree for, at the close of the production, Melvin Bernhardt offered to hire Grove as a full-time assistant.¹²⁹ After considerable soul-searching, however, Grove refused the offer and returned to Dartmouth in the Spring semester of 1971.

Grove began the summer of that year as a stage manager for the Playwrights' Conference at the O'Neill Center, but was called away to New York to assist in the national tour of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. The close of the summer brought him back to Dartmouth for his junior year. It was the only year he spent entirely in residence at the college and, in the course of it, directed some seventeen plays; all of them new works.¹³⁰ "The university orientation was all to the classics and not to new plays, and so I naturally gravitated in the opposite direction," he says, "that had been kindled by the people at the O'Neill and Broadway."¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

At the end of his junior year, he again left school to work as the Advance Director for a fourteen-week summer stock tour of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, with Sandy Dennis; a position he describes as "a combination of just about every management job in the world . . . a good way to learn management in a hurry."¹³²

Returning to Dartmouth to complete his senior year, he received yet another offer from the O'Neill Foundation; this from George White, to serve as stage manager of The Shakespeare Company, under the direction of Tina Pappert. The Company, which was funded by the Ford Foundation, had as its purpose "to find an American way of doing Shakespeare,"¹³³ and to that end would spend six months working with the Royal Shakespeare Company and six months in the United States, touring the results of their efforts.

The policy of the Ford Foundation did not permit grants to individuals, so the O'Neill Foundation was set up as a conduit for funds, and, says Grove, "George White wanted somebody there he knew to oversee some parts of the management of it."¹³⁴ Grove accepted the position and, at the

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 3.

end of the year-long tour, returned home, married, and found himself in the peculiar circumstance of having to actively seek employment. "From the time I'd gone to college," he remarks, "a lot of jobs had come very easily to me. And I interviewed for a number of jobs in New York that were set up by people I knew . . . and for different reasons, they didn't come to pass."¹³⁵

By this time, however, Jay Renelli had secured a position as Director of the New Repertory Project at the University of Rhode Island at Kingston; a project designed after the Yale School of Drama, although on a somewhat smaller scale. The college was to offer a graduate acting program, and to house a professional theatre company. Renelli offered Grove the position of General Manager of the theatre and the opportunity to teach undergraduate, and eventually graduate level, theatre management courses, despite the fact that Grove had yet to receive his own undergraduate degree.¹³⁶ After some initial hesitation about the prospect of teaching theatre management, Grove accepted the offer, which provided him with a challenge and important management

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

training. He recalls,

It was a great experience for me in a lot of ways because the theatre hadn't existed before then. They did one or two student productions a year, but that was it; and suddenly we were putting together a ten-play season of five student productions and five Equity productions, and creating a subscription audience and all of that. . . . So I had to create a subscription audience in a five hundred seat house, and I had to find a way of selling it to the community.¹³⁷ . . . it was a real hard set of circumstances.

It was at the end of one year in this position that Grove was contacted by Lynne Meadow to interview for the job of Managing Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club.

The initial interview between Meadow and Grove was followed by a series of interviews, over the course of a few days, culminating in Meadow's decision to hire Grove as the Managing Director beginning with the 1974-75 season. Grove, however, after considerable thought, refused the offer, choosing instead to return to his position in Rhode Island. "And so I went away," he says, "back to Rhode Island thinking that would be the end of a very intriguing and ego-gratifying few days, but that was the end of it."¹³⁸ Meadow was forced to fall back on her second choice for the position, and Grove continued in the capacity of General Manager

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 20.

of the New Repertory Project and a member of the faculty of the University of Rhode Island at Kingston.

Kathleen Norris was the candidate Meadow chose, following Grove's refusal. Having just arrived in New York from Cincinnati, where she worked as assistant to the Managing Director of the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, an Equity LORT theatre,¹³⁹ Norris had been referred to the Manhattan Theatre Club by Opportunity Resources, a placement organization for individuals in the arts.¹⁴⁰ She was hired as the successor to Susan Chase as the Club made preparations for the 1974-75 season.

Aware that she could not manage all aspects of the Club on her own, Meadow was now concerned with assembling her management team. Unquestionably, the concept of teamwork is integral to the organization and functioning of the Manhattan Theatre Club. It is also of interest that Meadow draws an analogy between the management of the Club and the psychology of competitive sport. Reflecting back lightheartedly upon her childhood, she recounts,

. . . as a kid I was involved with sports a lot .
 . . team sports, and I always liked to be the Captain. . . . I liked organizing other people, and

¹³⁹ Letter from Manhattan Theatre Club to Vincent Donahue, December 19, 1974.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 4.

I liked telling other people what to do. And I also liked, I think even as a kid, . . . I liked to bring out the best in people. I liked the sense that everybody on your team would do the best they could. And I think I probably took as much pleasure in having kids on the team who weren't as good, who, if you encouraged them . . . (got) better . . . they would do a good job for the team. You know, I think that's a basic thing in my personality.¹⁴¹

Meadow's description of the qualities to be found in a good theatrical producer or artistic director expresses a similar tone,

I think, first of all, you create a climate in which work can happen. . . . The climate you create is based upon what your priorities are--the things you believe are important. So, I think, number one, that's very important.

Number two, I think, is you have to choose. It's like a bit of casting; you know, you're choosing different people and putting them together: playwright and director; director and designers and stage managers and everybody . . . the whole team that you're picking. I think that's very important. And, I think, knowing how to provide guidance . . . knowing when to say something and knowing when not to say something. And to be able to exert your influence strongly, then back off and give people space and allow them to work, and leave them alone totally; then come in when they need you again and look at the work and be able to tell them where it needs work, and where it doesn't need work, and why something's not working well. . . .

I think you have to promote well, and I think you have to trust people, and I think you have to feel tremendous support of them; and you also have to doubt them and make sure that they're being re-

¹⁴¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 3.

sponsive to the highest standards in themselves. I mean that, to me, is the real thing . . . whether you're an artistic director of a theatre or you're producing an individual play . . . to me what's most important is that people aspire to the highest possible thing in themselves . . . and if they flop, okay, they flop, but they've really tried to do their best. . . . If I feel the aspiration is really high, then if you blow it, well, okay, you know, we'll play another game.¹⁴²

The chemistry between individual personalities certainly plays an important role in the soundness of a team. Despite more than adequate levels of competence exhibited by its individual members, it may be argued, personality differences and the inability to establish open lines of communication can prove detrimental to a team's performance. Apparently such incompatibility was true of the relationship between Kathleen Norris and Lynne Meadow, and accounts for the fact that Norris remained with the Club for only one season. Reflecting on the events of this period, Meadow states,

. . . at the end of that year, I thought, "It's not going to be with this person (Kathleen Norris) that I'm going to really establish a theatre." And I knew, I knew that I needed a partner who would be the other side of the boat, you know, doing the oar. And that's what I wanted, . . . to try to find somebody who would match my energies and zeal on a managerial front, and really devote himself or herself to the printed matter. . . . I cared about all of it, but I knew I couldn't do everything; and my heart was in being an artist too. .

¹⁴² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, pp. 16-17.

. . everything I was doing was in an effort to try and solidify the theatre.¹⁴³

"It took Lynne quite a while to find the team that she wanted to work with, that she had complete trust in," notes Peregrine Whittlesey, "and to learn about division of power."¹⁴⁴ Meadow seems to have been fiercely protective of the organization which had evolved during the three years of her directorship, and unwilling to relax her control over the affairs of the theatre except to someone whom she respected, and in whom she could place full trust. "I made a lot of sacrifices to put the time and the care into nurturing and developing, and thinking of how (the Club) should grow," she says, adding that it requires a "kind of zeal . . . to forge something out of nothing."¹⁴⁵

This sentiment certainly must have been shaped by Jay Renelli, who was encountering substantial difficulty in developing the New Repertory Project at Rhode Island. "The university was fighting tooth and nail," recalls Barry Grove, "Jay Renelli got exhausted from trying to put the project together and kept his tenured position but resigned

¹⁴³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 15.

as Chair of the department."¹⁴⁶

At the end of his second year there, the University of Rhode Island offered Grove an assistant professorship which he, however, turned down. "I knew that having gone through the . . . ordeal I had to get promoted to assistant professor with only a B.A.," says Grove, "that it was going to be a long time before I was really going to grow in that circumstance beyond that level,"¹⁴⁷ He, therefore, began interviewing once again for jobs, at the time that it "became apparent that Kathleen (Norris) and Lynne should go their separate ways."¹⁴⁸ Returning to the Club in June, 1975, Grove met with Meadow for sixteen hours of discussion over the course of a weekend. The following Monday, June 23rd, Grove began his position as Managing Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club.¹⁴⁹

"I was pretty naive at the time," he says, "I accepted the job without ever having seen a play Lynne had directed or that the theatre had staged."¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Grove

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Barry Grove, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

knew the kind of work that Meadow wanted the Club to do, which he considered not at all dissimilar to the work done at the O'Neill Center nor to that of the New Repertory Project, from which he had just departed. He was acquainted with several people who had worked at the Club, including Richard Wesley, whose play, The Past is the Past, had been produced by the theatre the previous April. He had also been counseled to take the position by several people whose advice he respected, including George White, Paul Zindel and Melvin Bernhardt who, says Grove, "was the unofficial father-figure to me at the time."¹⁵¹ Finally, he had met with Gerald Freund, and with the members of the staff in order to get their perceptions of the Club.

Recounting his meeting with Grove, Gerald Freund comments,

I felt that Barry, though young, was obviously highly intelligent, motivated to play an important role in this new theatre in New York City, and I got a very "plus" kind of impression of him and said so after the meeting.¹⁵² I was delighted at the time that he was hired.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 6.

¹⁵² Taped message from Gerald Freund as a follow-up to an earlier interview, 3/28/85.

Grove's arrival brought the total number of administrative staff members to eight: Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Managing Director; Tom Bullard, Associate Director and Production Manager; Stephen Pascal, Literary Manager and Casting Director; Joel Wald, Public Relations Director; Trudy Brown, Assistant to the Managing Director; William Anderson, Technical Director; and Nancy McClure, Administrative Assistant. At the time of his arrival, several members of the staff were about to be laid-off in order to make them eligible for unemployment insurance benefits during the summer, a practice "very common in those days in the Off Off Broadway arena."¹⁵³ Without a budget large enough to sustain a staff while a theatre was not producing, the best to be hoped was that staff members would volunteer services until activities resumed at the start of another season. Circumstances were such, however, that Grove joined the staff at precisely the same time that the theatre received a grant of \$10,000 from the New York Community Trust.¹⁵⁴ It was, therefore, his first decision as Managing Director to keep staff on the payroll through September, when the next season was scheduled to begin.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Anticipating, perhaps, a period of calm during the summer months which would permit him time to settle into his new role, Grove, instead, found himself to be a leading combatant in what came to be termed the "Equity Wars." In the early part of July, 1975, the Manhattan Theatre Club requested of Actors' Equity a letter of agreement which would permit an increased number of performances at a slightly increased ticket price in return for nominal payments to the actors in a show; requests which were similar to those made in connection with the production of The Seagull. In a meeting with Vincent Donahue, Natalie Priest and another Equity official, Grove recalls,

We were the first people, I believe, to have laid on us this secret new showcase code that was the first of the showcase wars of the early seventies. And so we left their office, not only having been turned down flat on our proposal,¹⁵⁵ but having (also) been given this new document.

The new showcase code, which proved such a shock at this meeting, was to shock the entire Off Off Broadway community, including producers, playwrights and Equity's own membership, for whose sake, ostensibly, the new code was devised. The revisions, which were the result of more than a half-year's committee deliberation,¹⁵⁶ were intended to

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁵⁶ "Equity Off Broadway Rules Stir Rift," New York Times,

protect the membership of Actors' Equity from possible exploitation by Off Off Broadway producers. The producers, however, piqued by the intimation of unfairness, were quick to respond that the changes in the code would drastically obstruct Off Off Broadway activity and would prove a major hindrance in the development of new plays.¹⁵⁷

In the opinion of some theatre professionals, Actors' Equity had been responsible for drastically inhibiting the experimentation for which Off Broadway was reputed a decade earlier. As Off Broadway theatres grew in size, so the union demanded increased salaries for its members appearing in Off Broadway productions. The resulting increase in operating expenses forced producers to abandon experimental works in favor of more popular scripts which had greater likelihood of proving financially successful. With a developing "bust or boom" mentality in the Off Broadway arena, artistic experimentation was stymied; the growth of Off Off Broadway was in response to the ossification of Off Broadway, brought about, at least in some measure, by the heightened demands of the actors' union. Now, some feared, the same scenario would be played out Off Off Broadway.

August 20, 1975, p. 47.

¹⁵⁷ New York Times, August 7, 1975, p. 39.

In the mid-1960's, Equity regulations permitted member actors to "showcase" their talent in non-paying productions which ran no more than a total of four performances to audiences of one hundred or fewer people who were admitted to the theatre free of charge.¹⁵⁸ Such productions could not be advertised. These regulations were relaxed somewhat in the early-1970's to permit a total of six performances at which audiences could make voluntary contributions.¹⁵⁹ With the introduction of the Pilot Project policy, Equity further eased the restrictions it placed on showcase productions, permitting up to a total of twelve performances of a show which could be advertised, and for which an audience of up to one hundred people could be charged admission of \$2.50 per person.¹⁶⁰

The new showcase code, which Equity announced to its membership on August 4, 1975,¹⁶¹ two years after the Pilot Project was instituted,¹⁶² contained stipulations which

¹⁵⁸ Davi Napoleon, "Equity Showcase: Experimentation or Exploitation," (publication not identified; undated).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ David Vidal, "Theaters Oppose New Equity Code," The New York Times, August 14, 1975, p. 40.

¹⁶² Davi Napoleon, "Equity Showcase: Experimentation or Exploitation."

brought far-reaching consequences. Under the new code, the provision which permitted Off Off Broadway theatres to charge admission was revoked and the policy of accepting voluntary contributions from audience members was reinstated.¹⁶³ Other stipulations of the new code, which went into effect the same day they were made public,¹⁶⁴ required that producers and writers who signed 1) use only Equity actors, when at all possible; 2) pay Equity members a minimum of two subway fares for each day of rehearsal and performance; 3) guarantee two percent of the profits from any commercially successful production which began as a showcase in which a union member rehearsed for two weeks; 4) guarantee union actors the roles they created in the showcase production when it moves into commercial production, or four weeks' salary; and 5) guarantee eight percent of the profits from a commercial production to Equity members from the original showcase if it involved more than four weeks of rehearsals.¹⁶⁵ The code also stipulated that union members in a showcase production be given equal shares of "total box office receipts for up to three performances (depending on

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ New York Times, August 14, 1975, p. 40.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

cast size and including one Saturday evening performance) to defray additional unreimbursed expenses."¹⁶⁶

Off Off Broadway producers reacted with alarm and anger to the new regulations which, they claimed, increased their expenses while limiting the ways in which they could raise income. Comments Barry Grove, the code "made the kinds of demands that would (have) put theatres out of business."¹⁶⁷

The Dramatists Guild, whose members were also affected by the changes, expressed dismay and cautioned its membership not to sign the code. David Le Vine, then Executive Secretary of the Dramatists Guild, expressed "shock that Equity would attempt to impose a rule requiring the author of a play to grant the cast of a showcase production a percentage of the author's income from his plays, from present and future productions."¹⁶⁸

"Where Equity should be finding ways to expand the opportunities for unemployed actors to act," said Joseph Papp of the New York Shakespeare Festival, and a leading spokesman against the new policy, "the code instead setts (sic)

¹⁶⁶ New York Times, August 20, 1975, p. 40.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ New York Times, August 7, 1975, p. 39.

up limits and deterrents that do a disservice to the needs of its own members. Most of the items in the revised code are petty harrassments and do not reflect the limited economics of the Off Off Broadway scene."¹⁶⁹

A committee, headed by Papp and Jerry Arrow, the Executive Director of Circle Repertory Company, was formed to represent forty-nine Off Off Broadway theatres that would be affected by the revised code. Also members of the committee were Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove, who had, in fact, triggered its creation by approaching the Off Off Broadway Theatre Alliance with news of the policy change following the meeting with the Equity officials.¹⁷⁰ Fearing the extinction of Off Off Broadway, the committee notified Actors' Equity that the theatres which it represented would be unable to comply with the new terms of the showcase code, and requested a meeting to explain their decision. On August 13, 1975, discussions between the two parties broke down when the committee walked out of the offices of Equity's Executive Secretary, Donald Grody, who refused to negotiate, claiming the committee failed to present specific objections to the code.¹⁷¹ The committee did, however, present Grody

¹⁶⁹ New York Times, August 7, 1975, p. 39.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 8.

with two demands, requesting that negotiations between the theatres and the union begin on September 2, 1975, and that the provisions of the old code remain in effect until a new code could be negotiated.¹⁷²

"The meeting lasted for about an hour and a half and we just kept going around in circles,"¹⁷³ commented Meadow. It had been the goal of the committee to have Actors' Equity recognize the Off Off Broadway network as "a major theatrical movement and a source of talent,"¹⁷⁴ as it was described by Joseph Papp; according to Meadow, however, Grody "did not take that seriously and refused to present (the demands) to the Equity Council."¹⁷⁵ The meeting merely produced a stalemate between the two sides and, on August 14, 1975, The New York Times reported that Lynne Meadow announced that theatre representatives would not sign the new code, adding that neither would they close their theatres.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ New York Times, August 14, 1975, p. 40.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ New York Times, August 14, 1975, p. 40.

The committee representing the Off Off Broadway theatre producers organized a rally on Monday, August 18, 1975, at the Newman Theatre of the New York Shakespeare Festival.¹⁷⁷ Crowded to the capacity of the theatre, with significantly more opponents to the code than supporters, the rally produced a petition of over one thousand signatures demanding that Equity suspend the new showcase code until until the entire membership could vote on the proposed changes.¹⁷⁸

Characterizing the rally as "a chance to hear both sides," Lynne Meadow added, "The issues are simple and must be understood And they have not been brought to the attention of thse acting community."¹⁷⁹ To help enlighten the acting community, a fact sheet was circulated at the rally outlining the repercussions of the proposed changes, including the fact that the new provisions might make actors who worked in Off Off Broadway shows ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits which would presumably be larger than their remuneration.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ New York Times, August 20, 1975, p. 47.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

The rally often proved stormy, and Donald Grody was repeatedly interrupted in his attempt to explain the union's rationale for instituting the new code. Robert Moss, producer of Playwrights' Horizons, was, by contrast, applauded when he explained that it took his theatre four years to reach the point of being able to pay actors. "We hadn't been asked to, we wanted to," he said, "But it takes time."¹⁸¹

In response to the growing tide of dissatisfaction with the new showcase code, Actors' Equity scheduled a special membership meeting for August 25, 1975, by which time, the opposition committee had come to represent seventy Off Off Broadway theatres.¹⁸² The meeting, held at the Majestic Theatre, was a hotbed of dissension, "filled with boos, hisses, applause and catcalls during heated debate."¹⁸³ More than six hundred actors voted at the meeting, giving overwhelming support to a motion, proposed by Ruby Dee, that the new code be suspended and the old code be reinstated while discussions towards revising the Pilot Project policy

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² David Nival, "Equity to Meet Today on New Code," in The New York Times, August 25, 1975, p. 23.

¹⁸³ David Nival, "Actors Vote Against New Equity Code," in The New York Times, August 26, 1975, p. 36.

commence between the union and its membership.¹⁸⁴

Joseph Papp, who, as a producer, was not permitted, technically, to attend the meeting, was granted a special invitation to address it by the Equity council "out of fairness to the issue in which he is deeply involved."¹⁸⁵ He chose to forgo delivering a prepared speech in favor of a terse statement following the voting in which he congratulated the membership on their actions. The meeting, which he described as an "extraordinary historic event,"¹⁸⁶ lasted a full afternoon, "as actor after actor wanted to have his say."¹⁸⁷ It adjourned, finally, at the insistence of the Equity council, who did not wish to incur the expense of overtime payments to the theatre's stagehands.¹⁸⁸

The resolution to suspend the new code was approved by the council of Actors' Equity Association; an action taken begrudgingly, but in accordance with the union's contract stipulation that membership meeting resolutions constitute recommendations to the governing board.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

An editorial in The New York Times lauded the outcome of the stormy confrontation between the union and its membership, stating,

The footlights will continue to glow in New York City's 140 Off Off Broadway theatres, thanks to an extraordinary display of union democracy and professional determination by hundreds of actors and actresses who make this city the most vigorous theatrical arena in the world. Instead of bowing to an unrealistic set of rules imposed by the leadership of Actors Equity Association, the performers overruled their union and voted for the shows to go on.

The rejected code had all the logic of the military maxim: "We bombed the town in order to save it." It attempted to force a "closed shop" on a workshop type of theatre; it also sought complex percentage-of-profits arrangements in largely non-profit enterprises and other terms that would have had the effect of shuttering most of the Off Off Broadway theatres, including more than forty black and Hispanic showcases all over the city.

The Off Off Broadway scene is a remarkable phenomenon. It is home for innovation, for trying new wings and themes, for learning and dreaming. Equity's members have done their union and the community a service by recognizing that this delicate blossom could be killed by too much regimentation.¹⁸⁹

Soundly defeated in this first and important battle, Equity's leaders retreated into silence for a time; however, the war between the actors' union and the Off Off Broadway producers was far from over. On September 21, 1975, a let-

¹⁸⁹ The New York Times, August 27, 1975, p. 36.

¹⁹⁰ "'Off Off' Stays On" The New York Times, August 27, 1975, p. 38.

ter to the editor appeared in The New York Times from Donald Grody, in which he stated,

In retrospect, it would appear that Equity made a mistake in issuing the new Showcase Rules without prior consultation with our own members or with the producers, to whom actors donate their free services. We incorrectly assumed widespread understanding and agreement on a basic concept: Actors should be reimbursed for their expenses when donating services and should have an opportunity to share the profits (if there are any) should the production achieve commercial success as a result of exposure through the actors' work. That seemed only fair.¹⁹¹

This apology to its members was followed, however, by an acrimonious attack launched against the producers who precipitated the controversy,

Because of the attack upon the Code by Showcase producers, it was perceived by many of our members as threatening to the welfare of actors willing to work for nothing just to gain enough visibility so they can compete for the pitifully few paying jobs that are available. . . .

But let's keep one thing in mind: When all the smoke has cleared away, the recent Off Off Broadway ruckus was a replay of 1919, when producers, in an attempt to destroy our fledgling union, played member against member, threatened, intimidated, and generally berated Equity for seeking transportation and minimum wages for professional actors. . . .

Last month, just a few days after the chief executive of the Off Off Broadway Alliance of Producers called its August 18 rally at the Public Theatre "the greatest call in the history of the theatre," the Alliance announced a blacklist of

¹⁹¹ "A Footnote from Equity," Letter to the Editor from Donald Grody, in The New York Times, September 21, 1975, Section II, p. 5.

Equity members for as long as the Showcase Code remained in effect. . . . I would hope that those producers and others with pretensions to integrity would carefully consider the long-range implications of being party to such actions in the future. Given time and the chance of careful, independent thought, all Equity members will certainly recognize such tactics for precisely what they are.

In future, we should all take time to look behind the stated motives of those who use the uncompensated labor of others for their own benefit while attacking, under the guise of saving culture, all attempts to win at least a token payment for the people who do the work which they exploit. To say that an actor "gains exposure" by appearing in a Showcase, and, ¹⁹²that exposure is its own reward, is not enough.

Grody was to repeat his charges against the producers at a meeting with them and with the editors and reporters of The New York Times later in the month. The meeting, which Grody attended with Vincent Donahue, head of Equity's Showcase committee, was also attended by Joseph Papp, Robert Moss, the President of the Off Off Broadway Theatre Alliance; Marshall Mason, the Artistic Director of the Circle Repertory Theatre; and writer Terrence McNally, whose play Bad Habits, which received its first reading at the Manhattan Theatre Club, had been produced Off Off Broadway, Off Broadway, as well as on Broadway.

 192 Ibid.

As reported in The New York Times, the meeting was far from calm following the initial social pleasantries. "The air was soon filled with acrimony and, occasionally, insults," wrote Mel Gussow, "Lines were firmly drawn: The two Equity spokesmen on one side, and everyone else on the other. . . . Frequently, both Mr. Papp and Mr. Grody interrupted each other, their tempers rising."¹⁹³ Robert Moss lost his temper when Grody suggested the producers had used scare tactics to turn the union's membership against the showcase code; in effect, Grody declared, producers who refused to sign the new code "were blacklisting actors."¹⁹⁴ Shouted Moss in response, "That's contemptible of you to talk about your membership in that way."¹⁹⁵

Efforts by Vincent Donahue to downplay the profit-sharing clause in the code, the key ingredient in the dispute, were only temporarily successful. Grody stated repeatedly that it was the role of the union to protect its membership, while the producers responded as frequently that Off Off Broadway posed no threat to actors while, in fact, the showcase code did.

¹⁹³ Mel Gussow, "Showcase Code is an Off Off Standoff," The New York Times, October 2, 1975, p. 46.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Marshall Mason raised the point that neither his Circle Repertory Theatre, nor Playwrights' Horizon, of which Robert Moss was Artistic Director, were truly representative of the Off Off Broadway arena, as both theatres were substantially funded. The majority of Off Off Broadway theatres, he noted, were barely self-sustaining, so that the code did not reflect an understanding the Off Off Broadway economy. "The code does not reflect any theatre,"¹⁹⁶ he concluded.

Like Playwrights' Horizon and Circle Repertory, the Manhattan Theatre Club was operating on a budget substantially greater than most Off Off Broadway theatres. With a membership of two thousand subscribers,¹⁹⁷ the Club was in the difficult position of needing to grow beyond the constraints of the Pilot Project code, while being not yet financially stable enough to advance to an Off Broadway contract with Equity. During the 1974-1975 season, the Club's subscribers filled an estimated sixty percent of available seats at each show, and during the 1975-1976 season, then in progress, subscribers were filling all available seats.¹⁹⁸ The Pilot Project code did not permit a show's run to extend

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Davi Napoleon, Equity Showcase: Experimentation Exploitation, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

beyond twelve performances, so that the increased interest by Club subscribers actually functioned to diminish the theatre's income. Reduced income, in turn, had potential long-range effects in terms of grants from funding agencies, the amounts of which were often based on the total of a grantee's earned income.¹⁹⁹ Except for concessions offered by Actors' Equity, the Manhattan Theatre Club was unable to grow any further at this time.

It is interesting to note that had the controversial showcase code been operating all the while, the Club would have been in the same confining predicament and, in addition, partly responsible for royalties to the casts of several plays which it premiered and which went on to be produced both Off and on Broadway. Included among these were Terence McNally's Bad Habits, Mark Medoff's The Wager, and Milan Stitt's The Runner Stumbles, which opened at the Club on December 10, 1974, in a production directed by Austin Pendleton. Under the terms of the rejected code, the theatre, along with the authors, would have been responsible for royalties to the original casts. For an organization like the Manhattan Theatre Club, dedicated to the production of new works, the showcase code would indeed have had poten-

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

tially disastrous effects, for each play which ultimately was to be produced commercially would have meant, in turn, a reduction in the Club's producing budget.

The conflict between Actors' Equity Association and the Off Off Broadway producers and playwrights was to stretch out over the course of several years, during which time Donald Grody rigidly maintained that liens be placed on all new works produced Off Off Broadway. Negotiations between the Off Off Broadway Theatre Alliance and the actors' union were effective only in postponing the enforcement of the union's policy. In 1979, four years after the confrontation started, Equity broke off negotiations with the Off Off Broadway Theatre Alliance and placed in effect a revised showcase code.²⁰⁰ The new code, formulated by Equity without consultation with playwrights' representatives,²⁰¹ stipulated that Equity actors who originated roles in a showcase production must be offered their roles again should the play be produced commercially on stage, film or television.²⁰² Actors not offered their roles would require compensation of four or five weeks' salary, for which the playwright would -----

²⁰⁰ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1979-1980, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1980), p. 40.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

be ultimately responsible.²⁰³ Furthermore, the code did not establish a time limit for these so called "conversion payments."²⁰⁴ As for the producing organizations, Off Off Broadway theatres were required to set aside a certain percentage of their income as wages for Equity actors.²⁰⁵

The new Funded Non-Profit Theatre Code ignited another frenzy of alarm, and seriously disrupted Off Off Broadway production. Playwrights, angered by the obligations foisted upon them, refused to sign the new agreement, and refused permission to have their works produced with Equity casts. A major protest was set off when Equity forced the closing of Michael Weller's play, Split at the Second Stage, a West Side Off Off Broadway theatre, because the author refused to sign the code. Weller organized a meeting of more than two hundred fifty playwrights to protest the new regulations on May 7, 1980.²⁰⁶ In attendance were such noted playwrights

²⁰³ Mel Gussow, "Meeting Today in Equity Off Off Broadway Dispute," in The New York Times, December 3, 1980, p. C26.

²⁰⁴ Richard F. Shepard, "250 Playwrights Protest Equity's Rules on Fees," in The New York Times, May 8, 1980, p. C19.

²⁰⁵ "Koch Urged to Mediate Stage Rift," in The New York Times, January 4, 1980, p. C23.

²⁰⁶ Richard Shepard, "250 Playwrights Protest Equity's Rules on Fees" in The New York Times, May 8, 1980, p. C19.

as Ed Bullins, Paddy Chayefsky, Jules Feiffer, Albert Innau-rato, David Mamet, and Stephen Sondheim.²⁰⁷ The protest effected no changes in Equity's position, however.

In October of 1980, Weller, joined by five other play-wrights, filed suit in Federal court against Actors' Equity Association, charging violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act and the National Labor Relations Act.²⁰⁸ The dispute was finally settled out of court with an agreement that pro-hibited "Equity from placing liens on plays or requiring playwrights to pay, guarantee or assume obligations for con-version payments."²⁰⁹ The agreement, some suggest, was made possible to some extent because Actors' Equity Associa-tion had a new Executive Secretary, Willard Swire, "consid-ered to be far more conciliatory than his predecessor, Don-ald Grody."²¹⁰ The reconciliation between parties permitted a return to full operation Off Off Broadway, how-

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mel Gussow, "Meeting Today in Equity Off Off Broadway Dispute," in The New York Times, December 3, 1980, p. C26.

²⁰⁹ Mel Gussow, "Dispute Between Equity and Off Off Broad-way is Resolved Out of Court," in The New York Times, November 25, 1981, p. C16.

²¹⁰ Mel Gussow, "Meeting Today in Off Off Broadway Dis-pute," in The New York Times, December 3, 1980, p. C26.

ever the restraints against Equity were time-limited.²¹¹ The matter, which many argue had the power of destroying the existence of Off Off Broadway, again disrupted activities when the injunction against Equity's seeking conversion payments expired at the end of 1984.²¹² The problem remains unresolved.

While it may appear, in some ways, that Actors' Equity Association was tyrannically formulating regulations which only exacerbated the difficulties its membership faced in finding employment, the union representatives were seeking to improve the benefits of those members fortunate enough to find work, and to prevent a situation where union actors could be exploited by producers. Commenting on the very beginning of the confrontation between the union and Off Off Broadway theatres, Barry Grove stated,

Equity was divided down the middle. There were members of Equity and members of committees who had been working principally in a showcase area who were very supportive of the theatres' position. There were older actors who had come up through the early battles against the exploitative producers, who worked mostly in the Broadway or Off Broadway arenas, who didn't understand the

²¹¹ Mel Gussow, "Dispute Between Equity and Off Off Broadway is Resolved Out of Court," in The New York Times, November 25, 1981, p. C16.

²¹² Samuel G. Freedman, "Playwrights and Actors In Dispute Over Rule," in The New York Times, December 12, 1984, p. C25.

first thing about the showcase arena and who felt that union protectionism was the only way for the union to go.²¹³

Clearly, the leadership of Equity did not perceive the producers of Off Off Broadway theatres as they perceived themselves. It is important to remember, notes Grove, that at the time,

virtually all of the managers and the artistic directors were members of Equity, myself included. We'd all, you know, just recently been acting and stage managing and that sort of thing, so it wasn't a question of being cigar smoking, three-piece-suit wearing, evil producers. It was a situation where actors had gotten together to form theatres, to have a place to work, because the amount of paying work that was happening on Broadway and Off Broadway wasn't beginning to employ any of the people that were here.²¹⁴

Ironically, he adds, in the situation which developed, "in many ways, the theatres were in the labor position and Equity was in the management position, in that they controlled the way things were done."²¹⁵

Grove was deeply involved in the early battles which comprised the Equity Wars. From the outset, he was a member of the committee of Off Off Broadway producers which was headed by Jerry Arrow and Joseph Papp. Later, he was to

²¹³ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 13.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

head that committee, and eventually, was to continue his discussions with Equity as President of the Off Off Broadway Theatre Alliance; a position which he held for two years. In his role as Managing Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club, however, Grove was required to approach Equity to request relaxation of the showcase code, not for the entire Off Off Broadway community, but for the Club alone. "We began to start going in to ask for concessions for each individual show," he recalls,

which meant going before the Council at Equity and pleading our case, going before the Showcase Code committee and pleading our case, . . . sitting seemingly week after week in front of the Council of Equity in what was beginning to be an acrimonious situation, which was nervous-making to say the least.²¹⁶

The protracted controversy with Equity caused some Off Off Broadway theatres eventually to modify their artistic policies to eliminate the difficulties of producing new works. Some theatres were forced to cancel productions or entire seasons; others, to close, as was the decision of the Impossible Ragtime Theatre, the Direct Theatre and Counterpoint.²¹⁷ The activities of the Manhattan Theatre Club

²¹⁶ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 8.

²¹⁷ Mel Gussow, "Meeting Today in Equity Off Off Broadway Dispute," in The New York Times, December 3, 1980, p. C26.

were not adversely affected, however, for by the time Equity began enforcing the stipulations of the Funded Non-Profit Theatre Code, in 1979, the Club had grown into a contractual Off Broadway arrangement with the union. It was able to do so as a result of concessions granted by Equity, even in the midst of the dispute. The relationship the theatre club shares with the union Grove describes as "friendly," adding, in reference to the start of the Equity Wars, "indeed, even during most of the period of that time ^{it} was friendly for us."²¹⁸

As part of the 1975-1976 season, the Manhattan Theatre Club produced a revival of Athol Fugard's play, The Blood Knot, directed by Tom Bullard. Reviewing the production, Mel Gussow wrote,

The Blood Knot demands--and in this production receives--two-man ensemble acting. David H. Leary and Robert Christian are acutely responsive to each other's actions and emotions. . . . This is a symbiotic double performance, clearly in a class with that given by James Earl Jones and J. D. Cannon in the 1964 production. Thomas Bullard's direction is impeccable.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 9.

²¹⁹ Mel Gussow, "Stage: Fugard Revival," in The New York Times, March 2, 1976, p. 26.

This successful production certainly, in some measure, assisted in paving the way for an agreeable relationship between the Club and Actors' Equity Association for, in attendance at one of the performances was Equity's Executive Secretary, Donald Grody. Barry Grove recalls the circumstances of his appearance,

David Leary knew personally Don Grody, he was a friend of Don's and so Don came to see the production. And it was the first time we were able to get him into the theatre on something--probably at all--but certainly something other than an adversarial relationship, to see what we were trying to do, to go backstage and to see the conditions, and to realize that we didn't have a lot of money.²²⁰

The Club presented Equity with a request to extend the production of The Blood Knot for an additional four performances, to allow it to be more extensively reviewed and to be seen by other producers in the hope of continuing the show through some other arrangement. The request was approved. It was the first concession to be granted to the Manhattan Theatre Club by Actors' Equity. It was not, however, the last. "We got an individual show concession on that show, and I think another one on the next show," says Grove,

and by that point we were beginning to develop some glimmer of trust . . . with Don that we were serious about wanting to grow into paying actors, because I think at that point in time he did not

²²⁰ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 8.

believe that a lot of theatres, while they were saying they wanted to pay actors, really wanted to pay them. So that's where we were able to sit down and work out a plan whereby we would increase the payments substantially, relative to what they were before--I mean it was still peanuts--and get an extended number of performances on a seasonal basis. That was the first time we were able to get a²²¹ seasonal agreement with Equity. That was 1976.

Formulating such an agreement with the acting union was a vitally important step in the growth of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Permitted to increase to twenty-four the number of performances the theatre could present, the Club was freed to resume audience development. Permission to increase ticket prices meant the Club could pay higher salaries to the artists it employed, but more importantly, it allowed the club to expand its activities; a growth-step that Grove was acutely aware was necessary. "We opened the main theatre. . . the first year I was here with Golden Boy, which Lynne had directed," he explains,

and that was a straight twelve-performance, three-weekend situation. And I turned to Lynne during the final rehearsals of Golden Boy and said, "you know, we've got to solve this problem " because I was able to see the enormous amount of care and attention she was putting into this production, which was way beyond anything I'd really experienced before in New York other than on Broadway. And it seemed as if she and everybody else involved in the production were working as if, you know, it was the opening of a Broadway run, as in-

221 Ibid.

deed they were.²²²

As a center for creative exploration, which maintained a standard of high quality productions, the Manhattan Theatre Club had heretofore been blocked from further growth by the union representing the actors who almost exclusively comprised the casts of its productions. Now, with the intercession of Donald Grody, Equity quite suddenly eased the restrictions which had hampered the Club's development, giving, in effect, a mandate for the theatre to continue and expand its operations. At the time, however, the significance of this action by the union was not entirely apparent, as Grove admits. "It was just a first step, and at the time it didn't seem really all that important," he says, "except that we finally had achieved a first concession." He continues,

But I think, in many ways, it was enormously helpful, looking back at it, because it was the first time that we had somebody from the Equity staff, even approaching someone in his position, in the building to see that we were not horrible exploitative monsters I don't think one can necessarily hinge the whole turnaround on that moment . . . but I do think it was true that we both saw each other for the first time as people and not just as symbols. . . . He did believe in us by the end of that year, and . . . (helped) us reach yearly letters of agreement . . . which brought us along to the point where we were able

²²² Ibid., p. 10.

to become fully Equity.²²³

While it is impossible to speculate on the course of development the theatre would have followed had the unexpected visitation of Equity's Executive Secretary not occurred, it is fairly safe to conclude that the road to full union recognition would have proven somewhat more treacherous than it did for the Manhattan Theatre Club.

One direct consequence of the improved relationship with Equity was an increase in revenue, which made it possible to begin producing in the space later to be called the Downstage. Until this time, the space, Stage 73, had been rented to outside producers for the greater portion of the year. The annual income of nearly \$20,000 produced by its rental helped to cover the overhead costs of maintaining the building. "We were doing all our work in what is now the Upstage theatre," says Lynne Meadow, "and it was a combination of Cabaret/Upstage Theatre. Then each year, we would do one production in that space (the Downstage)." The decision to expand the activities of the Club to include producing in the larger Downstage theatre was difficult to make, as Meadow explains,

²²³ Ibid., p. 14.

I remember a discussion we had--Barry (Grove) and Tom Bullard and I-- . . . saying do we have the wherewithal to try to move from the Upstage theatre, a one hundred seat theatre, into one hundred fifty seats; can we give up the revenue that we are earning from renting the space, and can we try to make up that revenue with subscriptions and ticket sales. And I had great trepidation because, you know, I didn't want the place to close. It was²²⁴ Barry who really urged me to take the step.

Reflecting back upon the important decision to risk expansion as a producing organization, Grove admits having had his own concerns,

. . . wondering whether or not we'd really be able to afford it, whether the deal we made with Equity was too steep, whether we might face a major setback. Looking at the numbers now, and knowing where we turned out, it seems relatively naive of us to think that we were in over our heads--or relatively unimportant--but at the time, they were enormous risks we were taking, we felt, financially. And they were risks we were taking without²²⁵ any confidence that they'd necessarily work out.

The move into the Downstage proved quite successful and was a significant step in the development of the theatre. From the standpoint of audience development, the move was of vital importance for along with the Equity concessions, it tripled the number of seats available for a production. It opened the potential for audience growth and gave rise to

²²⁴ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 2.

²²⁵ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 9

the creation of an audience development program for the Club. From a financial point of view, the move meant an increase in revenue which allowed the theatre to grow into a full contractual relationship with Actors' Equity Association. It also served to reinforce the artistic policy of the theatre, with the Downstage being reserved for fully produced plays, and the Upstage series set aside for the development of new plays.

The fact that Meadow was persuaded by Grove to make the move is evidence of the trust she placed in him; trust which evolved from countless hours in each other's company, planning strategy for the Club and developing a working relationship. "There was a certain amount of push and pull in defining the territory in the early time," says Grove,

but we devoted, probably at the expense of the then staff, an enormous amount of time with each other in that first year. We met every day, for hours a day, about everything. We sat . . . for enormous periods of time with the door closed, talking to each other. It put a tremendous strain on the rest of the staff, but it established the kind of relationship we needed so that by the end of the first year, unconsciously, we suddenly stopped talking to each other almost entirely, relative to where we'd been before. We could go our separate ways and yet know almost intuitively when we needed to come together and shut the door and find in each other the answer to the overwhelming dilemma of the time, and go forward again without having to step on each other's toes every

day of the week.²²⁶

In fact, major staff changes did occur with the arrival of Grove, and the organization of administrative positions assumed a different configuration. By assigning individual staff members duties which had previously been performed by whomever was available, efficiency was greatly improved. The addition of a full-time box office manager, which Grove perceived to be an immediate need, eliminated a considerable burden from the rest of the staff. In general, the work climate changed as the management structure of the Club became more compartmentalized. Most of the original staff left, for reasons of their own, when Grove joined as Managing Director, and the theatre saw a second wave of personnel. "I think it was at that point in time," says Grove, "that my style of management got layered on top of Lynne's style of management and so it doesn't surprise me that in that respect, that you find a veering of the way things functioned from that point on."²²⁷

Now beginning its fourth year of operation after the arrival of Lynne Meadow, the Club had in place a workable Artistic Director-Managing Director partnership. "The thea-

²²⁶ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 12.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

tre still had a long ways to go," says Grove,

it had gone somewhere in the first three years, and it had gone there really with Lynne as the only visible . . . leader of the organization. And it took a great deal of strength, courage, understanding, to recognize that she couldn't do it alone, that she had certain areas that she was weaker in than others, and that rather than surrounding herself with weak people, she had to hopefully surround herself with people that are strong in those areas. That is, if she was going to do this, she was going to have to give up a certain amount of responsibility, recognition, what have you, to somebody else. And she made it very easy in that sense.²²⁸

Freed from the day-to-day responsibilities of managing the business of the Club, Meadow was able to devote greater attention to her work as an artist. The play she chose to direct for the 1976-1977 season had been recommended to her with great enthusiasm by Stephen Pascal, her Associate Director. David Rudkin's Ashes, also attracted the interest of actress Roberta Maxwell and actor Brian Murray, who expressed a desire to do the play. Their agent, Clifford Stevens, contacted Meadow in the hope of making contractual arrangements and, recalls Meadow, "Clifford said to me Roberta Maxwell would very much like for you to direct the play. . . . I wasn't sure that I would direct it or not, but I was very influenced by that."²²⁹

²²⁸ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 37.

²²⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 2.

Securing the rights to the play proved to be a somewhat complicated affair, for Margaret Ramsey, Ltd., the London-based agency which handled the rights initially responded negatively to the Club's request. A series of transatlantic telephone calls did little to sway the agency's opinion, and Meadow found herself in a bind, having made a commitment to Clifford Stevens who, in turn, turned down other offers for his clients.²³⁰ "Finally, in desperation," she says, "I called Joe Papp."²³¹

Papp knew Meadow's work, had visited the Club on several occasions to view productions, and had, in fact, co-produced the Club's production of Ed Bullin's In the Wine Time the previous season. After reading Ashes, and determining that it was indeed a play of merit, he responded to Meadow's plea. She recalls, "He said, I think it's a good play. I think you should do it. Tell them whatever you need to tell them to get the rights."²³² Meadow again telephoned Margaret Ramsey, Ltd. with news that Joseph Papp agreed to co-produce the play with the Manhattan Theatre Club in a production that she would direct. On this new condition, the

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., p. 3.

agency granted the production rights.

Papp's assistance was notably generous. He acquired the rights to the play for both the Manhattan Theatre Club and his Public Theatre, and contributed to the cost of the production done at the Club. The Club was permitted to retain all its box office receipts, and a small percentage of the receipts when the play moved to the Public Theatre. "It was a very generous offer on his part," remarks Barry Grove,

As a result of that production, and of the success of that production, we were able subsequently to go back to Margaret Ramsey on virtually the same kind of contract terms that we proposed before, and get accepted in our own right because she'd seen what we were able to do for her client. . . . It was only with Joe's doing that we were able to open that door.²³³

"He really saved the day," confirms Meadow, "He made it possible. Then I trundled into Barry and said I think we may lose a bunch of subscribers on this one. I mean (the play had) all this blood."²³⁴

The script, a parable of political tragedy in Northern Ireland, traces the desperate attempts by a couple to conceive a child, and includes a miscarriage, and several graphic scenes involving vaginal bleeding.

²³³ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, pp. 11-12.

²³⁴ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 3.

"Lynne thought it was the most daring conceivable thing she could ever do," recalls Peregrine Whittlesey, "She was terrified about producing that play; not because she didn't love it, but because she just thought this was going to be something that the audience would walk away from."²³⁵

Quite the contrary, the production proved remarkably successful and received extremely positive critical acceptance. Roberta Maxwell received recognition as Best Actress in a Primary Role, and the play was classified as one of the ten Best Plays of the season in Otis Guernsey's The Best Plays of 1976-1977, which described the production after its move to the Public Theatre as,

. . . the peak of the Off Broadway season and the spearpoint of the theatre of shock. . . . It is hard to imagine how the acting of Brian Murray and Roberta Maxwell as the couple and the brutally direct staging by Lynne Meadow could have been bettered. It was effective to the point where it risked shattering the audience's suspension of disbelief with theatre of unendurable shock, that dangerous aesthetic territory where even the ancient Greeks feared to tread.²³⁶

The production subsequently merited OBIE Awards for Best Play, Best Playwright, Best Actress (Roberta Maxwell) and Best Actor (Brian Murray), and also received recognition

²³⁵ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 8.

²³⁶ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1976-1977, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1977), p. 23.

from Time Magazine as one of Ten Best Plays of the season. For the Manhattan Theatre Club, the play attracted considerable attention, particularly as the production was moved virtually unaltered to the Public Theatre. The Club had produced several plays during previous seasons which were later produced commercially, but subsequent productions always brought changes in casts, directors, or scripts. The move of Ashes was, therefore, significant for it represented the first transfer of a play produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club, as opposed to a play merely having a future life.

The publicity generated by the production was certainly of great importance to the Club, as Grove notes,

Ashes was the first time suddenly that we had major publicity--not just for the show here, for certainly the previous year we got enormous publicity for . . . Geography of a Horse Dreamer and Life Class, which opened back to back, and Sea Marks, which was being made into a Theatre In America piece about the time that Ashes was happening, and The Blood Knot, which had gotten great reviews. But nothing had actually moved with that group of plays. . . . The move of Ashes was the first time, I think, that we really felt secure that something was happening that would make . . . (our expansion) do-able in a sense.²³⁷

The 1976-1977 season was, in fact, quite a successful season for the Club and attracted much positive critical attention. With the exception of one play, the Downstage se-

²³⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 9.

ries received good to excellent reviews. In addition to Ashes, the season included A. R. Gurney's Children, in a production directed by Melvin Bernhardt, of which Mel Gussow of The New York Times wrote, "The quartet of performers could not be bettered on Broadway or in regional theatre."²³⁸ The production of Athol Fugard's Boesman and Lena, directed by Thomas Bullard, Edith Oliver in The New Yorker termed "A complete success."²³⁹ Alan Rich in New York Magazine described the production of Jane Bowles's In the Summer House, directed by Stephen Hollis, as "An intelligent revival," adding, ". . . But this was Mrs. Bowles's first and only play, and it's fuzziness and insecurity are serious flaws that no performances, even as splendid as the current one, could hope to conceal."²⁴⁰ Similarly, it was the script more than the production which was to blame for the poor reviews which Edna O'Brien's The Gathering, received in its American premiere. Mel Gussow wrote, "My sympathy, not won by the characters, went to the actors--and to

²³⁸ Mel Gussow, "'Children,' New Gurney Play, Begins Brightly, Then Falters" in The New York Times, October 26, 1976, p. 47.

²³⁹ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," in The New Yorker, February 7, 1977, p. 68.

²⁴⁰ Alan Rich, "Theatre," New York Magazine, May 23, 1977, p. 86.

the director, Austin Pendleton, except for his choice of this play."²⁴¹

The flurry of good notices and the awareness of increased recognition provided a solid foundation for the theatre's growth. Certainly it did much to bolster the confidence of Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove in regard to their view of the theatre's stability.

The following season, the Club's Downstage schedule was produced with Off Broadway contracts, while the Upstage remained, contractually, an Off Off Broadway theatre. The Downstage series consisted entirely of foreign plays: Peter Nichols's Chez Nous, Athol Fugard's Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act, on a double bill with Scenes from Soweto, Stephen Poliakoff's Strawberry Fields, Play, That Time, and Footfalls, one acts by Samuel Beckett, and Istvan Orkeny's Catsplay, a Hungarian work directed by Lynne Meadow which Guernsey described as ". . . the standout offering of MTC's first Off Broadway year."²⁴²

²⁴¹ Mel Gussow, "Stage: Edna O'Brien's 'The Gathering,'" The New York Times, March 11, 1977, p. C3.

²⁴² Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1977-1978 (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1978), p. 26.

The reviews for the Downstage series ranged from complimentary for Catsplay to embittered for Chez Nous, but overall were favorable. It was in the midst of the 1977-1978 season, however, that the Manhattan Theatre Club struck gold, with its Cabaret production of Ain't Misbehavin', a production, directed by Richard Maltby, Jr., that went on to win Tony Awards for the season's Best Musical, Best Director and Best Featured Performer; OBIE and Drama Desk Awards for Best Performer; and the Drama Critics Circle Award and Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical. The show attracted such commercial attention that it was transferred to Broadway less than two months after it closed at the Club.

The 1977-1978 season marked the beginning of a change for the Manhattan Theatre Club. Owing to increased budgets, growing production costs, heightened prominence, and an associated change in the nature of its audience and of its Board of Directors, the Club was now beginning to show signs of shifting towards greater conservatism and away from the kind of unbridled creative risk-taking which characterized the early days of its development. This change in orientation for the Club, although gradual in its onset and almost insidious in its development was, on the other hand, in many

ways the inevitable next step for a successful Off Broadway theatre. Peregrine Whittlesey comments,

The real difficulty about this organization is that when it was struggling in the early years, it brought in a lot of young people. That was partly because they could afford the ticket price, and partly because there was a lot being produced at the Club. A lot. A crazy amount of things . . . there was a great assortment The organization wasn't sufficiently prominent, the productions weren't sufficiently prominent, so that there was a lot more risk-taking that could go on. . . .

The early days, we were producing with very little money. There were no major designers or, at least if they were, they were people who grew to be major designers . . . people fresh out of Yale, people Lynne had known, actors who worked for virtually nothing, if not for nothing altogether. Plays were done in showcase productions, . . . the contract with Equity allowed it, . . . and as a result you could bring in lots of people off the street. It was always odd, because being at 73rd Street, in a wealthy community, much of the membership was composed of people who lived in the area and, therefore by definition, had some money. But still there were young people who could afford to come.

And then, as the runs were extended, as the contract with Equity changed, as the producing itself became more expensive, then fewer and fewer plays were produced. And the audience changed. The whole character of the audience changed, and then you suddenly were producing things for that audience. It's a typical syndrome, I think, of what has happened to any so-called successful not-for-profit theatre in the last decade.²⁴³

²⁴³ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 7.

While, without question, the Manhattan Theatre Club continued to be "dedicated to presenting works that challenge, that ask hard questions, that illuminate some aspect of our lives and society,"²⁴⁴ the offerings of the Club began to reflect a diminution of the zealousness which characterized the early years. With increased recognition, the Manhattan Theatre Club began the transformation from a free-wheeling theatre laboratory to a slightly more conservative institutional theatre.

In a New York Times article on the Club published right after the premiere of Ashes, Mel Gussow wrote,

More and more there is communication and collaboration with other institutional theatres. . . . The theatre club is similar to a regional theatre, in terms of its productivity, professionalism, and range of interest. But it is a small Off Off Broadway theatre, and Miss Meadow indicated that she took seriously one suggestion on a recent audience questionnaire: "Don't get too big."²⁴⁵

With success, however, came growth, and increased reliance on the the strategies which had promoted growth in the past. The artistic policy which evolved over the years--the key components of which were the Downstage series of fully produced plays; the Upstage series of works in progress; the -----

²⁴⁴ "Introduction to the Manhattan Theatre Club," (Public Relations brochure, 1982).

²⁴⁵ Mel Gussow, "The Manhattan Theatre Club," The New York Times, December 3, 1976, p. C3.

Writers In Performance series; and a special events series which included Cabaret performances, virtually remained unchanged, although embellished by the Playwrights in Residence program and the 'In-the-Works series, which was instituted in 1980. For the most part, however, the artistic policy which was established during the period of rapid growth of the Manhattan Theatre Club, 1972 to 1977, was unaltered as the Club began its metamorphosis into an institutional theatre.

Chapter V

GROWTH OF STABILITY THROUGH 1980

"The MTC is responsible for much of the meaty fare digested by New York theatergoers," wrote Don Nelsen at the start of the 1977-1978 theatre season, "and (Lynne) Meadow is responsible for the MTC doing what it does."¹ By the start of the fifth season under Meadow's artistic direction, the Manhattan Theatre Club had gained a reputation for producing quality work. The successful after-lives of Bad Habits and The Runner Stumbles, along with the transfer of Ashes to the Public Theatre, captured critical attention and provided a greater measure of stability than the Club had previously enjoyed as a producing organization.

However, while Broadway runs of shows which began at the Club helped to make the Club more visible, according to Meadow, they were not its raison d'etre.

We did them because they were unique and worthy of being seen. We don't want to measure our success only in terms of what moves from here. What's just as important is our presence here, doing something the spectator can see, something he's

¹ Don Nelsen, "'An intimate supermarket of the arts,'" The New York Daily News, September 27, 1977.

not going to see somewhere else.²

Meadow has never been hesitant to produce a play, as unusual or as uncommercial as it might be, so long as the work was of interest to her. "She doesn't have any particular hang-up in the theatre of wanting to do a certain kind of play," says A. E. Jeffcoat,

She is almost wildly eclectic. She loves something that's really a new idea, whether it's a new director who is totally improbable to direct a certain kind of play, or an actor or actress who she sees in a role that is totally different from anything they've ever done before, or something like that. She's very, almost, experimental in her approach to the theatre.³

The artistic policy of the Manhattan Theatre Club provides that plays be chosen by the Artistic Director, taking into account the the recommendations of the literary staff. "I make a subjective appraisal, not doctrinaire," Meadow explains, "I must do what I feel is viable theatre."⁴ It is, therefore, not surprising to find that a wide variety of plays, illustrating different dramatic styles, make up the Club's production history, and that there has been heavy emphasis on the staging of new plays. "There's a need for new

² Ibid.

³ Interview with A. E. Jeffcoat, 9/10/82, p. 5.

⁴ Pat Lamb, "Lynne Meadow directs traffic on a New York City stage." (Unidentified source, undated).

plays as well as classics to be done in a variety of ways," Meadow contends, "I like flexibility, although at the heart, my commitment is to writers and directors I've really operated on a 'why not' policy."⁵

Such policy gained the admiration of theatre critics, and contributed to the success and continuance of the Club. The Manhattan Theatre Club was lauded by Walter Kerr in 1975 as

. . . the kind of Off Off Broadway center that is . . . saving the American theatre's neck. . . .

. . . it is extraordinarily eclectic, freewheeling, uncommitted to any one policy that might invite arthritis. Not just new plays, though 65 per cent of those done so far have been originals; . . . (but) revivals . . . alternate with the untried. The Cabaret offers entertainment the minute the three theatres drop their curtains. Opera is done as freely as drama; so are poetry readings. . . .

New veins and old, and both together, have become the unrestricted business of a narrow, jumbled building on 73rd Street It's the wrong season for it, but it all seems like Santa's workshop. Certainly it is going to give the theatre new Christmases.

Meadow was realizing her goal of making the Club, as she describes, "a place where you can come in, turn to the right and find cabaret, turn to the left and see a new

⁵ William Harris, "On Target Off-Off Broadway," The Press, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1976.

⁶ Walter Kerr, "They're Still Taking Chances Off Off Broadway," The New York Times, February 9, 1975, p. B1.

American play, or go straight ahead and see a new international play. . . . (a place) for people who have varying tastes, as I do."⁷ Such artistic liberality, however, is not entirely without limits. "We don't do non-verbal plays," she admits with irony, adding that naturalistic dramas such as Catsplay reflect her personal stylistic preferences: "It's a very human, life affirming play. For me as a director, that's certainly the first criterion."⁸

In addition to the eclecticism characteristic of the programming, and of equal if not greater importance in the Club's positive recognition, the quality of productions mounted by the Club proved to be consistently high. The attempt was not to attain commercial success, but rather artistic success measured in terms of the development of a writer's skill. Meadow's commitment to this policy is evident in her correspondence with John Hart, an Irish playwright whose play Dearly Beloved, was produced by the Club during the Spring of 1976. Hart, who travelled from Ireland to see the play produced, complained vociferously in a letter to Meadow about what he perceived to be unsatisfactory

⁷ Don Nelsen, "An intimate supermarket of the arts," The New York Daily News, September 27, 1977.

⁸ Mel Gussow, "'I've grown up with the Manhattan Theatre Club,'" The New York Times, June 18, 1978, p. C5.

treatment of both the play and its author. He writes,

. . . The point is, why did you ask me to come? I should have been lined up on talk shows (again I discovered 3 that would have taken me if informed earlier). More importantly, why did you undermine my efforts to get more complete coverage for the play? If you had no faith in it you should not have promoted it.

Somewhat surprisingly, he closes the letter, "You may have my next play--as what you do on stage is nice--but I cannot any longer emotionally or financially afford what has just happened to me."¹⁰

In response, Meadow offers a clear statement of the artistic goals of the theatre club,

. . . the bottom line seems to me that you were much more concerned about the promotion of your play than you were about the working of the play itself. As I wrote to you in my very first letter, "The Manhattan Theatre Club's primary focus . . . is to develop new writers, and to allow productions to serve as a real growing process for our writers." I was frankly stymied by your attitude, although I feel sympathetic, when we talked in my office, that you were totally dry on the play and that you could not rewrite any of it. I feel that you had a company and a director who were exemplary in their efforts to serve your work, but let's be honest John, were there not flaws in your play we, the Manhattan Theatre Club, would not have been producing it. Were it ready for the Broadway market, as you seem to have thought, then it would have had no business being at the MTC. . . .

⁹ Letter from John Hart to Lynne Meadow, 4/22/76.

¹⁰ Ibid.

It is often the case here that we do not invite critics at all to productions, since our intent is to develop work and sometimes we feel that if a work is not ready, it should not be subjected to critical perusal. . . .

I have little desire to send playwrights around to television interviews when there is work to be done at home. (My intention here is) . . . to work with writers and directors and actors who are serious in their desire to grow and learn and benefit from being outside the commercial arena.¹¹

Written prior to the achievement of Ashes, the successful 1976-1977 season, and the even more successful season which followed, Meadow's letter rings of the kind of artistic virtue which is virtually impossible to maintain when faced with the practical realities of operating a major not-for-profit theatre institution. The letter is, perhaps, as idealistic as John Hart's letter is materialistic; however, the Manhattan Theatre Club was just at the beginning of a period of transition which would involve both administrative and artistic adjustments in response to growing prominence. For the time being, the primary concerns were with artistic development and the continued search for "vital new works for the theatre."

In its search, the theatre was fortunate to be aided by a grant from the Ford Foundation, which not only eased its financial burden considerably, but also provided impetus for -----

¹¹ Letter from Lynne Meadow to John Hart, 5/10/76.

management to engage in long-term fiscal planning and more concrete proposals regarding artistic direction. The five-year, \$250,000 grant, the Manhattan Theatre Club received from the Ford Foundation represented the largest single grant the Club had received to date, and its psychological impact further helped to define the identity of the institution.

"The Ford Foundation grant, for the first time, gave us more than a year's . . . ability to survive," says Lynne Meadow, " . . . for the first time, there was an endowment."¹²

Barry Grove considers the award of the grant to be a significant component in the major financial turnabout which the theatre experienced during the 1977-1978 season. Notes Grove,

it was the first time that the Manhattan Theatre Club had gotten a grant anywhere near that magnitude, just in terms of the simple impact of getting a quarter of a million dollar grant. And it was the first time that anyone had given us a multi-year grant, so it was really the first time anyone said you're going to be here more than a few more months. . . . Until then, it was very much a year to year proposition, and that grant really cemented for us the possibility of there being a "long term."¹³

¹² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 2.

¹³ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 4.

Award of the grant came about as a result of efforts that Grove had begun two years earlier, when he arrived at the Manhattan Theatre Club, in conjunction with counterparts from other Off Off Broadway theatres.

Certainly by the winter of '75-'76, we had begun conversations with the Ford Foundation . . . stemming out of the amount of time we were spending together with the Equity crisis, (we) began to have regular meetings between Jerry Arrow and Marshall Mason at Circle (Repertory Company), Lynne and myself at MTC, and Bob Moss at Playwrights (Horizons). . . . and we ultimately, jointly, made an approach to Roger Kennedy at the Ford Foundation for funding to help us make the leap to the next plateau.¹⁴ In the Fall (of 1977) those grants came through.

While alleviating much of the Club's financial pressure, the Ford Foundation grant did not offer a windfall of immediate income. \$100,000 of the allocation was set up as a cash reserve fund requiring the theatre to meet stringent operating goals over the five year period. "We were not allowed to run into the red," explains Grove, "we had to maintain net current assets at the end of any given year, . . . and we didn't actually earn that money until about 1981-82."¹⁵ The remainder of the grant was divided into funds for outright operating support of \$100,000 over five years, and a one-to-one matching challenge for the balance

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

of the allotment which necessitated new private contributions.

The grant obligated the Manhattan Theatre Club to submit a five-year financial plan and other long range plans outlining the theatre's anticipated growth and development. "It was the first time an institution was forcing us to do a budget for more than the next few months," explains Grove, "it was forcing us to do a budget for the next few years."¹⁶ This needed financial analysis helped to establish realistic goals for the theatre's expansion. Grove notes,

by that point in time, Lynne and I had worked together enough that we really knew each other, trusted each other, had developed a kind of relationship that allowed us no longer to have to spend a ton of time together, which we did at the beginning to make sure we really knew what we were doing and where we were going, and to begin to move in different directions. . . . We could cover suddenly twice as much territory because we didn't both need to be in the same place all the time. And the cash flow changed in such a way that we could really start to focus on what we wanted the place to become, instead of just keeping the doors open.¹⁷

The management structure which evolved during Grove's first two years at the Club, was made fully operational during the 1977-1978 season. "The structure that we were put-

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

ting into the place," says Grove, "really became the framework for how we moved forward."¹⁸ In fact, the structure, while expanded over the years with the addition of staff members, has undergone no significant modification since its implementation. The functions of Artistic Director and Managing Director became even more distinct after the Club received the Ford Foundation grant. The bond of trust which had developed between Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove facilitated the separation of powers. The management structure, says Grove, "coupled then with the funds really gave us the platform to take off on."¹⁹ Moreso than before, Meadow was now free to concentrate on artistic policy and the search for vital new theatrical works.

As with any exploration, artistic or otherwise, precious finds do not occur as frequently as unexceptional discoveries. The 1977 production of Peter Nichols's Chez Nous was viewed by most critics as unexceptional. A turgid and sardonic comedy about two British couples who vacation together in the South of France, the play focuses on the network of interrelationships. Dick, a pediatrician, played in this production by John Tillinger, is the author of a book

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

advocating sexual freedom for children. He discusses the work with his friend Phil, an architect, played by Sam Waterston. In the course of the action it becomes apparent that the pediatrician's newborn infant is actually the offspring of his teenage daughter, who was made pregnant by Phil. This revelation is placidly accepted by the couples, and the play concludes with the suggestion that Diana, the architect's wife, played by Christina Pickles, and Dick may abandon the scene together.

Richard Eder, in his new role of theatre critic for The New York Times, wrote that the production was a "long session of wasted talents" in a play of "endless artificial talk in an endlessly artificial situation."²⁰ Martin Gottfried of The New York Post noted that

The central performances are excellent . . . (but) . . . The overall uncertainty of tone and style make it a confused production²¹ of a confused and thematically annoying script.

The harshest attack, however, came from critic John Simon, who did not share Gottfried's view of the performances. He writes,

²⁰ The New York Times, November 7, 1977, p. 44.

²¹ Martin Gottfried, "Theatre," The New York Post, November 7, 1977, p. 55.

This is an unsteady little comedy about two English couples . . . engaged in rustication, reminiscences . . . some pontification . . . and other unessential existential speculations. . . . As I gravitated out of the theatre at midpoint, I wondered why this most inept of actors (Sam Waterston) keeps getting good roles and lavish reviews instead of being booed off the stage.²²

In contrast, however, Edith Oliver of the New Yorker admired "the performance, under Lynne Meadow's direction . . . Best of the actors is Sam Waterston. . . ." ²³

While more criticism was levelled against the script than the production, the reviews were not an auspicious beginning for the opening play of the season and the Club's first year of operation under an Equity Off Broadway contract. In fact, given the events surrounding the rehearsals of Chez Nous, the 1977-78 season got off to a very shaky start.

While the program credits Lynne Meadow as the play's director, and Richard Maltby, Jr. as the associate director, this arrangement was decided upon only shortly before the play was to open. Originally, Maltby was commissioned to direct the show, but encountered insurmountable difficulties in working with the actors and bringing the play to life.

²² John Simon, New York Magazine, November 21, 1977, p. 106.

²³ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, November 21, 1977, p. 143.

Peregrine Whittlesey recalls,

Part way through the rehearsal process, Richard came to Lynne and said, "I don't understand this play. I can't go on doing it. You've got to help me out." He was desperate. He was having no luck with the actors. He was having trouble with his vision of the play. First show of the season. And so Lynne came in and bailed him out; at least got the play to the point where it could be presented, and where²⁴ the actors were not threatening to leave the set.

Following this artistic setback, Maltby apparently began to lose confidence. Meadow, who was a long-time friend of Maltby's, having worked with him at Yale, felt the need to provide him with some ego support. Whittlesey states,

Richard was feeling so depressed, so insecure about himself, so unsure as to his future, and so forth, that a couple of months later, when Lynne was looking for a cabaret project, she said, "Look, Richard's got to be given another chance." So she came to him and said, "How about that Fats Waller thing that you wanted to put together?"²⁵

The production of Chez Nous, one of the less notable endeavors of the Manhattan Theatre Club, created the opportunity for Maltby to put together Ain't Misbehavin', a tribute to Fats Waller, which was to become the most publicized of all the Club's productions to date.

²⁴ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

Maltby, son of successful popular music arranger Richard Maltby, had been introduced to the idea of putting together a revue of Waller's music a year earlier by his friend, Murray Horwitz. Until that time he had had little acquaintance with the music, and showed little interest in doing the project. "When the project first came up," he explains,

it was not an idea that interested me a great deal. I didn't know much about Fats Waller's music, and frankly I have never liked jazz. Because of my father I have always preferred arranged music. I like to know where everybody is going. But I listened to some old Waller records, and they bowled me over. His musicianship was impeccable. It had tremendous power but was intricate at the same time. But most of all, it was comic. Really very funny stuff. I began to realize that if we could get all of that up on a stage, we could have a real show on our hands.²⁶

It was the comedy in the music which caught Maltby's interest and which motivated him to pursue the project. To Maltby, it was comedy of the highest order. He explains,

. . . the only thing I can compare it to is Restoration comedy. "Ain't Misbehavin'" is sung by a man who's surrounded by women to another woman. He says he's been faithful, and she knows he hasn't been, because she wouldn't be interested in somebody that boring. Nonetheless, he knows he has²⁷ to say it, and she knows she has to believe it.

²⁶ Horizon Magazine of the Arts, September, 1978, p. 88.

²⁷ Robert Palmer, "He Brought 'Fats' to Broadway," The New York Times, May 21, 1978, sect. II, p. 1.

Indeed, the collection of thirty musical numbers,²⁸ written by Waller or associated with him in performance, which came to comprise Ain't Misbehavin' managed to capture the spirit of the performer without any attempt at direct imitation. The show was not designed to be biographical, but rather a tribute to the musician who was considered to be the "OAO," the "One and Only," master of stride piano style of the 1920s and 30s.²⁹

Stride piano developed in the backwater Baptist churches of the United States south, but it was also associated with the phenomenon of the rent party in Harlem. Piano music was provided as the entertainment for neighbors who contributed money towards the host's rent. Technically, stride piano was a style which allowed a single piano to take on the sound of an ensemble, with the left hand providing the bass beat, replacing the bass and drum, and the right hand improvising the melody line.³⁰

²⁸ The initial production at the Manhattan Theatre Club used twenty-seven songs; three additional numbers were added when the show moved to Broadway.

²⁹ Horizon Magazine of the Arts, September 1978, p. 88.

³⁰ Anthony Calabrese, "He Was the 'Clown' Prince of Jazz," The New York Times, May 7, 1978, sect. II, p. 1.

At the age of fifteen, Waller imposed himself on both James P. Johnson and Willie ("the Lion") Smith, masters of the stride piano style, and from this association he developed a style which became distinctively his own. His reputation, however, was based more on his comic abilities than his musical achievements, and during the 1930's, his contagious humor was heard on a radio show which made him "RCA Victor's chief recorder of comic records."³¹

As part of the show, Maltby provided lyrics to a Waller musical composition to explain the style of stride piano in a number entitled, "Handful of Keys." Lyrics were also written by Maltby for several other of Waller's musical numbers. Waller's comedic sense is an integral part of the revue, and "Wallerisms," such as the most famous, "One never knows, do one?" punctuate the collection of songs. In an attempt to faithfully re-create the Waller spirit, the revue utilized a mere two or three lines of dialogue, allowing the songs alone to depict the composer.

"It really tells you an extraordinary amount about Fats Waller and his world," says Maltby,

It doesn't tell you when he was born and when he died, but he tells you when he functioned and what he felt. It takes you uptown and downtown. It shows you the undercurrent of humiliation he ex-

³¹ Horizon Magazine of the Arts, September 1978, p. 88.

perienced. It entertains you, but it cuts progressively closer and closer to the bone, until you get to the song "Black and Blue," in which he drops the comic mask.³²

"Black and Blue," the 1922 Waller musical number which is presented as the last Waller composition, provides a dramatic contrast to the rest of the revue's upbeat offerings. With it, notes Jack Kroll,

The mask of showbiz falls away, the jiving stops--quietly, affectingly, we hear the splendid, sorrowing pun: "What did I do to be so black and blue?" And an immensely³³ appealing show becomes a deeply poignant one.

"It's a relatively simple thing," notes Maltby in regard to the number, "but it carries a lot of emotional freight. . . . I love ostensibleness, things that purport to be innocent but give you some content that you didn't know you were going to get."³⁴

No one really knew, during the planning of the show, what they were going to get. An extraordinary dynamism among the performers was evident, however, early in the rehearsal process; so much so that on the third day of rehearsal-----

³² Robert Palmer, "He Brought Fats Waller to Broadway," The New York Times, May 21, 1978, sect. II, p. 6.

³³ Jack Kroll, "Black and Blue," Newsweek, May 22, 1978, p. 71.

³⁴ Robert Palmer, "He Brought 'Fats' to Broadway," The New York Times, May 7, 1978, sect II, p. 6.

hearsal, Maltby called Lynne Meadow to say, "Something very special is going on here."³⁵ Following the third performance at the Manhattan Theatre Club, he told his cast that they'd better get ready for something really big.³⁶

From the outset, Maltby had planned on using a cast of five, and, at the suggestion of Steven Pascal and Andy Wolk, the physical size of the actors became an important consideration in the casting process. "One thin girl, two plump girls and two men--automatic tension,"³⁷ he explains. The five performers chosen at the only audition held at the Manhattan Theatre Club for the show--Irene Cara, Nell Carter, Andre De Shields, Armelia McQueen and Ken Page--were not widely known. All were in their early twenties, unfamiliar with the music of Fats Waller, and, notes Maltby,

They all felt vaguely embarrassed by that. They felt like it was a hole in their musical educations. And the first thing I did was to show them all the movies he had made and tell them that I didn't want them ever to imitate him. I wanted them to watch to see what they found in themselves that was similar to whatever they saw on the screen. I never had to ask them what they found. They just used it, in a way that made the connection for them.³⁸

³⁵ Horizon Magazine of the Arts, September 1978, p. 88.

³⁶ "Stompin' Smash," Time Magazine, June 5, 1978, p. 70.

³⁷ John Corry, "Ain't Misbehavin' Born of Waller Music," The New York Times, May 11, 1978, sect. III, p. 17.

In the course of his research of Waller's music, Maltby discovered that many of the five hundred or so compositions Waller wrote had been lost. "We went to the publishers who published his songs," he recounts,

and they couldn't give us copies. One publisher listed 200 titles, and they gave us four pieces of sheet music. In order for us to have permission to Xerox at the Library of Congress, we had to get permission from the publishers, and they would only give us permission if we promised to make them copies too.³⁹

Maltby and his partner Murray Horwitz were able to recover seventy-five songs, to which were added four or five unfamiliar numbers contributed by Maurice Waller, one of Waller's three sons.⁴⁰ From these, he selected fifty for the cast to learn. They were then tried in different combinations during rehearsals in order to provide the best matches between songs and performers.

Arthur Faria had been recruited by Maltby to choreograph the staging, largely because of his work on a production about black stars who were contemporaries of Waller. "Richard had never seen anything I'd done," says Faria, "but

³⁸ Robert Palmer, "He Brought 'Fats' to Broadway," The New York Times, May 21, 1978, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Harlem's Sultan of Stride," Time Magazine, June 5, 1978, p. 70.

had heard about All Night Strut, which I did in Washington and was all about the music of the 20s and 30s. So Richard called me four times, and on the fourth time I said I'd work with him."⁴¹

In addition to his extensive knowledge of dances of the period, Faria knew Oriental dancing, which proved valuable in giving the production a uniformity of movement. "My job was to give the show a uniform look," he says, "stylish walks, classic Asian arms, hands broken at the wrists, keeping the elbows out for a better silhouette."⁴² Maltby acknowledges the importance of this contribution to the show, noting that while every gesture employed in the production was authentic for the period, the addition of the Oriental element provided the show with a "sensuous" quality. "In the beginning," he admits, "I didn't think the show would be as physical as it . . . (turned out to be). . . . But I found out that when the bodies are elegant and physical, then the raunchiness in the music has a place to live."⁴³

⁴¹ John Corry, "Ain't Misbehavin' Born of Waller Music," The New York Times, May 11, 1978, sect. III, p. 17.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

At the suggestion of Faria, Maltby contacted Luther Henderson, a musician who had orchestrated the music for nearly fifty productions,⁴⁴ on Broadway and elsewhere, to accompany the cast at the piano. After some initial hesitation, Henderson agreed to accept the job.

The combination of creative forces of performers, directors (Murray Horwitz assisted Maltby in the execution of the show), choreographer, pianist and the music and spirit of Fats Waller produced a revue for the Manhattan Theatre Club's cabaret which attracted instant attention. "Almost from the very beginning," comments Peregrine Whittlesey, "Ain't Misbehavin' was clearly blowing everybody out of the room. There was an undercurrent of excitement as to what was being generated."⁴⁵

When the show opened on February 8, 1978, it was not immediately widely reviewed. In fact, The New York Times did not review the show until it was halfway through its run. Time Magazine's review appeared a week before the show was to close. Word of the show's impact spread rapidly within theatre circles, however, and, notes Whittlesey, "It was clear this was a show that had a future beyond the Caba-

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 2.

ret. In fact, while it lasted at the Cabaret, every producer in town came to see it. It generated a great deal of interest immediately."⁴⁶

John S. Wilson, reviewing the show for The New York Times, wrote,

The show moves with the zing and sparkle of a Waller recording--filled with bright melodies and wonderfully lighthearted rhythms, counterpointed by the comments and asides ("One never knows, do one?") that were as much a part of a Waller performance as the music and lyrics. In one instance, Mr. Maltby uses these normally jaunty catch phrases ("Mercy, mercy!" and "Here 'tis") to point up the clown mask behind which Mr. Waller performed, dropping them rhythmically into a brilliantly conceived arrangement by William Elliot of Mr. Waller's deeply moving "What Did I do to Be So Black and Blue?"

This is the one somber note in an evening that is otherwise buoyant and joyous. Ken Page, a big man with a striking facial resemblance to the short and round Mr. Waller, manages to expand on the already expansive personality, building the complaints of "Your Feet's Too Big" to heights that not even Mr. Waller reached. Andre De Shields squirms and slithers his way through a pulsating portrait of a reefer-puffing "viper" in an adaptation of a Waller piano solo, "The Viper's Drag."

Nell Carter's strangely shrill, penetrating voice squeezes out startling rhythmic phrases whether she is lounging through "I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling" or bumping and belting her way through an uproarious duet with Armelia McQueen on "Find Out What They Like (And Let Them Have It Just That Way)." The fifth member of the cast is more effective as a dancer than as a singer, but she manages a bit of breathless vocal comedy as she tries

⁴⁶ Ibid.

to squeeze a set of newly written lyrics into the fast-moving rhythms of a Waller stride piano classic, "Handful of Keys."

To find an evening of Mr. Waller's songs a delight is no surprise. But to feel the immediacy of his presence that this performance conjures up is a startling experience.⁴⁷

T. E. Kalem, of Time Magazine described the show as, "A handsome and jubilant tribute" to Fats Waller, and noted that

The three women and two men who deliver the numbers really deliver. Armelia McQueen is a husky dusky sybil of song. Irene Cara wraps her voice in plaintive melancholy, and Nell Carter has a sensual verve that turns "Cash For My (Sic.) Trash" into a show stopping aphrodisiac. Of the two men, Andre De Shields is a cat of cool gray nattiness and Ken Page is a slithery streetwise shark with a mimetic gift for Waller's gravely mocking asides. To give the show its rightful name, "The Joint is Jumpin."⁴⁸

Numerous producers expressed interest in transferring the show to Broadway; however, the financing for the move was restricted to only a few backers. Peregrine Whittlesey remembers,

The people producing the commercial production got their money from only a few sources. Five or six people were the backers of Ain't Misbehavin'. One of them was Jacques Nordeman, a Board member. He

⁴⁷ John S. Wilson, "Here 'Tis"--A Musical Bow to Fats Waller," The New York Times, February 20, 1978, sect. III, p. 13.

⁴⁸ T. E. Kalem, "Rent Party," Time Magazine, February 27, 1978, p. 58.

knew the person who was doing the financing of that show;⁴⁹ and when that person approached him, he bought in.

Nordeman's investment in the show prompted another emotional confrontation which echoed, in some ways, the Mortimer Levitt affair. Once again, the question was raised as to how much involvement a member of the Board of Directors should have with the artistic policy of the theatre. As with the Levitt dispute, Gerald Freund became a spokesman for the opposition. While there was no question of ethics in regard to Nordeman's motives, and Nordeman's actions were in no violation of any law or of any part of the constitution or by-laws of the Manhattan Theatre Club, objections were raised regarding the propriety of a member of the Board of Directors investing in a show produced by the Club. Whittlesey explains,

Jacques Nordeman did it (made his investment) not knowing that a Board member shouldn't do it. He saw a chance to make some money, he was approached by the person doing the financing, and he just simply did it as any investor would do. . . . There were a lot of Board members who, at the time, had there been an opportunity for them to put some money in, would have put it in; if they'd had a chance.

On the other hand, should Board members invest in a show? I mean, how can a Board member be completely dispassionate in the artistic role he plays vis a vis an organization, if there's some

⁴⁹ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 2.

question of a goldmine at the end of that tunnel? If there's a hit, can we as Board members have a privy situation to this and, in fact, invest our own money? So, once again, Gerry (Freund), as probably a lone voice, although I think there may have been others by now who echoed it, said that this could never happen again; obviously, it was a mistake. It was not Jacques Nordeman's fault, because he didn't realize that this was a mistake, but this could never happen again at the Manhattan Theatre Club; and every Board member at this point should understand that if they decide to stay a Board member of the Manhattan Theatre Club, that they would never invest in anything.⁵⁰

While by no means as protracted as the Mortimer Levitt affair, this confrontation was of importance in establishing another restriction regarding the Board of Directors' influence on the artistic policy of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Unlike the Levitt incident, however, Nordeman remained a member of the Board, and the incident ended amicably, although some resentment is perhaps evident in Whittlesey's comment,

I fault Nordeman more for the fact that it (Ain't Misbehavin') was a show that made a lot of money, and he put extremely little money back into the Manhattan Theatre Club after that. I felt he really⁵¹ owed the Manhattan Theatre Club a lot of money.

 50 Ibid., p. 3.

51 Ibid.

Indeed, Ain't Misbehavin' went on to make an enormous profit on Broadway and on tour. Three days after its Broadway opening on May 9, 1978, the show was sold out until June. By June, tickets were sold out through September.⁵² By the close of the 1979-1980 season, the show had yielded an estimated \$2.4 million profit on the initial \$375,000 invested in the Broadway run.⁵³

The financial benefits for the Manhattan Theatre, while significant, were, however, tightly controlled, particularly at the outset. The contractual arrangements were such that the Club licensed the rights to the production to Emanuel Azenberg, the show's leading producer, for a share of the gross income, a share of the profits and a share of the subsidiary rights financially, along with a billing credit that the show first appeared at the Manhattan Theatre Club. The Club retained no control over the future of the show, however.

Nonetheless, income from Ain't Misbehavin' was sufficient to create a surplus of funds which were set aside in a restricted account for expansion and development. This surplus income was also used to help meet the theatre's operat-

⁵² "Stompin' Smash," Time Magazine, June 5, 1978, p. 70.

⁵³ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1979-1980, (Dodd, Meade and Company, 1980), p. 8.

ing losses each year.⁵⁴

"First of all, I think we got a fair deal," says Barry Grove, regarding the contractual agreement made with the Azenberg office, "They were pretty substantial percentages by the then standards. . . . It represented over a four to five year period about a million dollars in income to the Manhattan Theatre Club."⁵⁵

The greater proportion of the income derived not from the Broadway run but from the touring productions. "The way those economics work," Grove explains,

the profits from the Broadway company are used to capitalize the road shows, and there were five or six road shows of Ain't Misbehavin', so in effect, the profits were being deferred over a period of time, under the control of the Azenberg office, not under our control, but wisely done, and then you get a balloon, in effect, on the back end, when all those companies suddenly go into profits, virtually at the same time. Then you have five or six companies suddenly turning out profits all at once rather than any one company. So the early going, although the play is enormously successful on Broadway and whatnot, is not generating a great deal of money,⁵⁶ and suddenly . . . there's a balloon year.

⁵⁴ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/8/82, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

An examination of the financial records of the Club illustrates the concept which Grove describes. For the fiscal year ended September 30, 1977, the season Ashes was produced, the Club reported total income from theatrical productions to be \$79,548. The following year, the year of Ain't Misbehavin', production income was reported as \$204,289. For the nine month period ended June 30, 1979, it had increased to \$475,318, and then rose again to \$848,072 the following "balloon" year.⁵⁷

The windfall income from the proliferous cabaret production created two conflicting problems in regard to how the funds should be handled. In a single year, profits from touring productions brought the Manhattan Theatre Club nearly \$450,000 income. "To simply incorporate \$450,000 in that one year into the operating budget would have been a big mistake," emphasizes Grove,

because we would have been forced to retrench to the same magnitude the following year. . . . On the other hand, we weren't yet on full contract with our second stage, particularly, and we couldn't, in good conscience, simply bank the entire sum of money when we were not paying people living wages. So we, in effect, without being rigid about the formulation, incorporated, in the early years anyway, about half of that money into the operating account, to move much more quickly to get people on to full contracts, and banked the

⁵⁷ New York State Department of State Charitable Organization Annual Reports.

other half, and spent only the interest off that as the operating income in our operating budget. That created,⁵⁸ at it's height, about a \$500,000 cash reserve.

The Expansion and Development Fund into which this reserve was placed, was intended, at the time, to go towards the renovation and eventual purchase of the property at 321 East 73rd Street, the site of the Manhattan Theatre Club, and the annexation of another theatre space on East 74th Street, also owned by the Bohemian Benevolent Society, the theatre club's landlord. The annexation of the 300 seat theatre was viewed as the essential next step in ensuring the Club's stability. The increased source of revenue through ticket sales would make the theatre less dependent upon contributions from the public and private sectors. The space on East 74th Street, with an alleyway connecting it to the Manhattan Theatre Club, seemed an ideal location. Preliminary negotiations appeared promising, but complications followed which made the theatre's transition to the next major plateau in its development far more difficult than had been anticipated.

For the time being, however, royalties from Ain't Misbehavin' were such that for several years the not-for-profit Manhattan Theatre Club was producing year-end balance sheets

⁵⁸ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 8.

that showed the theatre making significant profits. Grove explains,

" . . . in a couple of years of Ain't Misbehavin', we were closing the year with a hundred, two hundred thousand dollar a year surpluses. And in those years, our support continued to represent fifty percent of expenses, but revenue represented probably seventy-five percent of expenses and one hundred twenty-five percent of the pie."⁵⁹

In fact, year-end fund balances were substantially higher than Grove states for several years after the success of Ain't Misbehavin' in the commercial arena. For the fiscal year 1977, the Club closed with a fund balance of \$55,621. The following year, the theatre club's net worth at year-end had increased nearly five-fold to \$320,952 and nearly doubled again in 1979 when it peaked at \$558,844. While by no means the sole source of income for the Club, royalty income from the show was, in large measure, responsible for the substantial fund balances the Club recorded in the years 1978-1980.

The production also provided the Club with considerable name recognition, particularly with funding sources. Notes Grove, "It helped us in giving us an immediate recognizability to the corporate sector in terms of going into an office and saying we are the people who produced this event which

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

they had probably seen on Broadway."⁶⁰ The commercial success of Ain't Misbehavin' also brought negative consequences, however, as Grove explains,

First, we lost some funding from people who thought we didn't need their money. . . . A lot of people said Ain't Misbehavin' is another Chorus Line, and the Manhattan Theatre Club is like the New York Shakespeare Festival. The truth of the matter was we couldn't afford to wholly finance that show ourselves, the way the Public Theatre can. And, yes, we were making money, and a substantially greater amount of money than an awful lot of regional theatres around the country have made on their transfers, but nothing in comparison to what A Chorus Line has meant to the Shakespeare Festival. So that was one problem.

The other problem, I think, was that while musical work had always been a part of what we were doing, it was only a relatively small part in simple numbers to the number of straight, serious plays that we'd been doing. We got a number of subscribers the following year who, I think, expected to see five more Ain't Misbehavin's, and who instead got . . . Fugard. And so there was a certain amount of falloff in the following season's renewal rate of subscribers. Certainly we are incredibly proud of that work. I think it's probably some of the finest entertainment of that ilk ever done, but it certainly was only a small fraction of what we did.⁶¹

Despite these consequences, the production of Ain't Misbehavin' was more beneficial than harmful. A very important positive result was the financial wherewithal to move the second stage series to a full Equity Off-Broadway con-

⁶⁰ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 4.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 19.

tract. The strategy to do so was carefully conceived, as Grove explains,

After we moved the main stage on to full contract, we the had to begin to address . . . the Upstage series levels of compensation. And we had made a strategic decision, a conscious decision, that rather than try to bring both of them (the Downstage and the Upstage) up at the same time, . . . we made a decision to try and get . . . the Downstage series on to a contract. Once that was done, we began then the same process with the Upstage. And for . . . two full seasons after we came off showcase in the second stage, we moved that series onto the mini-contract, before ultimately moving on to the full Off-Broadway contract. . . . '80-81 was the first season we went under the full Off-Broadway contract, with a couple of concessions.⁶²

The concessions were minor, dealing primarily with scheduling Equity Principal Interviews for Upstage productions, but the important point is that income from Ain't Misbehavin' helped to advance the Manhattan Theatre Club to the level of a full Equity operation.

As part of the Cabaret series at the Club, Ain't Misbehavin' utilized a minimal budget, with cast members getting "paid something like twenty-five dollars apiece for the entire thing."⁶³ At best, the project began as a tangential offering of the Club. It ended as one of the 1977-1978 season's hottest musicals on Broadway, bringing in a top ticket

⁶² Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, pp. 4-5.

⁶³ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 9.

price of \$20, only \$2.50 beneath the highest priced ticket for the season: \$22.50 for Bob Fosse's musical, Dancin'.⁶⁴ Waller's famous line, "One never knows, do one?" seems strangely appropriate to the progression of events in connection with the production, as critic after critic recorded in reviews of the show.

The transition from the sixty-five seat Manhattan Theatre Club Cabaret to the one thousand seat Longacre Theatre, required some changes in the production, although few major demands on the cast. Notes Maltby, "we had trouble containing the show in a cabaret. This cast can blow down the walls even at the Longacre."⁶⁵

For the Broadway run, Charlaine Woodard replaced Irene Cara ("the thin girl"), but the rest of the cast remained unchanged. John Lee Beatty was commissioned to design a set, and created one resembling a bare Harlem saloon which also functioned to concentrate the action within a relatively small space. The most extensive change involved the musical arrangement. The single piano used in the Club production was embellished by a six piece jazz group, using music orchestrated by Luther Henderson, but Lynne Meadow em-

⁶⁴ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1977-1978, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1978), p. 39.

⁶⁵ "Stompin' Smash," Time Magazine, June 5, 1978, p. 70.

phasizes that, "just what you hear on (the cast) album, minus orchestrations, is what you heard in that room of sixty-five people at the Manhattan Theatre Club."⁶⁶

Reviews of the show were, without exception, glowing. Richard Eder began his New York Times critique with the question, "What whistles, hoots, throws off sparks and moves at about 180 miles an hour, even though it is continually stopped?" And he gives the answer, "Ain't Misbehavin'." The review continues,

This musical re-creation of Fats Waller, the jazz singer and pianist, is a whole cluster of marvels. No self-respecting audience could let it go on without interrupting it continually, and if the audience at the Longacre Theatre, where it opened last night, was self-respecting to start off with, it ended up in a state of agitated delight. . . .

A whole series of the jazz worlds of the time, uptown and downtown, raffish and posh--the posh had an edge of mockery to it--funny and startlingly beautiful, came to life. . . .

. . . If the five performers, all of them talented and three of them magnificent, ever flagged in holding the stage, there was always the piano. Tall and ornate as a small cathedral, it had an engaging way of moving around.

When Mr. Henderson got into his most vigorous stride--a two-beat rhythm: bass-note, chord, bass-note, chord--the piano sidled sideways as if being pumped. At the end of the first act, when the cast cake-walked off the stage, the piano bobbed along after them.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 4.

Eder was the only reviewer who refused to shower unreserved praise on the entire cast. He writes,

By comparison with Miss Carter, Miss McQueen and Mr. Page, the other two performers are weaker. Miss Woodard moves marvelously, but she is not a very interesting singer; and it is pure singing that is the heart of the show. Mr. De Shields is quite out of place: he is bland and mannered and his skill lacks the besotted conviction that makes Ain't Misbehavin' behave so beautifully. His "The Viper's Drag," a long number about a man stoned on reefer, is the show's one real failure.⁶⁸

By contrast, Harold Clurman wrote, "Andre De Shields is the protean showman, delightful rascal, constant kidder, devil-may-care playboy,"⁶⁹ and Jack Kroll added, "Inside Fats was a sleek cat struggling to get out, and Andre De Shields is that cat; singing and dancing 'The Viper's Drag,' his limbs writhe and wreath like the smoke from his 'reefer.'"⁷⁰

The greatest praise, however, came from John Simon, considered by many to be New York City's harshest, and often most recalcitrant, critic. Simon's relationship with New

⁶⁷ Richard Eder, "Theatre: 'Ain't Misbehavin'," The New York Times, May 10, 1978, p. C19.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation Magazine, May 27, 1978, p. 645.

⁷⁰ Jack Kroll, "Black and Blue," Newsweek, May 22, 1978, p. 71.

York producers was somewhat strained during the 1977-1978 season. Some producers voted to refuse him opening night complimentary tickets to shows for his alleged use of a four-letter word in describing the production of The Shadow Box on a television talk show. Others objected to his criticism of Liza Minnelli's physical appearance in The Act, as well as to his general caustic reviewing style.⁷¹ Of Ain't Misbehavin', Simon wrote,

. . . allow me to rave incontinently about the cast of five that works together as nimbly and wickedly as five fingers in a piece of sleight of hand. Above my praise for them individually, I must set my admiration for them as a protean ensemble that, subdividing and coalescing into any number from one to five, is always gloriously one.

There is, in this quizzical quintet, Ken Page, a corpulent but lightsome man, who has that extraordinary quality that I associate with children, idiots, and great performers: absolute spontaneity. Performers, unlike the other two groups, have to fake it, and Page does this with such guileness conviction going from seignorial indignation to irrepressible roguery as only the most untampered-with children and divinely inspired idiots could match. When, for instance, he throws back his head to emit a very nearly endless note, and we feel drenched by that warm geyser of sound, we would swear that his gleeful surprise is as genuine as our own.

Then there is Armelia McQueen, a red-hot mama that can turn into a milky baby or anything intermediate in rather less than a trice. Imperious or mellow, she cajoles or commands, and floats her

⁷¹ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1977-1978, (Dodd, Mead and Company), 1978, p. 39.

imposing girth on the air like the zippiest of zeppelins. The beautifully trained voice rides the octaves like a surfer, and when, for example, she stretches an imaginary stocking between ineluctably diverging hands, the gesture is so real that you tremble for the meshes of the hose.

Andre De Shields is next, the epitome of suave rascality. A fellow of slithes and slithers, his very voice handles the staff as if it were a greasy pole; his snippy words and snide looks are worthy of a French pastry cook caught among Bronx bagel bakers. Even when he stands still, he seems to undulate; you just know that his suit is filled not with a body, but with lizards of both the lounge and leapin' varieties.

Charlaine Woodard, who reminds me of Shelley Duvall, can make dopiness look like a privileged state, and generally carries on like a very hip sleepwalker. When she throws herself into a dance movement, she knows no more than we do where a given foot or elbow of hers might end up; when she recovers her balance, she beams incredulously, like someone whose wallet is returned intact by a passing gypsy. In song, notes take off from her cantilevered lips for unknown destinations, and seem to hit home quite accidentally. She is also very, very sweet.

But the most miraculous finger of this hand is the fat little thumb called Nell Carter. Looking like a slightly larger-than-life eight ball with a pert face painted on and four clothespins added for limbs, she is simply immense. She has, in fact, every attribute of a giantess, except the size. On exaggeratedly dainty feet, she moves like someone who would brook no contradiction from a bulldozer, if there were one rash enough to cross her path. Though she can leap up as lyrically as Wordsworth's heart to a rainbow, she is more likely to cock her head, latch onto the ground with her feet, and, arms akimbo, either charm the birds out of a tree or wither the tree itself with a glance. Her voice, which by itself should win acting awards, ranges from soprano sax to bass tuba and can thunder, wail, flicker, and put away a note with a marvelously smug little click.

And yet the ultimate hero of the evening is the man who either sang and popularized or actually wrote these gorgeous songs. Thomas, or "Fats" Waller. I almost believe that under yet another name he wrote one⁷² of the finest English lyrics, "Go, lovely Rose."

Simon's concluding reference is actually to a song written by the seventeenth century writer, Edmund Waller; and the lyrics to which he refers,

Go, lovely Rose!
Tell her, that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

seem remarkably tame in comparison to the raunchiness characteristic of so many Fats Waller compositions that the association is somewhat unclear.

What is very clear, however, is that, along with the other offerings of the season, the production of Ain't Misbehavin' did much to increase the prominence of the Manhattan Theatre Club, as well as to establish a standard of quality against which audiences and critics would judge future productions. The heightened visibility brought on by the enormous success of the production benefitted the theatre by attracting a larger audience, as well as making it easier to attract talent. It reinforced critical opinion

⁷² John Simon, "Perfect Misbehavior," New York Magazine, May 22, 1978, p. 111.

and admiration of the Club. It also, as a negative consequence, created for some new audience members the impression that producing musical revues was the focus of the Club's activities. To some funding organizations, the Manhattan Theatre Club was perceived as being of the nature of a Broadway tryout house. "You've got certain foundations," says Barry Grove, "that begin to think you're in the business of trying to move plays to Broadway, which couldn't be farther from the truth."⁷³

Indeed, of the seventeen offerings which made up the 1977-1978 season at the Manhattan Theatre Club, only Ain't Misbehavin' had a significant afterlife, although the Club's final Downstage production of Istvan Orkeny's Catsplay, did move to another Off Broadway theatre for a short run.⁷⁴ It is fairly evident, however, that the selection of plays which comprised the season was made without concern for the commercial viability of the works. The issues and themes which the works addressed were not those typically associated with plays produced on Broadway.

⁷³ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1977-1978, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1978), p. 26.

After Chez Nous, which focussed on marital dissatisfaction, the Club presented three works by Samuel Beckett in an evening called, Play and Other Plays, directed by Alan Schneider, then considered Beckett's "chief interpreter."⁷⁵ The author's 1964 work, Play, was accompanied by the world premiere of two more recent (1976) works, That Time and Footfalls. The plays, which together took little over an hour in performance, represent, it would seem, the diametrical opposite to the kind of "life affirming" plays to which Meadow states she is drawn.⁷⁶ "All three of them," wrote critic Stanley Kauffmann, "are located near the end or just past the end of life, when the tugs and countertugs of living can still be felt but when judgements are altering."⁷⁷ However, Meadow points out that despite the cynical and often morbid outlook depicted in Beckett's works, the plays need not be perceived as nihilistic. "I don't think that life affirming means you cheerlead and say life is wonderful," she says, "I think in some way you make statements about how we survive, and if Beckett doesn't make

⁷⁵ Gerald Clarke, "Boredom's Brimstone," Time Magazine, January 2, 1978, p. 59.

⁷⁶ Mel Gussow, "'I've grown up with the Manhattan Theatre Club,'" The New York Times, June 18, 1978, p. C5.

⁷⁷ Stanley Kauffmann, "Border Country," The New Republic, January 14, 1978, p. 22.

a statement about our desire and our will to survive, nobody does."⁷⁸

In Play, Beckett stipulates that the stage be bare except for three identical grey urns, touching one another. From each urn protrudes a head, the neck held tightly in the mouth of the urn. The three characters, a man and two women with "faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns,"⁷⁹ recollect their mutual involvement in a failed love affair, in rapid and toneless voices. Their recollections are provoked and made separate by a single spotlight moving from face to face, often, as Edith Oliver noted, "with comic effects."⁸⁰ The play, an inquisition of the characters by the merciless spotlight which forces them to speak, is performed in its entirety a second time after the character of "The Man" questions, "Am I as much as . . . being seen?"

In this production, The Man was played by Donald Davis, who had originally performed the role of Krapp in Beckett's

⁷⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Author's stage directions to Play, Samuel Beckett, Cascando and Other Short Dramatic Pieces, (Grove Press 1964) p. 45.

⁸⁰ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, January 2, 1978, p. 60.

Krapp's Last Tape in New York.⁸¹ Susan Costallos and Sloane Shelton completed the cast, and all received complimentary notices on their performances, which Richard Eder described as "strong, nuanced and totally controlled."⁸² Stanley Kauffmann noted that because of the nature of the writing and the specific stage directions supplied by the author,

Acting, in any full sense, is not required: acutely timed and phrased part-singing (almost) is. It is a bitterly comic canon on human vanity--specifically the vanity of sensuality and of the deceptions necessary to accommodate it in our world.

The two pieces which completed the bill also deal with memory, but employ minimalism to the extent that they have been described as more musical than dramatic.⁸⁴ That Time presents the garishly spotlighted face of a sleeping man as the only image on an otherwise unlit empty stage. As the man, played by Donald Davis, dreams, his disembodied voice is heard describing events from his past from three different locations on the stage, often simultaneously. In Foot-

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Richard Eder, "Two Short Beckett Plays Are 'Chamber Music,'" The New York Times, December 19, 1977, p. 44.

⁸³ Stanley Kauffmann, "Border Country," The New Republic, January 14, 1978, p. 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

falls, the image is of a woman, played by Suzanne Costallos, shuffling back and forth across the stage, engaged in a dialogue with her unseen mother, played by Sloane Shelton, whose comments and questions barely rise above the sound of the daughter's pacing. "The image is striking," wrote Richard Eder, "but the subject--that thing that might have caused the (daughter's) regret--is too little visible, and the women's voices and the half-light muffle them from us, and ourselves from own attention."⁸⁵

Overall, the reviews of the productions were quite favorable, if the works themselves were not entirely satisfactory. Harold Clurman described Alan Schneider's direction as "scrupulous," adding, "The performances by Donald Davis, Sloane Shelton and Suzanne Costallos are just what they should be."⁸⁶ Richard Eder used the terms, "splendid" and "faultless" in his review of the show and Gerald Clarke characterized the direction as "expert."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, January 14, 1978, p. 28.

⁸⁷ Gerald Clarke, "Boredom's Brimstone," Time Magazine, January 2, 1978, p. 59.

The Downstage production which followed, a double-bill of Athol Fugard's Statements After An Arrest Under the Immorality Act and Steve Wilmer's Scenes From Soweto, directed by Thomas Bullard, also received quite favorable reviews. Both plays deal with the issue of apartheid in South Africa, although the Fugard play, which focusses on the unfairness, emotional and otherwise, of South Africa's 1957 Immorality Act prohibiting "sexual offenses between white persons and colored persons," was generally reviewed as the better dramatic work. "Scenes From Soweto," wrote Richard Eder, "is a far thinner and more strident work. . . . It falls into the shallowest kind of polemic documentary."⁸⁸ Likewise, Edith Oliver noted,

Statements is an eloquent, poetic tragedy, as eloquent at times in its silences as in its words. Most important, it is about . . . two specific people, whom we come to know and care about. . . . As a dramatist, he (Fugard) never stoops to propaganda; the characters he explores and presents so artfully and the situations they are in are persuasion enough. The performance, under Thomas Bullard's direction, is entirely worthy of the play In Scenes From Soweto . . . the hero starts out to be quite interesting . . . but the play soon dwindles into just another polemic.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Richard Eder, "Stage: Double Bill of South African Drama," The New York Times, February 6, 1978, p. C18.

⁸⁹ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, February 20, 1978, p. 104.

The cast of three had all worked at the Manhattan Theatre Club previously. Robert Christian, who portrayed the black characters in the two plays, had appeared in both Fugard productions staged earlier at the Club by Thomas Bul-lard: The Blood Knot (1976) and Boesman and Lena (1977), receiving glowing reviews each time. Veronica Castang had performed at the Club in its production of Gardner McKay's Sea Marks, which opened the 1975-1976 Upstage series, and which went on to be filmed in Ireland and later televised as part of the "Theatre in America" series, aired nationally over the Public Broadcasting Service. She was also a member of the cast of David Storey's Life Class, which received its American premiere at the Club in 1975. John C. Vennema, who played the role of the white policeman in Statements and the White Actor in the Wilmer work, worked at the Club in 1976 in Michael Neville's Ballymurphy, directed by Ronald Roston. Their work on this show, according to several critics, was responsible for the evening's interest. The production of the Fugard play, noted Richard Eder, "is built on the lovely performances of the two principal actors."⁹⁰ Clive Barnes singles out Robert Christian as "memorable in both

⁹⁰ Richard Eder, "Stage: Double Bill of South African Drama," The New York Times, February 6, 1978, p. C18.

plays,"⁹¹ while John Simon wrote, "The acting by all three performers is very fine."⁹²

Interestingly, the production of the Fugard plays--which many critics as well as people directly associated with the Club consider to be a major contribution of the Manhattan Theatre Club to theatre in New York City, in that it was, at the time, the only organization to produce these plays--were directed by a man who had had no exposure to Fugard's writing previously. Thomas Bullard explains,

Steve Pascal, who was the Literary Manager at the time, suggested to Lynne that The Blood Knot would be ripe for revival, and Lynne . . . asked me to read it. . . . I knew nothing at that point about Athol Fugard or South African theatre. I was a real neophyte. I read the play, and was overwhelmed by it, and scared, and said "yes, I'll do it. . . ." And once I did the production of Blood Knot, I suggested to Lynne that we do Boesman and Lena, and suggested that we do Statements . . . and it was really a breakthrough for me as a director to work on the piece, because of the real brilliance of the play, and the generosity of the play. And the actors allowed me to feel, for the first time, totally relaxed directing. And I gained ⁹³new confidence and desire, actually, to direct.

⁹¹ Clive Barnes, "Theatre," New York Post, February 6, 1978, p. 20.

⁹² John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, February 20, 1978, p. 76.

⁹³ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 7.

From the exposure initially provided by Steve Pascal, Bullard was to go on to direct several more of Fugard's works. The experience of directing the pieces at the Club, he says, ". . . allowed me, and I think many people in the audience, to begin to deal with our internalized racism. Then it began a kind of obsession for me to do other plays . . . at other theatres."⁹⁴

It is noteworthy that in cases where both play and production were not favorably reviewed, it was not at all unusual for the production to be commended. The Manhattan Theatre Club consistently emphasized high standards of production.

Writing about Ain't Misbehavin', a few months into the Broadway run of the show, Stanley Kauffmann turned his attention to the work of Manhattan Theatre Club. "Production quality at the MTC began low," he noted, "but has, allowing for lapses, zoomed in the last two years."⁹⁵ To illustrate this observation, he points to the productions of Ashes and Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act, and the production which closed the Downstage's season, Stephen Poliakoff's Strawberry Fields. The play, he noted,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Stanley Kauffmann, "One Never Knows, Do One?," The New Republic, July 8, 1978, p. 28.

is about rootless young English people finding a "home" in violent native fascism. The writing was diffuse and seemed a dilution of of a better young English playwright, relatively unknown here, Heathcote Williams. But the two young maniacs were strongly acted by Susan Sharkey and Nicholas Woodeson, and (Stephen) Pascal directed with clear design and control.

These two productions not only pumped my regard for MTC, they helped confirm what I take to be a general truth: these days one sees better acting and directing away from Broadway than on it. And I mean representational work, not avant-garde pieces of the sort that Broadway wouldn't do anyway.

High production standard is also noted by Edith Oliver in her review of Catsplay, which was mounted after the South African works and before Strawberry Fields. She cites, ". . . the acting, by and large, is up to Manhattan Theatre Club standards."⁹⁷

Indeed, reviews from the period generally indicate that the Manhattan Theatre Club had established a standard which theatre critics found to be more than satisfactory and worthy of comment. To Harold Clurman, the Club had become an "honorable" institution.⁹⁸ Lynne Meadow, however, wanted to exceed this achievement. "We've already become an insti-

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Edith Oliver, "On the Banks of the Danube," The New Yorker, April 24, 1978, p. 94.

⁹⁸ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation Magazine, December 3, 1977, p. 604.

tution," she said in a 1976 interview, "Now we want to become a landmark!"⁹⁹ She continued,

It's important for people to understand the context in which we are emerging. There is tremendous quality in the theatre in New York today but much of it is off the beaten track, like our kind of Off-Off Broadway house where new talent is given exposure.¹⁰⁰ A wide variety of work is really our trademark.

Certainly, the Downstage series for the 1977-1978 season provides evidence to support this assertion. Commencing with a contemporary British play, Chez Nous, which fancifully examines domestic life and mores, the season progressed to the minimalist, absurdist plays of Beckett; continued with political works focussed on the controversial issue of apartheid in South Africa; next introduced the work of the Hungarian writer Istvan Orkeny to its audience with Cat-splay, and concluded with a contemporary British work dealing with the role of violence in effecting political and social change. It is impossible, given this variety, to characterize the series as presenting any particular type of play. High calibre production values, however, were evident in all the productions.

⁹⁹ "Manhattan Theatre Club Featured on Theatre in America," Theatre in America press release, c. April, 1976.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Catsplay, directed by Lynne Meadow, was regarded by many to be the best offering of the Downstage season. John Simon considered it "artistically accomplished and meltingly humane," adding, "the present production is quite good enough to convince me that this is the best new play of the season."¹⁰¹ Harold Clurman described it as "pleasant goulash . . . marked by a distinctive Hungarian raciness . . . a mixture of tangy sauce over bits of succulent meat."¹⁰² In contrast, however, Stanley Kauffmann described the play as "More imported sentimentality, posed against the past."¹⁰³ He goes on to suggest that the play was designed to serve as a vehicle for the actress playing the central role, Helen Burns, who had played the role at the Arena Theatre in Washington a year earlier, and performed the part for Canadian television. Wrote Kauffmann,

Burns performs the play with a proprietary air which makes one suspect that much of the reported alteration (of the script in its present translation) was engineered to feed her role--in the baldest old "star" sense. This might have its own rewards if Burns were a virtuoso actress, but her virtuosity is entirely of the worst stock company

¹⁰¹ John Simon, "The Cat That Stands By Itself," New York Magazine, May 1, 1978, p. 72.

¹⁰² Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation Magazine, April 29, 1978, p. 515.

¹⁰³ Stanley Kauffmann, "Theatre," The New Republic, May 27, 1978, p. 23.

trickery: mugging responses, mechanically calculated readings, wide-eyed takes front-face to the audience. . . . What wanly possible winsomeness the story might have had is ground into the dust by Burns's Sherman-tank performance. She seems also to have cowed the director, Lynne Meadow, who did so well with Ashes last year, into helpless complicity.¹⁰⁴

Otis Guernsey acknowledges that the script is, in essence, a vehicle for the play's leading lady, although he describes Burns's performance in a more flattering way. Nonetheless, the production reconstructed the work at the Arena Theatre, with the same actress in the leading role.

Given Meadow's forthright personality and intensely protective attitude towards the Manhattan Theatre Club, it would seem most unlikely that she would have permitted a visiting actress to intimidate her, particularly in light of the circumstances surrounding the production of The Wager. However, Meadow admits that Helen Burns

was tough! She was tough! . . . I don't think she cowed me into submission as much as I just let her do her thing and I directed everybody else in the play. ¹⁰⁵ But she, very clearly, was going to do her thing.

In any case, what is most significant about the production is that it introduced an unfamiliar playwright to the Club's audience. Also significant, as John Simon points

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 2.

out, is the fact that the Manhattan Theatre Club undertook to produce the play in the first place. "If Broadway producers had any sense at all," he wrote, "they would have snapped up Catsplay . . . it cries out for the biggest and best exposure. Failing that, it is good of the Manhattan Theatre Club, in conjunction with the New York Shakespeare Festival, to bring it to the premises of the former if only for a limited run."¹⁰⁶

Simon's observation poses an interesting question. As, in his view, the Manhattan Theatre Club was venturing to undertake a production which commercial producers failed to recognize as commercially viable material, was the theatre becoming more commercially minded?

Barry Grove emphatically dismisses the idea that the Manhattan Theatre Club has ever existed as a testing ground for productions aimed to land in the commercial arena. "If you wanted to do that," he points out, "truly, why stay here? . . . Lynne and I could leave here, and bring some of the staff with us, and open an office on 44th Street, and start producing for the commercial theatre and make a lot of money."¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, however, he admits,

¹⁰⁶ John Simon, "The Cat That Stands By Itself," New York Magazine, May 1, 1978, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 20.

there's a certain temptation, of course, to want another Broadway success because the reality is that the economy, being what it is, neither the private sector nor the public sector can afford to pay¹⁰⁸ what we need to bring in to balance the budget.

Despite Simon's perspective, Catsplay seems a bit too esoteric to qualify for an extended Broadway run, and it is somewhat difficult to support the notion that the Manhattan Theatre Club produced the play with even the vaguest hope that the production would become a money-making vehicle. It is noteworthy, however, that the play falls within the category of "mainstream," more or less "conventional" dramas, far removed from the avant-garde dramas which Stanley Kauffmann notes to be not the stuff of Broadway.

If three generalizations could be made about the Manhattan Theatre Club at this stage of its history, the first would be that the theatre shied away from producing works which might be classified as anti-literary. Despite the eclecticism evident in the choice of plays produced, it is unlikely that the Living Theatre, for example, would have found a home for its production of Paradise Now at the Manhattan Theatre Club. The anti-literary nature of Paradise Now would have precluded its appearance at the Club.

108 Ibid.

Second, it may be said that the plays produced by the Club shared an intelligent, literary quality, geared towards an intellectual audience interested in philosophical, political and social issues, in addition to entertainment. The Beckett pieces, while viewed by some as "anti-theatrical," are undeniably works characterized by a masterful command of language. The Fugard plays presented at the Club are certainly representative of the theatre's sensitivity towards political issues, as is, to a certain extent, the production of Ashes, set against the backdrop of politically motivated violence in Ireland; and surely, also, the production of Poliakov's Strawberry Fields exemplifies the theatre club's political bent. Chez Nous and Catsplay are plays which focus on the subtleties of social relationships, which are explored intelligently and without an eye to conformity. In fact, even in Ain't Misbehavin', where the emphasis is on entertainment, there exists strong, intelligent social undercurrents.

The final generalization that can be made is that whatever the Club produced had to meet the highest standards of production possible, given the means available. "Quality production" was a term synonymous with the Manhattan Theatre Club, and the director of quality control continued to be Lynne Meadow.

"The name, 'Manhattan Theatre Club' was my responsibility," she says, "and I think . . . my single driving goal . . . (has been) to see quality at every level, to put my name on it and be responsible for everything . . . every activity that the theatre does is important to me."¹⁰⁹

It may appear significant, as it did to Otis Guernsey in his review of the season,¹¹⁰ that the Club's first season operating under an Off Broadway contract consisted entirely of foreign plays. However, Meadow claims that this choice of programming was not intended as a comment about a paucity of good American plays. "We did all foreign plays in the main theatre," she says,

but next door (the Second Stage) . . . we opened with a Pete Gurney play, followed with a Charles Strouse evening. We followed with a Dory Previn evening, we followed with Frankie and Annie, a play by a New York playwright; we followed with a group from Kentucky, Jim Wann's Safe House by a California playwright, Rib Cage by Larry Ketron. So how many American playwrights in that season alone? . . .

I used to program (believing) that people would attend everything, and indeed our subscription (policy) in those years was just starting to change. We hadn't broken off our series yet so that you could subscribe to the main stage and to the second series. You would subscribe to everything. So, if you look at just the Downstage sea-

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1977-78 (Dodd, Meade and Company, 1978) p. 8.

son and say they were all international works, that's not a fair reflection of how I saw them in my mind's eye. . . . I was programming for an audience that would see everything, and it wasn't until later on, when the series started getting divided up that you see that in the main series I would program an international play, an American play, and I would try to get variety in the individual series. . . .

I assumed, probably arrogantly, that people would go see all three things (main stage, second stage and cabaret), and I sought my balance that way. (Altering) that, has been an enormous psychological change for me.¹¹¹

While intellectually challenging, the Downstage series was not stylistically daring or experimental. However, stylistic experimentation would have been uncharacteristic of the Club, and such experimentation would have been unwise given the changing financial climate of Off Broadway. Guernsey notes of the 1977-1978 season, "The time when the off-Broadway plateau was a fertile field for experimental theatre has long passed, . . . what with ever more stringent contractual obligations and costs. . . . But venture is still possible even though raw experimentation generally is not."¹¹² The venture which the Manhattan Theatre Club seemed to be undertaking was the production of mainstream drama along more intellectual lines than was typical of -----

¹¹¹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 6.

¹¹² Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1977-1978, (Dodd, Meade and Company, 1978) p. 33.

mainstream productions produced in the commercial arena. Part of that venture was certainly an effort to produce plays in accordance with the highest standards of production possible.

A theatre which functions with the support of a subscription audience, as does the Manhattan Theatre Club, must be sensitive to the desires of its audience and, even more importantly, to the audience's dislikes. Lynne Meadow was evidently attuned to the interests of the Club's audience, for the number of subscribers continued to grow. By the 1978-1979 season, subscribers numbered 4,800.¹¹³ The eight-fold growth in the Manhattan Theatre Club's subscription list in the course of four seasons was partly due to the commercially successful productions which were spawned at the Club, and partly due to the administration's efforts at audience development.

In 1974, the Club had received a \$17,500 grant from the Mellon Foundation for audience development. Activities sponsored by that grant increased the number of subscribers from six hundred to approximately one thousand four hundred.¹¹⁴ At the time, subscribers were entitled to attend

¹¹³ Statement included in "Showbill" for the 1978-1979 season productions.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 24.

any of the Club's offerings to which seats were available. A total of 1,200 seats was the maximum number available for any play. However, because of the quantity of productions which characterized the theatre's early years, and the relatively low visibility of the Club in its infancy, overbooking a production presented no problems. Records indicate that of the total number of subscribers, only some 600 patrons ever attended a given play,¹¹⁵ despite the fact that over twice that number were entitled to attend as part of their membership agreement.

Amending this annual membership system was a priority of Barry Grove's when he joined the staff in 1975. In the Spring of that year, with the help of Joel Wald, Public Relations Director, Grove mounted a campaign for seasonal subscribers in addition to annual subscribers. The following year, Grove voiced the need for an assistant to help develop the Club's subscription audience, but funding was unavailable for such assistance.

Grove had intended to hire Rubie Lerner to work on audience development. When it became clear that no salary allocation could be made for the position, Lerner volunteered to assist the box office. The following year, she was

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

placed in charge of subscription and audience development, despite the fact that she had no experience in these areas. Grove's experience was equally limited, but he undertook to expand his knowledge of audience development through meetings with advertising and direct mail professionals, and others knowledgeable in subscription techniques.

"And so I started training Rubie to do that job," says Grove,

and she was here for four years, and eventually had grown in the job, and had taken a number of seminars herself, and developed her own philosophy, so that eventually she'd reached the point where she knew more about audience development than I did. . . . She's the one that really marks the creation of that department.¹¹⁶

Lerner was one of several individuals originally hired as assistants to the administrative staff who became middle managers. Like Lerner, Connie Alexis, who was hired as the Business Manager, and Paul Fitzmorris, hired as the Production Manager, had limited experience in the roles they assumed, but evidenced, according to Grove, "talent, enthusiasm, and a certain amount of education and potential to help them grow into their jobs."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Administrative functions which had previously been performed haphazardly were becoming routinized, and the management structure of the theatre began to reflect the stability that the Club was exhibiting artistically. Perhaps the keenest evidence of this is found in the theatre club's expanding audience, an audience that continued to be drawn primarily from the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Theatre-sponsored audience development surveys done during the 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 seasons reveal that for the earlier season, the average Manhattan Theatre Club subscriber was an Upper East Side professional, under fifty years of age, with an income in excess of \$30,000. During 1977-1978, the average subscriber was described as a married Upper East Sider, between twenty-six and forty-nine years of age, with a graduate degree, and an income of over \$30,000.¹¹⁸ While there were "encouraging signs of growth in Long Island, New Jersey and Westchester,"¹¹⁹ the geographical distribution of subscribers remained unchanged over previous years. The Manhattan Theatre Club was still very much a theatre for the Upper East Side community.

¹¹⁸ Statistics from Audience Development Surveys (internal documents).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Discussion that the theatre was beginning to outgrow its physical space raised the issue of the Club's dependence on its geographic location. While results of the 1978 survey indicated that only five percent of respondents would continue to attend Club offerings if it remained at its location on East 73rd Street, twenty percent required that the Club remain in the same neighborhood, and thirty-five percent would consider only an East Side location above 42nd Street.¹²⁰ Fueled with this information, hopes of annexing the theatre space on East 74th Street continued.

The first major stepping stone was provided for the Manhattan Theatre Club when it became the recipient of the \$250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation in 1977. Proceeds from the production of Ain't Misbehavin' created another important stepping stone the following year. Along with sizable contributions from the Shubert Foundation, the New York Community Trust, the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as other private donors, the Manhattan Theatre Club received a \$125,000, three-to-one challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, which sparked an aggressive campaign to raise funds. Beginning with the 1978-1979 season, for each dollar contributed by patrons to the theatre club, the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Club received one dollar from the Ford Foundation and thirty-three cents from the National Endowment for the Arts, making each dollar contributed to the Club actually worth \$2.33.

"We got two big grants and Ain't Misbehavin' all happening in a relatively short period of time," says Barry Grove,

Those three things, in conjunction with each other, gave us the surety to make the next move. . . . (We moved) onto a full contract (in the Downstage) because we had a certain amount of underpinnings from the Ford grant. Then the Ain't Misbehavin' money gave us the ability to quickly move the second stage, at a much faster rate than we would otherwise have been able to do, onto at least a mini-contract. The challenge (grant) . . . was the capper in terms of all that. So, it gave us the ability to compensate artists--those three events, happening in quick succession.

It also meant we could hire more staff, which gave Lynne and I more time not to be tearing tickets at night and worrying about who was covering the box office phones, and be able to really start working at the bigger picture and the more long-term picture of the theatre in a way that simply wasn't possible before.¹²¹

The sudden affluence which the Club now experienced, relative to previous years, permitted greater division along artistic and managerial lines and permitted enlargement of the staff, so that the administrative base was broadened. At the same time, the infusion of funds brought with it im-

¹²¹ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 5.

plicit demands regarding organizational responsibility. The kind of laissez-faire artistic policy which characterized the very early days of the Club's history, in which virtually any play could be produced on a shoestring budget, would no longer be appropriate nor acceptable. "We don't do so much of the impossible anymore," says Lynne Meadow, "I mean I guess that's what happens when you grow up, right?"¹²²

The 1977-1978 season was pivotal for the Manhattan Theatre Club, both financially and artistically. With a much strengthened fiscal foundation, long-range development plans could be drawn with greater clarity and structure. Artistically, the season marked a new direction based on lessons learned in previous years. "I wouldn't say that in 77-78 things became less experimental," says Meadow, but,

the fact is, as you look at it, each year we were doing fewer and fewer things, so you don't see the (same) number of things, and . . . as quantity decreased, experimentation decreased relative to the amount of things that we were doing. . . .

I think in every season we've taken risks, we've done plays that are risky plays. The fact is . . . we started adding more to our production values, but . . . philosophically, I don't think we evened out. If anything, it became clearer from 77-78 on, how eclectic my tastes are.¹²³

¹²² Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 3.

¹²³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/85, p. 5.

In effect, the freewheeling spirit, the creative adventurousness which the theatre evidenced in its infancy was now checked somewhat by its increased prominence. The artistic/administrative structure of the Club, however, provided an immunity against its becoming a Broadway tryout house. "I think the division of Artistic Director and Managing Director, in a lot of ways, is a healthy one to protect against that situation," notes Barry Grove,

because Lynne can truly pick plays without any regard to whether they have a commercial afterlife or not. And then, once she's picked the play, I can negotiate every contract as if it's going to be the next Tony winner, to protect our financial interests in the event it does turn out to be that.¹²⁴

Indeed, the strengths maintained by Lynne Meadow, artistically, and Barry Grove, managerially, created the balance which prevented the Club from perishing from literary over-experimentation or ceding to insubstantial, but profitable, commercialism. Notes Barry Grove,

As the organization grows larger and more institutional, and therefore less personal, one has to fight very hard to not cause a kind of institutional civil service to set in--lethargy--a lack of caring. I think that the role of the artist is, in some ways, to create chaos; and the role of the manager is to create clarity. And there has to be a constant tension between those two forces.

¹²⁴ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 20.

If there's too much chaos--I mean that in the classical sense of the word--then there's no accessibility for an audience. And if there's too much clarity, then it . . . (shows) rigidity and boredom. So there's got to be that constant tug of those two forces. . . . You have to examine just how you're doing things--and just because they've been successful in the past is no reason to continue with . . . (them). . . . As you are more and more successful, (you) have to continue to take risks to shatter that very success, in order to maintain it in a way. . . . I think it's important that Lynne goes one step ahead of me, destroying the order, in some way, that I'm trying to set up, because¹²⁵ . . . (otherwise, we'd) become just a treadmill.

After the 1977-1978 season, a greater degree of polish and smoothness was associated with virtually every aspect of the Club's functioning. Manhattan Theatre Club brochures reflected sophistication in design; fundraising materials were more confident and aggressive; and Showbill programs began to include a description of the Club as "a major performing arts center."¹²⁶

Administratively, the Club began to expand. Staff size began to increase, positions were becoming more specialized, and the environment began to reflect a somewhat more depersonalized, institutional quality. As Thomas Bullard described it, "Things got more efficient, but it got larger

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

¹²⁶ Description included in Showbill programs beginning during the 1978-1979 season.

so, inevitably, it got a little less homey."¹²⁷

Artistically, the 1977-1978 season was a peak season for the theatre, representing the Club's maturation as a producing organization. "We . . . (were) producing for five years," says Meadow,

I had learned more what I was doing. I'd learned more about casting, more about making choices, and I think there was a kind of quality that was less sporadic about that season. I think more of the events were of a higher quality.¹²⁸

The season may also be seen as the one in which the Club's artistic goals were most fully realized to date. It was successfully presenting a widely diversified range of quality productions, simultaneously. Recounts Meadow,

Statements After an Arrest, an Athol Fugard premiere, was happening next door to Ain't Misbehavin' in the cabaret, was happening next door to something called Red Fox, Second Hanging, which was a group we brought here from Kentucky That's very . . . emblematic Those three wildly different things, all happening under one roof, and yet each one, I think, a major theatrical event.¹²⁹

While the critics did not seem to share the view that Red Fox, Second Hanging was a major theatrical event, reviews were complimentary of the story theatre production

¹²⁷ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 7.

¹²⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 1.

which related the apparently true story of the conviction and hanging of Ole Doc Taylor in Wise County, Virginia in the 1890s. Edith Oliver described the production in The New Yorker as "A charming little show,"¹³⁰ and expressed praise for the three male story tellers, Don Baker, Gary Stemp and Frankie Taylor, who narrated the tale without the help of costumes, props or scenery. Certainly, the production stood in contrast to the others which were running at the Club at the time.

Without question, the 1977-1978 season was a banner year for the Manhattan Theatre Club, both artistically and administratively. The recognition the Club received for giving birth to Ain't Misbehavin' advanced it considerably in the eyes of theatre critics, commercial producers and audience members, but the other plays which comprised the season represented such a diversity of topics, themes and styles as to reinforce the Club's identity as a non-commercial theatre operating in New York City.

The revenue supplied by Ain't Misbehavin', the biggest transfer in the Club's history, provided the means to increase production values in a material way. In fact, to Barry Grove, the artistic strategy of a theatre is closely

¹³⁰ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker March 20, 1978, p. 90.

intertwined with its finances. "The budget is really simply an outline of the artistic policy translated into numerical form," says Grove, emphasizing that artistic approvals, such as casting or the selection of a set designer, are nearly inseparable from financial approvals, that is, the amount of money available to pay the chosen actors or designers. "One without the other is almost irrelevant," he adds,

because to the extent that you want to make a certain artistic choice, often you have to have the finances to back that choice up, or the choice isn't meaningless, but it's difficult to implement. . . .

What you want to do and the wherewithal to do it are very much intertwined. That doesn't mean you can't create great art for no money, but certainly for us here, the two have moved in lockstep together forward.¹³¹

The obvious exception to this generalization would appear to be Ain't Misbehavin'. It must be remembered, however, that the performers in that show were relatively unknown at the time, and had name performers been sought out, on a salary of twenty-five dollars a week, the show would have likely never been mounted.

With increased revenue, the choices available broadened for the Club in terms of the selection of actors, directors and designers. Actually, to some of the Club's critics,

¹³¹ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 6.

budgetary allocations to artists had heretofore not increased rapidly enough, as Grove explains,

We were criticized by some, I think, early on, because in the earliest years our allocation of dollars to administrative personnel was greater than it was to artistic personnel. To this day, I believe that's why we are now in exactly the opposite direction . . . because in the earliest days, we needed to have some continuity, and some people here to raise money, to sell tickets, to get to the point where we could devote the overwhelming bulk of our finance to art.¹³²

The infusion of funds which began during the 1977-1978 season led to a modification of the theatre club's budget, so that beginning with the Club's financial report for the year ended September 30, 1978, and continuing thereafter, the allocation to artistic personnel became the Club's largest expenditure.

Sudden solvency, however, did not serve to eradicate the theatre's problems; in fact, in some ways, it generated new problems for the Club. Financial support of the type which the Club received, notes Grove, "proves limiting in some respects that weren't there before, and opens up new horizons in others. The problems don't go away with more money, they just become different problems."¹³³

¹³² Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 6.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 7.

Certain expectations accompany an endowment. While these are mostly unstated, they nonetheless exist and exert pressure on the endowed organization. An organization which was deemed to merit financial support must show a certain measure of responsibility to its supporter by continuing to produce material at least equal in quality to what it did in the past. Freewheeling experimentation must give way to more mature, calculated decision making. "It's easier to be experimental when you have no freight," says Meadow, "when you have no payments to make. It's easier to say 'come on, let's do something' when it's all for nothing."¹³⁴ She contends, however, that decisions of an artistic nature never took into account accountability to sponsors; rather, sponsors responded to work which would have been produced regardless of their funding. The Manhattan Theatre Club "was funded more because it was doing better work,"¹³⁵ she says.

The Club continued in 1978 with a season of fifteen events beginning with a production of Simon Gray's The Rear Column, which attracted considerable critical attention. The production marked the American premiere of the play,

¹³⁴ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

which had run in London's West End earlier in the year. The British production received poor notices and closed within six weeks. At the Manhattan Theatre Club, notices were mixed; but while the general critical consensus was that Simon Gray had failed to produce an effective historical drama, reviews of the production itself were much more flattering.

The play, as Clive Barnes described it, "is not a comfortable one."¹³⁶ It is based on the final African exploration of Henry Morton Stanley, involving an incident which, Gray claimed, was sufficient to destroy Stanley's reputation as an explorer and leader. According to diaries kept by participants in the incident, a five-man rear guard was left by Stanley at an African jungle base under the command of a presumably paranoid Major. Surrounded by Sudani and Zanzibari troops, the members of the guard slowly began to react to the stress of their circumstances and the uncertainty of their leader's return. The relationships and interactions of the five marooned men provide the basis for Gray's play.

"It became a debacle that led to charges of the most monstrous brutality and negligence--even cannibalism," Gray stated, "It was a scandal that effectively destroyed Stanley's

¹³⁶ Clive Barnes, "Gray's 'Rear Column': a grim and grisly tale," The New York Post, November 18, 1978.

reputation because the disintegration of the rear guard was taken as a reflection on his leadership."¹³⁷

While Gray stated in several interviews that he considered The Rear Column to be his best play to date, and "the one I'd want my reputation to stand by,"¹³⁸ the critics in New York generally disagreed with his assessment. Douglas Watt, of The Daily News called it "an extremely skillful and entirely unnecessary play."¹³⁹ Despite his admiration of Gray's drawing "concrete and believable" characters, Richard Eder of The New York Times wrote that the play "does not keep cause and effect in dramatic balance,"¹⁴⁰ and Allan Wallach, of Newsday, stated, "It's an ambitious play that flickers with interesting scenes, although they never coalesce into the insightful play that Gray clearly intended."¹⁴¹

On the other hand, John Simon wrote,

¹³⁷ Robert Berkvist, "Simon Gray Explores the Roots of Atrocity," The New York Times, November 19, 1978.

¹³⁸ Robert Berkvist, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Douglas Watt, "'The Column' good but unnecessary," The New York Daily News, November 20, 1978.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Eder, "'Rear Column,' a Drama by Simon Gray Is Staged," The New York Times, November 20, 1978.

¹⁴¹ Allan Wallach, "Mad Honor," Newsday, November 20, 1978

it is a highly intelligent piece of craftsmanship, with shrewd command of dramatic strategy, blessed with sharp but not unduly clever dialogue. . . . Gray's writing here strikes out with considerable success in a new direction, an excellent thing for a play to do."¹⁴²

Edith Oliver termed the play, "powerful," with characters of "admirable subtlety and clarity."¹⁴³ She goes on to describe the production in glowing terms which echo the observations of other reviewers. "In every instance," Oliver wrote, the "acting is all that any playwright could wish for, and it meets, even surpasses, the high standards of the Manhattan Theatre Club,"¹⁴⁴ John Simon described individual performances as "letter-perfect" and "superlative," noting "James Hammerstein's direction is always at least workmanlike, and often better than that. . . ."¹⁴⁵ Praise for the actors and the director also came from Richard Eder of The New York Times, Allan Wallach, of Newsday, and Douglas Watt of The New York Daily News, who concluded his review with the statement, "The MTC has begun a new season with a

¹⁴² John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, December 4, 1978.

¹⁴³ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre: Off-Broadway: Left Behind," The New Yorker, December 4, 1978.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, December 4, 1978.

practically faultless production of a literate, authoritative play."¹⁴⁶ A better description, the Manhattan Theatre Club could not have asked for.

For Simon Gray, working at the theatre club was his first association with Off-Broadway theatre. His previous two works, Butley and Otherwise Engaged, described by Emory Lewis as "entertaining and caustic studies of educated fools in contemporary London,"¹⁴⁷ were produced successfully on Broadway. However, The Rear Column was a different kind of play and, actually, Gray placed blame for it's London failure on that fact that it was produced in the commercial West End. "The National (Theatre) is where we should have done it," he stated in an interview, "The West End was a great mistake. People who go to the West End are looking for shows like No Sex, Please, We're British, not a play that has to be listened to and thought about."¹⁴⁸ To produce The Rear Column on Broadway would have probably proven as much a mistake as the commercial British production; a fact

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Watt, "'The Column' good but unnecessary," The New York Daily News, November 20, 1978.

¹⁴⁷ Emory Lewis, "'Rear Column': a step backward," Bergen County Record, November, 1978.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Berkvist, "Simon Gray Explores the Roots of Atrocity," The New York Times, November 19, 1978, p. C-2.

Gray recognized in his praise of the Club. Said he of his time supervising the rehearsals at the theatre club,

I consider the past 10 days the most exciting days of my theatrical life. Partially because of the devotion of the cast. Whether people like the play or not, they're going to see some very extraordinary acting. I think the play is going to be realized so that people can judge it fully. There's no anxiety to goose it up, to make it a hit.¹⁴⁹

Providing a testing ground for works of interesting dramatic merit continued to be the major thrust of Lynne Meadow's artistic policy, and the Club's increased assets permitted embellishments in production, such as improved scenery, which assisted the works produced. Clive Barnes noted of The Rear Column, "the setting by John Lee Beatty, the costumes by Judy Dearing, the lighting by Dennis Parrichy, and the sound design by Gary Harris all help(ed) most wonderfully."¹⁵⁰ Tish Dace, writing for Other Stages claimed "the production's designs--particularly John Lee Beatty's meticulously detailed setting--rank among the Manhattan Theatre Club's best."¹⁵¹ Other reviewers as well

¹⁴⁹ William Harris, "'No Anxiety to Make It a Hit,'" The Soho Weekly News, November 30, 1978.

¹⁵⁰ Clive Barnes, "Gray's 'Rear Column': a grim and grisly tale," New York Post, November 18, 1978.

¹⁵¹ Tish Dace, "A Year in the Congo: Decency's Demise," Other Stages, November 30, 1978.

noted that Beatty's setting of an outpost hut with a thatched roof, bamboo siding, piled crates and a communal table, contributed to the oppressive quality that Gray sought to communicate.

The Club's first Downstage offering of the season was recognized as a production of quality. Happily for the Manhattan Theatre Club, the initial Upstage offering received the same recognition. Athol Fugard wrote Nongogo at the age of twenty-seven, five years before The Blood Knot premiered. It was one of his earliest plays and, critics noted, in many ways not fully developed.

Nongogo, which translates as "whore," is a play about a South African Black woman, a former prostitute, who operates a shebeen in a Johannesburg shantytown. It is in the shebeen that Queeny encounters Johnny, a travelling salesman with fantastic hopes for the future; hopes which seduce Queeny. Optimistically looking ahead, the two decide to close down the liquor bar and enter into a partnership to sell dress materials. Their hopes are dashed, however, when a former pimp discloses her past.

Because of the Club's commitment to Fugard's work, having produced three of his plays in the three previous seasons, Nongogo was given its American premiere performance in

the belief that it shed "interesting light on his other works that have been important to MTC audiences."¹⁵²

John Simon did not agree. Wrote Simon, "Good as some of Fugard's later work is, this piece of juvenilia is creaky, predictable, unconvincingly simplistic, and afflicted with a particularly awkward dramatic failing: overacceleration."¹⁵³ Less scathing in his criticism, but equally unsupportive, Richard Eder wrote in The New York Times,

(the play) has some interest, but the main part of that may lie in the demonstration that a large talent can stumble quite a lot before it finds its way The play is awkward and thin. It is unable to communicate very much about its characters, or make them much more than the servants of a noticeably ticking plot.¹⁵⁴

Once again, however, criticism of the script was distinct from that of the production. Marilyn Stasio, writing for The New York Post, observed, "Despite its excellent production, Nongogo is branded by its simplistic theme and schematic structure as an immature piece of writing," adding that the direction by Oz Scott was "strong, but sensitive."¹⁵⁵ While neither Simon nor Eder saw any innovation

¹⁵² Audience program notes for Nongogo.

¹⁵³ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, December 13, 1978, p. 88.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Eder, "Nongogo," The New York Times, December 4, 1978, p. C-15.

in Scott's direction of the play, no further criticism was levelled against the director. Edith Oliver declared, "The acting . . . is very good,"¹⁵⁶ while Debbi Wasserman noted in her review for The New York Theatre Review, that "Mary Alice and Terry Alexander do an outstanding job in the roles of Queeny and Johnny. . . . Director Oz Scott, however, has not been as successful with the rest of the play." Yet, she concluded "there is a definite polish to the production."¹⁵⁷

The next Downstage offering was less successful, however. Eduardo de Fillipo's La Grande Magia, translated incorrectly, according to John Simon, as Grand Magic, by Carlo Ardito, was directed by Michael Kahn. (Simon contends the title should be "The Great (or even The Greater) Magic--a reference to the illusions of life that are a greater magic than anything dreamed of by a professional magician"),¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Marilyn Stasio, "Theatre," The New York Post, December 5, 1978, p. 44.

¹⁵⁶ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, December 11, 1978, p. 57.

¹⁵⁷ Debbi Wasserman, New York Theatre Review, January, 1979, p. 40.

¹⁵⁸ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, January 22, 1979, p. 65.

While Matthew Ruderman of Show Business, highlighted the "Strong production values and winsome performances (which) do much to inspirit this cleverly plotted tale" of a magician who uses his skill to cuckold and deceive a wealthy man; and further notes, "The technical elements of the production are uniformly splendid,"¹⁵⁹ his observations stood apart from most other reviewers.

Richard Eder described the show as a "rickety production, with fallen archness," adding, "the production is coarse, clumsy and heavy-handed."¹⁶⁰ Edith Oliver noted, "The actors . . . seem ill at ease, hampered, no doubt, by the awkward, prosy translation,"¹⁶¹ and, characteristically, John Simon offered the harshest words, describing the play as "Pirandello for pygmies," continuing, "Michael Kahn's direction suffers from directorial anorexia."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Matthew Ruderman, "Grand Magic," Show Business, January 18, 1979, p. 19.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Eder, "Grand Magic," The New York Times, January 8, 1979, p. C-15.

¹⁶¹ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, January 22, 1979, p. 88.

¹⁶² John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, January 22, 1979, p. 65.

Nevertheless, Clive Barnes declared, "The actors, at least most of them are super. . . . Ed Wittstein's settings and Andrew B. Marlay's costumes all assisted a play that probably needed as much assistance as it could get."¹⁶³ Barnes's criticism falls in line with a substantial number of the Club's to reviews to date, indicating that the cause of dissatisfaction was not with the production, but with the selection of the play produced. Interesting to note, the Manhattan Theatre Club tended to fare better, critically, with producing new works than with mounting revivals. The 1949 de Fillipo play was one of several revivals to meet with general critical disapproval.

The play which followed in the Downstage series was a new work by Joanna McClelland Glass, called Artichoke, about a love-starved farmer's wife in Saskatchewan, Canada. Margaret, who has banished her husband from her bed but not her house, is committed to raising his illegitimate daughter, by another woman, as her own child. Into this passionless relationship steps Gibson, her stepbrother, who woos her and displaces her husband for the six weeks of his visit. After Gibson's departure, husband and wife are reconciled.

¹⁶³ Clive Barnes, "Theatre," The New York Post, January 3, 1979, p. 39.

The New Yorker described the play as a "delightfully eccentric comedy, noting, "Lynne Meadow has directed it firmly and with an awareness of its subtle changes in tone."¹⁶⁴ John Simon theorized, "this is a full-length play intended, one gathers, to say something about existence. 'Wherever I go, I find too much life,' exclaims Gibson, but he is dead wrong as far as Artichoke is concerned--one chokes on its artiness."¹⁶⁵ Simon goes on to praise the work of some of the performers, adding, "Lynne Meadow has directed amiably, but to little avail."¹⁶⁶

Otis Guernsey includes mention of the play in his annual review of the season, describing it as "droll," but adding "MTC was not exactly a haven for American dramaturgy in its main efforts of 1978-79, nor was this one of their vintage years in other departments."¹⁶⁷

Of the four Downstage productions which were reviewed this season, (the Club's final production, The Arbor, was not reviewed), none were cited as significant literary

¹⁶⁴ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, March 5, 1979, p. 92.

¹⁶⁵ John Simon, "Triumphs of the Will," New York Magazine, March 26, 1979, p. 95.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1978-79, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1979), p. 32.

works. Nearly all were praised for their production values; however, the last production to be reviewed, Ödön von Horvath's Don Juan Comes Back from the War, in a new translation by Christopher Hampton, was termed a "rather uncertain and untidy production"¹⁶⁸ by Richard Eder of The New York Times, a description which was echoed by Clive Barnes and John Simon. Only Douglas Watt of The New York Daily News stood apart, commenting, it is "a sulfurously fascinating piece of work. . . . Stephen Pascal has staged this strangely compelling play . . . with a becoming . . . directness."¹⁶⁹

The Upstage series did not fare much better, in terms of reviews. Following the cool reception of Nongogo, the Upstage production of Beethoven/Karl, about the relationship between Ludwig von Beethoven and his obedient and misused nephew, Karl, received an even more frosty reception. Richard Eder described the play as "poorly written and tedious."¹⁷⁰ Edith Oliver noted, "it doesn't even make a

¹⁶⁸ Richard Eder, "Stage: 'Don Juan' Legend," The New York Times, April 16, 1979, p. C-12.

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Watt, "Theatre," The New York Daily News, April 16, 1979, p. 23.

¹⁷⁰ Richard Eder, "Beethoven/Karl," The New York Times, January 23, 1979, p. C-7.

play,"¹⁷¹ while Terry Curtis Fox, in The Village Voice, declared the play "is not a success."¹⁷²

The subsequent production was, however, a success, and was clearly the highlight of this season's Upstage series. Roberta Maxwell, under the direction of Brian Murray, her acting partner in the Club's exemplary 1975 production of Ashes, received excellent reviews for her portrayal of the British poet, Stevie Smith, in Hugh Whitemore's Stevie.

"Stevie," wrote Edith Oliver, "is, among many admirable things, the occasion for a remarkable performance by Roberta Maxwell."¹⁷³ Richard Eder stated, "Stevie is a modest, low-key play, and one that is not without its rewards. Prime among them is Miss Maxwell, who manages to keep her character childlike . . . without ever seeming foolish. Her Stevie wins our allegiance with her honesty. . . ."¹⁷⁴

And John Simon praised the production, noting,

¹⁷¹ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, January 14, 1979, p. 46.

¹⁷² Terry Curtis Fox, The Village Voice, January 29, 1979, p. 77.

¹⁷³ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, February 26, 1979, p. 78.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Eder, "Stage: 'Stevie' Dramatizes Poet's Life," The New York Times, February 19, 1979, p. C-12.

Brian Murray has directed with sensitivity and simplicity, and he has elicited three superlative performances. Roberta Maxwell glows brownly as Stevie, like a shiny horse chestnut freshly stripped of its spiny husk. The mischeviously quizzical smile, the tomboyish voice with its scratchy edges, the slightly strident movements laughing at their own brashness, the general air of bravado of a child alone after lights-out--all this is perfect. As Aunt Lion, Margaret Hilton is wonderfully like Stevie's description of her in a poem: "Faithful and True Tranquil. Also sardonic." . . . As Man, or men. . . . James Higgins gives a performance of extreme directness and decency, disarmingly unactorish.¹⁷⁵

He concludes by noting, "By the time you read this, Stevie will have finished its brief run at the Manhattan Theatre Club; it would be an act of supreme kindness to bring it back in a somewhat larger space for so long as there are people who want to bask in its unsoggy, frisky goodness."¹⁷⁶

The transfer did not occur. However, while Stevie had no after life, the following Upstage offering did. John Hopkins's Losing Time, with an impressive cast including Jane Alexander, Shirley Knight and Tony Roberts, was presented in the Upstage during March and April of 1979, and was mounted to open the Downstage series during the 1979-1980 season.

¹⁷⁵ John Simon, "Stevie's Little Wonders," New York Magazine, March 12, 1979, p. 74.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Losing Time was written specifically for Shirley Knight, the wife of the author, and Jane Alexander, the wife of Edwin Sherin, who directed the show.¹⁷⁷ Like Hopkin's previous two plays, Find Your Way Home and Always Another Time, Losing Time is a work which focusses on sexuality.

The three act play opens with the appearance of Ruth (Shirley Knight), bleeding, with her clothing torn, at the home of her friend, Joanne (Jane Alexander). She relates, through three conflicting stories in the first act, that she has been sexually molested, although it is later made clear that she, in fact, had brought on the attack. A telephone call for help to her husband, from whom she is separated, ends in a theatrical emotional display in which the telephone is hurled across the stage, a coffee table is overturned and and Ruth howls like a dog. Shortly thereafter, the two women enter into a lesbian relationship and plot a massive campaign to castrate the male population of the city. The appearance of Tod (Tony Roberts), who has been involved with both women, provides for another display of violence. Joanne, having conceded to a pummelling at the fists of Ruth, is nearly strangled by Tod, while Ruth is merely beaten by him before he announces that he wants to -----

¹⁷⁷ Carol Lawson, "Manhattan Club's First," The New York Times, August 15, 1979, p. C-18.

marry her. The final revelation is that Joanne slept with Ruth's husband before their separation. She explains, "They've changed the rules."¹⁷⁸

As a work in progress, the Upstage production was not reviewed; however, Lynne Meadow spoke of it in an interview shortly before the opening of Losing Time in the theatre's Downstage. While granting that the play is "very raw and explosive," she pointed up that what was most significant about the production was that it was given the chance to evolve through various stages of development at the Club. "I don't want to sound arrogant," she explained,

but to me Losing Time is already a success because the process of doing it has been so exhilarating. First we did it as a reading, then a workshop, and now we are taking the next step--a full production. All along, the play was worked on and went through changes. This process is exactly what we're about. We are a working theatre,¹⁷⁹ and it's important that we remind people of this.

The need to reinforce the identity of the Manhattan Theatre Club as a non-commercial theatre was a negative consequence of the Broadway transfer of Ain't Misbehavin'. The public, she cited, as well as commercial producers had come to expect offerings of a similar nature from the Club. It

¹⁷⁸ John Hopkins, Losing Time, (manuscript).

¹⁷⁹ Carol Lawson, "Manhattan Club's First," The New York Times, August 15, 1979, p. C-18.

was for this reason that the reaction to the 1978-1979 season by producers and critics was subdued. "Variety" called our last season 'lackluster,'" she explained, "as if the criterion is how many plays we can send to Broadway. . . . This isn't a marketplace."¹⁸⁰

However, the climate of Off-Broadway was undergoing change. Given the financial realities of producing in New York, commercial producers were looking more and more to the Off-Broadway arena for properties to mount commercially. Consequentially, new implicit demands were placed on Off-Broadway theatres in order for them to maintain their reputations. As Otis Guernsey noted in his analysis of the 1979-1980 season, "it is the successes, the transfers to Broadway and other hits, by which an Off-Broadway season is judged these days."¹⁸¹

To maintain the identity of a non-commercial theatre in an environment growing increasingly more commercial requires tenacity of purpose and some element of compromise. The Manhattan Theatre Club evidenced both. Entering into the 1980s, with its 1979-1980 season opening of Losing Time, the Manhattan Theatre Club was entering another period of its

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1979-1980, (Dodd, Meade and Company, 1980), p. 27.

development; a period of transitions.

Chapter VI

OBSTACLES AND TRANSITIONS, 1980-1986

"Everyone at the Manhattan Theatre Club is very brave," began Richard Eder's devastatingly sarcastic review of the Downstage production of Losing Time.

John Hopkins, for instance, is the author of the Club's current offering, "Losing Time," and he has not only written a play, but he has also written a play in three acts. Virtually unheard of nowadays. That perhaps does not seem particularly courageous to you. And, considering that the evening's caterwauling continues for a full three hours, it may very well seem simply humane. But consider. Two intermissions give the audience two superb opportunities to slip away furtively into the night. A real chance taker, this Mr. Hopkins.¹

The review continues, obliterating the writing, the acting and every other aspect of the production with wit of the most razor-sharp variety. It was not the most auspicious beginning for the Club's 1979-1980 season.

Edith Oliver titled her review of the show, "Time Lost," and it seems out of kindness to the performers, provided the briefest of descriptions of the play, condemning

¹ Richard Eder, "The Theatre: 'Losing Time' With Jane Alexander," The New York Times, October 1, 1979, p. C-16.

it as "glum and depressing without even touching tragedy,"² and closing with some conciliatory remarks about the courage of the actors to perform such a script. The review was entirely consistent with others written of the production. The play was considered a harsh polemic of human callousness by the critics, and one which failed to succeed dramatically. John Simon described it as "raping the audience,"³ while Variety dismissed it as "A terrible play about women and sex."⁴

On the other hand, Robert Brustein noted that it had "force and courage, commendable qualities in a theatre not usually known for its bravery."⁵ He went on to describe the production as "Ferocious, vitriolic, febrile, scorching, the sounds and sights of this evening are not pleasant; you leave the theatre feeling as if someone has ground glass into your ears and eyes."⁶ To Brustein, the production, if not the script, was dramatic.

² Edith Oliver, "Off Broadway: Time Lost," The New Yorker, October 15, 1979, p. 148.

³ John Simon, "Raping the Audience," New York Magazine October 15, 1979, p. 82.

⁴ Variety, November 3, 1979, p. 88.

⁵ Robert Brustein, "The Theatre," The New Republic, November 10, 1979, p. 25.

⁶ Ibid.

Similarly, for Jack Kroll, writing for Newsweek, the performances outweighed the play. "It's doubtful," he wrote, "that the new season will produce a more shocking and disturbing play than John Hopkins's Losing Time, or one with stronger women's roles than those played by Shirley Knight and Jane Alexander."⁷ The Manhattan Theatre Club continued to maintain a standard of high quality production.

Interestingly, however, to John Simon, the Club's theatre laboratory policy proved ineffective in this instance. He reported of the developmental work which preceded the Downstage production,

An additional problem appears to be that Losing Time has had too many readings and workshop productions, that too much improvising and revising has gone into it, until the whole thing looks like a elaborate mosaic whose tesserae, though polished to death,⁸ have also been eroded and no longer fit together.

While the program notes for the play include a statement that John Hopkins had just been named Playwright-in-residence for the 1979-1980 season, this relationship, in fact, never fully materialized. Numerous writers, including Joanthan Levy, Corinne Jacker, and A. R. Gurney, held the

⁷ Jack Kroll, "Brutal Battle of the Sexes," Newsweek, October 8, 1979, p. 107.

⁸ John Simon, "Raping the Audience," New York Magazine, October 15, 1979, p. 82.

title of Playwright-in-residence at different times, but the position was more of an informal affiliation with the theatre than a true commission. The 1982 production of Steve Metcalfe's Strange Snow was a commissioned work, but is the only such work in the theatre's history.

"We never had residences," explains Lynne Meadow, "It's very difficult to have residences without a company." One consequence of installing resident playwrights is that it can restrict what a theatre can offer in the course of a season; something Meadow chose to avoid. "Playwrights' Horizons had a resident group of playwrights, and they produced (just) those playwrights' work," she says, adding,

I haven't limited myself. And I think also that . . . I've had such a strong international inclination; that I've wanted to produce the work of English playwrights, and Hungarian playwrights, and French playwrights . . . and clearly I wasn't going⁹ to be able to have those people in residence, so.

For whatever reason, Losing Time was the only Hopkins' play to be produced at the Club.

Ice, by the American playwright Michael Cristofer, author of The Shadow Box, which won the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for Best Play in 1977, opened the theatre's Upstage series. The three character play takes place in Alaska,

⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 2.

and focusses on Murph, a young man who purchases a small shack in the wilderness in an attempt to become more in touch with nature. For reasons not fully made clear, he agrees to give shelter to a scrofulous vagrant named Ray, and to a sexually promiscuous woman named Sunshine. In the course of the brief play, in which obscenity and scatology are abundant, everyone sleeps with everyone else, and Ray and Murph, in effect, reverse roles.

The Upstage series, still not operating a full Equity contract, was described for its audience in "Showbill" as,

a workshop for new plays, playwrights and composers. As a space for familiar as well as new voices in the theatre, the series provides a place where playwrights, composers, actors and directors can begin the investigation of a project's potential. Each production in the Upstage/Cabaret is also an investment in a particular playwright/composer, aimed at influencing his next work as much as perfecting the present one.

The description concludes, "The emphasis is on the development of a work-in-progress, in an unpressured atmosphere, rather than on a finished play or musical with extensive production values."¹⁰ It was perhaps to permit the play to develop in performance that the production ran three weeks in previews and less than a week after officially opening. John Simon, however, saw another explanation.

¹⁰ "Showbill" for Ice, (October 9, 1979-November 4, 1979).

Simon, whose use of an obscenity in describing The Shadow Box on a television talk show caused much commotion with producers two years earlier, took the opportunity to vigorously re-state how untalented he believed the author to be. He noted of the length of the run, "In a curious maneuver, Ice was offered for several weeks of previews, but only one performance; that's one way of preventing criticism from closing your show."¹¹

Of course, in the past, shows which were not considered to be in a state ready for critical reception were simply never officially opened; this, in an attempt to circumvent the pressures associated with the "hit or flop" syndrome prevalent in New York City. It was perhaps unfortunate that such a decision was not made in the case of Ice, for the reviews of the theatre club's second offering of the 1979-1980 season were consistently negative. Simon's New York Magazine review began,

The worthy Manhattan Theatre Club, still reeling (figuratively) from the disastrous Losing Time, has come up with a workshop production of Ice, by Michael Cristofer, which enjoys the one distinction of managing, in a much shorter compass, to be about as offensive as its predecessor. . . . But Cristofer adds his own brand of insufferable pseudo-poetry and obfuscatory symbolism that symbolizes nothing, as well as a highly developed pre-

¹¹ John Simon, New York Magazine, November 12, 1979, p. 130.

tentiousness to which the author of Losing Time can as yet only aspire.¹²

Mel Gussow, in The New York Times, described it as "unfocussed and unsavory--a self-parody whose best feature is its brevity."¹³ The audience, too, was far from satisfied. Of those responding to the theatre's audience development survey, sixty-seven percent categorized the production as poor. In comparison, fifty-two percent had rated Losing Time as fair to poor; forty-eight percent considered it good to excellent.¹⁴

The survey further reveals that during the 1979-1980 season, the average respondent was forty-six years of age, with an average income of \$29,953. More than half of the respondents were women, were married, and had graduate degrees. Nearly eight percent had incomes in excess of \$100,000. And, according to Harold Clurman and John Simon, many patrons tended to be restless and rude, as illustrated during the run of the Club's second Downstage offering for the season, The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs, adapted by David Edgar, and directed by Lynne Meadow.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mel Gussow, "Stage: Cristofer's 'Ice,'" The New York Times, November 2, 1979, p. C-5.

¹⁴ Audience development survey for 1979-1980, p. 2.

The play, the first of the season to attract positive critical attention, was adapted from the actual diaries written by Albie Sachs, a white South African lawyer, following his release in 1963 from solitary confinement on charges of political dissidence. Sachs, politically aware but not radical, was confined under South Africa's "90-days law," which allows authorities to arrest and detain suspects for renewable periods of several months. He was kept in solitary confinement for nearly half a year, with isolation his only form of punishment. The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs documents how he dealt with that uniquely painful punishment.

"To give the audience some notion of what solitary confinement must feel like," Harold Clurman reported in his review of the play, "we are bidden to remain motionless (at the end of the first act), staring at the blank wall of Albie's prison cell for two solid minutes. It was interesting to observe that many were unable to do so."¹⁵ Clurman went on to praise the "elocutionary skill" of Brian Murray in the title role, and added, "the entire cast is first rate."¹⁶

¹⁵ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, December 8, 1979.

¹⁶ Ibid.

John Simon lauded the play as "one of the most powerful stage works to come out of South Africa," continuing with a twofold observation of the play and its audience,

It is pitiful that it should take the brutality of apartheid to produce some of the most haunting drama of our time, but inspiriting that such drama gets written, whether or not our audiences want or deserve it. Those at the Manhattan Theatre Club are particularly crass and unruly. Take the young couple that came in just as the play began: Swathed in furs and carrying brimful glasses, they proceeded to undress, drink, rattle ice cubes, and chatter inanely through the most moving scenes, not to mention their trampling on my feet. They were, however, a useful reminder that the scandal of South Africa could happen here.¹⁷

Focussing on the play, he notes,

As Albie, Brian Murray gives a complex, munificent, subtly chiseled yet ultimately towering performance. . . . Although this performance alone makes the play a must, there is also uniformly fine supporting work from the entire cast, the cogent direction of Lynne Meadow, the set design of John¹⁸ Lee Beatty, and Jennifer Tipton's lighting.

Mel Gussow compared the play to the works of Fugard and determined that Edgar's adaptation lacked the intensity and profundity characteristic of Fugard, but concluded that the play "is meant to be--and is--instructive, a cautionary lesson about the extent of apartheid, the debilitating effect

¹⁷ John Simon, "Theatre: More Than We Deserve," New York Magazine, December 3, 1979, p. 109.

¹⁸ Ibid.

it has on whites as well as on blacks, on a nation as well as on its 'citizenry.'"¹⁹

With The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs, Lynne Meadow was able to change the direction of the season, and regain the positive attention of the critics. The production also caught the admiration of the audience, deserving or otherwise, with eighty percent of those who rated the production categorizing it as good to excellent. A similar rating was given to the Cabaret's one-woman show with Nacha Guevara, an internationally renowned cabaret artist, who made her first extended appearance in New York at the Manhattan Theatre Club during November and December of 1979. Seventy-six percent considered the evening's entertainment to be good to excellent. But such a rating was not repeated with the Club's next Downstage offering, a production of Samuel Beckett's Endgame.

Beckett was well represented in the Off Broadway circuit during the 1979-1980 season. Joseph Papp staged a production of Happy Days, starring Irene Worth, at the Public Theatre, and the New York Shakespeare Festival was also the home of an adaptation of Beckett's novel, Mercier & Camier,

¹⁹ Mel Gussow, "Stage: 'Jail Diary of Albie Sachs,' on South Africa," The New York Times, November 19, 1979, p. C-15.

by Frederick Neumann.²⁰ Endgame, a classic Beckett work which, as Robert Brustein makes note, "one often finds in conventional resident theatres, produced out of homage to the modern repertory,"²¹ attracted interest when produced at the Club because it was directed by Joseph Chaikin.

Chaikin, founder of The Open Theatre, and a major name in the avant garde theatrical movement, is both an actor and a director. At the time of this production, he was in fact performing in Sam Shepard's Tongues/Savage Love, at the Public Theatre. The Open Theatre had, in fact, staged Endgame in 1970, with Chaikin performing the role of Hamm, the blind tyrannical protagonist. In the Manhattan Theatre Club production, the role was played by Daniel Seltzer. Clov, Hamm's dependent, put-upon servant, was played by Michael Gross; and Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents who appear periodically emerging from their ash can confines, were played by James Barbosa and Joan MacIntosh.

Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett's biographer, notes that Endgame, the translation Beckett insists upon of the original title, Fin de Partie, was begun as a conscious intellec-

²⁰ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1979-1980, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1980), p. 38.

²¹ Robert Brustein, "Robert Brustein on Theatre," The New Republic, February 9, 1980, p. 26.

tual exercise which became transformed into an exercise of theatrical techniques. Beginning with Endgame, Beckett shows greater and greater concern for dramatic exactitude,²² permitting less and less interpretative leeway on the part of actors and directors. Chaikin, who in an interview stated, "When I work in a classic text, I have no interest in tampering with it,"²³ did not, however, remain entirely faithful to the author's demands. Beckett specifies, for example, that the two ash cans which house Nagg and Nell be separate; in Chaikin's production, a rectangular double bin was used. Also, various stage directions were modified or ignored.

These slight changes did not bother Mel Gussow, who described the production as "authoritative," with a "virtuoso performance" by Daniel Seltzer who, with Michael Gross, formed a "peerless tragicomic couple." The use of "a trash box built for two" he considered an "ingenueous variation."²⁴

²² Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography, (Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, 1978), p. 464.

²³ Leah D. Frank, "Joseph Chaikin Stages Beckett's 'Comedy About Suffering,'" The New York Times, January 13, 1980, p. B-5.

²⁴ Mel Gussow, "The Stage: Chaikin Directs Beckett's 'Endgame,'" The New York Times, January 14, 1980, p. C-12.

Neither Robert Brustein nor Harold Clurman objected to the staging, although both indicated that the production lacked the urgency the play requires to maintain interest. Brustein noted that the performances "lacked conviction,"²⁵ while Clurman found the production "clear and forceful" but often "strained" in terms of delivery.²⁶

Edith Oliver noted, "there were a few unwelcome novelities--Clov is too much of a vaudevillian at the start, playing more silly tricks with a ladder than the stage directions indicate--but Beckett's intentions are made clear at every point."²⁷

Chaikin presumably introduced the additional comic stage business to reinforce his concept of the play as "entertainment at the border of despair. It's like a war where show people come to entertain."²⁸ For this reason, he also requested the designers to soften their designs and provide a greater sense of warmth than is usually associated with -----

²⁵ Robert Brustein, "Robert Brustein on Theatre," The New Republic, February 9, 1980, p. 26.

²⁶ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, February 16, 1980, p. 187.

²⁷ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, January 21, 1980, p. 96.

²⁸ Leah D. Frank, "Joseph Chaikin Stages Beckett's 'Comedy About Suffering,'" The New York Times, January 13, 1980, p. B-5.

the play. While Brustein merely found this "softening," particularly in terms of lighting design, inappropriate, John Simon, a staunch admirer of Beckett, found it unforgivable.

In his review entitled "Murder at the Manhattan," Simon wrote, "Joseph Chaikin's staging of Endgame, does to Samuel Beckett at the Manhattan Theatre Club what the four knights did to his namesake Thomas at Canterbury Cathedral." He continues, ". . . Chaikin seems to be ignorant of--or to have deliberately ignored--the readily available accounts of how Beckett himself has staged this, his preferred play." He concludes with a reference to the exchange which Beckett admitted to be his favorite in the play,²⁹ the moment when Clov observes that Nagg is crying, and Hamm responds, "Then he's living." Said Simon, "Let me put it this way: A production in which the play's most moving moment can fall utterly, unmovingly flat is worse than no production at all. And the warm lighting by Beverly Emmons is the final injury."³⁰

²⁹ Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), p. 468.

³⁰ John Simon, "Murder at the Manhattan," New York Magazine, January 29, 1980, p. 58.

Simon, however, stood alone with this harsh review. For most, the Manhattan Theatre Club production was merely another revival of Endgame.

The Club returned from the timeless setting of Beckett's work to a contemporary setting with three one-act plays from the Welsh playwright John Gwilym Jones, in an evening called One Wedding, Two Rooms, Three Friends, directed by Thomas Bullard. As with the earlier Downstage productions of Losing Time and Ice, these pieces focussed on male-female relationships in a cynical light, and were not well received. Mel Gussow called the plays, which were presented in the Upstage, "slight and familiar," and concluded, "the evening consists of three friends, two rooms, one wedding, no play."³¹

With the next Upstage offering, the theme of discord between the sexes was repeated. Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi, by Pam Gems, deals with four women living in an apartment in London. The play was originally written for a feminist theatre in England, was first produced at the Hampstead Theatre and moved to London's West End in 1977. The New York Times review noted that "in it there is a militant line of anti-male chauvinism. The men, who never appear, are the vil-

³¹ Mel Gussow, "Stage: Welsh One-Acters," The New York Times, January 29, 1980, p. C-8.

lains of the piece," and summarized, "the evening is enticing in isolated moments, but it loses rather than gathers momentum."³²

Jack Kroll, writing for Newsweek, was more complimentary, and viewed the play in a somewhat different light. He wrote, "without sentimentality or forced anger (Gems) intimates that no one--female or male--can avoid being some kind of victim as society and psyche come apart at the seams. Director Nancy Meckler and the four actresses create the scary feeling of highly intelligent creatures caught not in a trap but in a universe of traps." Focussing on the Club, he noted, significantly,

No other theatre in the U.S. has more interesting play selection than New York's Manhattan Theatre Club under its dynamic artistic director, Lynne Meadow. One of her specialities is bringing in foreign work that would otherwise not be seen here. . . . The MTC doesn't produce plays as one-shot hits or misses, it acts as a prism for the very idea of theatre around the world.³³

The next Downstage offering was not a foreign work, but a revival--the first in forty-seven years--of S. N. Behrman's Biography, a star vehicle written for the actress Ina Claire, and originally produced by The Theatre Guild. At -----

³² Mel Gussow, "Play: 'Dusa, Fish, Stas,'" The New York Times, March 3, 1980, p. C-13.

³³ Jack Kroll, "Four of a Kind," Newsweek, March 10, 1980, p. 101.

the Manhattan Theatre Club, it was directed by Lynne Meadow, with Piper Laurie in the leading role.

Brendan Gill, in The New Yorker, described the show as an "overzealous" production of a well crafted play,³⁴ while both Walter Kerr and Clive Barnes faulted the direction as stylistically uncertain and often strained. On the other hand, Douglas Watt described Meadow's staging as "graceful."³⁵ Overall, the performances were praised, but the production was not categorized as outstanding.

As the 1979-1980 season drew to a close, it appeared that, with the exception of The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs, it was a disappointment, critically. The Manhattan Theatre Club was not alone in this situation, however. Otis Guernsey noted, "an off-Broadway season is sometimes more activity than productivity. This was certainly the case this season." He further adds, "Among the new works there seemed to be an inordinately large amount of wasted effort even for an experimental arena, particularly in the area of organizational production. Artistic directors were distracted, perhaps, by offstage economic and/or social problems, or were

³⁴ Brendan Gill, "Theatre," The New Yorker, March 31, 1980, p. 93.

³⁵ Douglas Watt, "Biography," The New York Daily News, March 17, 1980, p. 43.

simply having an off year."³⁶ In the case of the theatre club, it would seem the latter applied, for the major problems to which Guernsey refers--specifically, the aforementioned difficulties between Equity and Off- and Off-Off-Broadway theatres--did not directly influence the Club. At the time, the Downstage was operating on a full Off-Broadway contract, and the Upstage utilized the mini-contract. It was only a year before the second stage would also become a full Equity operation.

With the season near its conclusion, the theatre club opened its final Downstage production. A new play, by an unknown author, Geraldine Fitzgerald's direction of Bill C. Davis's Mass Appeal attracted unanimous positive attention.

The play is the story of an idealistic young seminarian whose path crosses that of a middle-aged priest with a love for sparkling burgundy and an expensive car provided by the parish. Father Tim Farley, played in this production by Milo O'Shea, understands the politics of keeping his wine cabinet stocked, and does little to jostle his congregation. Seminarian Mark Dolson, played by Eric Roberts, asks hard questions and makes uncompromising judgements, incurring the displeasure of Church authorities. On the verge of being

³⁶ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1979-1980 (Dodd Mead and Company (1980), p. 35.

expelled from the seminary, Dolson is brought under the tutelage of Father Farley. The opposition of personalities and ideologies results in a bond of friendship between the two men which the playwright develops through a series of comic scenes and doleful reminiscences.

The production represented a double premiere: for the author and for the director. For Bill C. Davis, the production was the first of his plays to be produced in New York. With a collection of seven full-length plays and fifteen one-acters produced by friends on a small scale outside the city--many with characters based on priests and nuns whom he had encountered in the course of his Catholic school education--the Manhattan Theatre Club production introduced his work to New York critics.

For Geraldine Fitzgerald, an actress with forty years of professional experience, Mass Appeal marked her professional directorial debut. She had received a copy of the play in the mail from a friend of Davis's, who was, in fact, a priest. "I skim through a lot of plays," she says, "but this one had life in it. In my mind, that takes precedence over all the other qualities that a play can have."³⁷ She met with Davis, who agreed to rework the play with her. Af-

³⁷ Robert Blair Kaiser, "A Playwright's Clerical Insight," The New York Times, June 13, 1980, p. C-3.

ter four drafts and four workshop performances at Circle Repertory Theatre, she contacted Lynne Meadow.

The show began previews during the end of April and opened to glowing reviews in early May. Frank Rich declared,

There are few more invigorating theatrical experiences than hearing the voice of a gifted writer for the first time. That is the excitement to be found these nights at the Manhattan Theatre Club. Bill C. Davis, the author of a new play called Mass Appeal, has never before had a full-length work produced in New York, but he's not going to be a stranger anymore. Mr. Davis is a natural: He writes with wit, passion and a sure sense of stagecraft. While Mass Appeal is unlikely to be the most ambitious endeavor of his career, it is, on its own modest terms, flawless. For that matter, so is the production, which marks the smashing directorial debut of the actress Geraldine Fitzgerald.³⁸

To John Simon, the play was passionate and funny. "True," he wrote, "Davis tends to steer toward slightly oversimplified comedy (but funny!); yet this very strategy makes the moments of impassioned audacity and sickening failure stand out all the more movingly or sorrowfully." Of the performances and staging, he noted,

Milo O'Shea . . . achieves a comely blend of cynicism and vulnerability, boldness and deflation, fading manipulateness and growing humanity; were he in the pulpit, I might be converted to churchgoing. As for Eric Roberts, his Mark . . . is

³⁸ Frank Rich, "The Stage: Bill C. Davis's 'Mass Appeal,'" The New York Times, May 12, 1980, p. C-13.

achingly felt and firmly conveyed; the performance has range and richness of shading. Moreover, seldom have two actors looked so right. They have been shrewdly paced and held neither too tightly nor too flaccidly by Geraldine Fitzgerald's wise and generous direction, in which even the most complicated, knockabout stage business is executed with startling spontaneity and without a hitch. The physical production, though modest, has the warmth of an adequate little red wine.³⁹

The production received similar words of praise from Clive Barnes, Harold Clurman, Walter Kerr, Jack Kroll and T. E. Kalem, who concluded that Geraldine Fitzgerald "subtly and surely . . . weaves a mantle of sentiment without sentimentality, and provides off-Broadway's Manhattan Theatre Club with a luminous seasonal swan song."⁴⁰

So popular was the production that the Club, which as a rule did not produce during the summer, extended the run through August, while preparations were made to move the show to Broadway. The season, which had begun so ominously, ended with the Club again receiving the critics' praise and respect.

It also ended by attracting the interest of producers, both of theatre and film. By the time the play reached Broadway, more than a year later, it had numerous producers:

³⁹ John Simon, "Religion, Magic and Idle Worship," New York Magazine, June 2, 1980, p. 49.

⁴⁰ Jack Kroll, "Gift of Grace," Time Magazine, May 26, 1980, p. 84.

Elizabeth McCann, Nelle Nugent, Ray Larsen, in association with Lynne Meadow, Barry Grove and Warner Theatre Productions, Inc. The delay in transferring the show to Broadway was the result of the desire to keep Milo O'Shea and Eric Roberts in the roles they had created. O'Shea had a prior commitment to perform in a touring production of My Fair Lady that culminated in a run at the Uris Theatre in New York. When his contract expired in September of 1981, he returned to rehearse Mass Appeal, which was scheduled to open at the Booth Theatre in New York on October 28, 1981, following a Boston tryout run.

The opening, however, was again delayed because Roberts, who had sustained injuries in a car accident, chose to leave the show after it opened in Boston, to continue his recuperation. He was replaced by Michael O'Keefe, and the opening was moved back to November 11th.

The Broadway production was generally well received. Jack Kroll believed it to be better than the show presented at the Manhattan Theatre Club,⁴¹ while Frank Rich considered the Broadway version "somewhat inferior to its predecessor."⁴² Kroll was impressed by Michael O'Keefe's por-

⁴¹ Jack Kroll, "Holy War," Newsweek, November 23, 1981, p. 123.

⁴² Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Mass Appeal' Comes to Broad-

trayal of the rebellious young seminarian, Rich was disappointed by it, but both agreed that O'Shea's work was superlative and, noted Rich, was "the finest performance of his New York career."

While Mass Appeal must be viewed as a salient production in the history of the Manhattan Theatre Club, in that it represented another major transfer, it did not meet with the kind of universal approval that Ain't Misbehavin' encountered. "Mass Appeal opened very poorly,"⁴³ notes Barry Grove, in a statement that could be characterized as ironic, describing the box office sales from the Broadway run. After joining Ain't Misbehavin' on Broadway, Mass Appeal ran for 214 performances, but when the 1980-1981 season drew to a close, Ain't Misbehavin' was still running with over 1,200 hundred performances to date.

Within the Club, staff changes were occurring. Jonathan Alper was hired as the theatre's Literary Manager at the start of the 1980-1981 season. Given his position, it is interesting to consider his reaction to Davis's play. Declares Alper, "Well, I hate Mass Appeal. . . . I just loathe it. I think it's a commissioned piece of Boulevard

way," The New York Times, November 13, 1981, p. C-5.

⁴³ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 17.

trifle."⁴⁴ Alper was not on staff when the decision was made to produce Mass Appeal, but it is apparent that he would have opposed the production.

Jonathan Alper, in effect, served as the replacement for Stephen Pascal, the Manhattan Theatre Club's Associate Artistic Director until 1980. Pascal had been hired in 1975 as Casting and Literary Director, and the following year was named Associate Artistic Director. In his five years with the Club, he directed four productions: David E. Freeman's Battering Ram in 1975, Gert Hoffman's The Son, in a new translation by Jon Swan in 1976, Stephen Poliakoff's Strawberry Fields in 1978, and Don Juan Comes Back from the War, by Ödön von Horvath, in a translation by Christopher Hampton in 1979. He was also directly responsible for selecting the script of Ashes in 1975, the production of the Fugard plays, and to a large extent, the Club's leaning towards producing European works.

"He was a friend of Lynne's, she raved about him,"⁴⁵ recalls Board member A. Joseph Tandet of Pascal's tenure with the Club. "The quality of production--of literary merit--really increased during his time," credits Thomas Bul-

⁴⁴ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Interview with A. Joseph Tandet, 6/28/83, p. 17.

lard, "he set the standards for that and made a big contribution."⁴⁶ Jonathan Alper, who had worked for Pascal as a play reader, adds,

"I'm sure his taste had a lot to do with the kind of plays that were done early on. I'm sure he and Lynne agreed on a lot of that, but . . . his taste tended towards the rawer or the darker sort of play . . . he obviously cared a lot about the work that was going on here, and he . . . left his imprint on the organization."⁴⁷

Pascal left the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1980, apparently disgruntled over being unable to attain greater recognition within the institution for his contributions. "He made an enormous contribution while he was here," comments Thomas Bullard, but

he wanted more, he wanted more than there was to be offered. . . . He was not happy with the way the separation occurred, but . . . that's one of the instances . . . where a real tough decision (had to be made) There were personality, temperment incompatibilities,⁴⁸ as well as financial incompatibilities, so

With Pascal's departure, there occurred a subtle shift in the kinds of plays selected for production, although there was no definitive change in the Club's artistic policy. Says Jonathan Alper, "I think it's changed some since

⁴⁶ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 7.

he left . . . I think, if anything, we've gone a little more mainstream . . . but that's also a function of money and size and visibility as much as aesthetic viewpoint."⁴⁹

Perhaps the success of Mass Appeal at the close of the 1979-1980 season provided a kind of momentum which carried over to the following season, but whatever the reason, the Manhattan Theatre Club was to become a theatrical incubator of sorts, hatching a series of interesting works in a season which was generally considered to be mediocre at best.

"We know for certain that in 1980-81 some climatic influence was altering the very personality of the New York stage, and not for the better,"⁵⁰ notes Otis Guernsey in his review of the season. The malaise was pervasive, affecting both Broadway and Off-Broadway, brought about by any number of factors including rising costs and the continuing dispute between Actors' Equity Association, its membership and dramatists over the unpopular Showcase code.

Commencing its first year as a full Equity operation, the Club was now removed from the issue of the Showcase code, and was producing in very healthy fashion. The season, which Guernsey characterized as "exceptionally distin-

⁴⁹ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1980-1981, (Dodd Mead and Company, 1981) p. 3.

guished" opened with a Downstage production of Stephen Metcalfe's play, Vikings, directed by Lynne Meadow. A family drama, the play focusses on a family of craftsman and the ways in which they cope in a world of mass production; a world which has become less dependent upon the skill of individual laborers.

Frank Rich praised the performers and described Meadow's direction as "crisp," but considered the play to be almost "too well-crafted." In his somewhat paradoxical review, he wrote, "There are few digressions, no missing pieces, no sloppy scenes. Yet there are no surprises, either. In prizing dramatic symmetry, efficiency and clarity above everything else, Mr. Metcalfe seems to have written the life right out of his play."⁵¹

Though Rich considered the play "bland," it did go on to be produced at the Edinburgh Theatre Festival and was performed as a radio drama as part of a series called Ear-play. It was also impressive enough to result in a commission for Metcalfe, which culminated the following season with the playwright's Strange Snow. "That's the only time that's ever happened here," emphasizes Jonathan Alper,

⁵¹ Frank Rich, "Stage: Metcalfe's 'Vikings,'" The New York Times, November 10, 1980, p. C-17.

We actually commissioned a play which we then took all the way down the line and, I've never been able to get an accurate count, but I'm sure that it's been produced in two dozen theatres around the country at least. And that really was our work.⁵²

While the Club had always maintained a policy of developing writers' material through readings and different levels of production, Metcalfe was the first and only writer in the theatre's history to be commissioned to produce a new play.

One Tiger to a Hill, a prison drama by the Canadian writer, Sharon Pollock, and directed by Thomas Bullard, opened the Upstage series for 1980-1981. Its only review, that written by Frank Rich in The New York Times, was a negative one which dismissed the play as a "silly piece of theatrical claptrap," comparable in many ways to "old time B prison movies that one can see on television at 3:48 a.m."⁵³

Having begun the Upstage Equity operation with a negative reception, it was hoped that the subsequent production would reverse the direction. Next on the Upstage schedule was a play which had originated at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, and which had been rejected by the Club more

⁵² Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 7.

⁵³ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Tiger to a Hill,' Canadian Prison Drama," The New York Times, November 14, 1980, p. C-3.

than once. Thomas Bullard recalls, "Crimes of the Heart was a play that we had passed on several times, and it was at Doug Hughes's insistence, really, that Lynne looked at it again."⁵⁴

Douglas Hughes joined the staff in 1980 as an Artistic Assistant as part of a National Endowment for the Arts Director Fellowship. During his first season at the Club, he directed an Upstage production, worked on a series of one-act plays in the Upstage workshop, and was instrumental in casting two of the season's offerings.

Crimes of the Heart was the first full-length play that Beth Henley had ever written. Henley, whose aspiration was to work in the theatre as an actress, wrote the play with the intention of showcasing it in Los Angeles, where she had relocated from her native Mississippi. Having shown the completed work to a friend, Frederick Bailey, also a playwright, it was submitted to the annual playwrighting contest sponsored by the Louisville Actors Theatre, by Bailey, without Henley's knowledge. Bailey's The Bridgehead, a play about the Vietnam War, was a winner in the contest the previous year. "The fact that Rick sent in my play may have helped," admits Henley, "since they already knew him and his

⁵⁴ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 6.

work, but they're real good about reading all the plays submitted to them."⁵⁵

Crimes of the Heart is a play about a reunion, in Hazelhurst, Mississippi, of the three McGrath sisters. The action begins with Lenny, the eldest sister, whose shriveled ovary portends a life of spinsterhood, attempting to secretly celebrate her birthday with a cupcake, a candle and a song to herself. She is unhappy, not only because it is her thirtieth birthday (a critical age for an unmarried woman in Hazelhurst) and it has gone unremembered, but also because the night before, her beloved horse, Billy Boy, was struck dead by lightning even though there was hardly a storm. Babe, the youngest sister and a would-be saxophonist, has just shot her husband in the stomach because, as she puts it, "I didn't like his looks," and Meg, a failed nightclub singer who has turned promiscuous, returns to the homestead to find Babe "the best lawyer in town." Unfortunately for Babe, Hazelhurst's best lawyer is the man she shot.

With, as Frank Rich described it, "enough plot for about three Faulkner novels," the play follows the resolutions of the sisters' various unusual personal problems and tantalizes the audience with curious bits of McGrath family

⁵⁵ Robert Berkvist, "Act I: The Pulitzer, Act II: Broadway," The New York Times, October 25, 1981, p. B-4.

history. Mother McGrath, for instance, gained the family national attention when she hanged her cat and then herself next to it. Granddaddy McGrath is in a hospital with "blood vessels popping in his brain." "Doc" Porter would have gone to medical school had he not spent the night with Meg in a house which was directly in the path of Hurricane Camille-- he was made lame when the roof collapsed.

Crimes of the Heart was read, approved, and selected as the co-winner of the 1977-1978 Louisville competition. It was mounted by the Actors Theatre of Louisville early in 1979 as part of its Festival of New American Plays. The production was well received, and was transferred to three other regional theatres before it was picked up by the Manhattan Theatre Club.⁵⁶

The production at the Club, under the direction of Melvin Bernhardt, was successful beyond expectation. Wrote Frank Rich,

Miss Henley is a beguiling writer. She meets her characters on their own terms and then embraces them; in her compassionate view, every conceivable crime of the heart is pardonable. She's also a lucky writer because her play . . . has been given a dream New York production under the wise and woolly direction of Melvin Bernhardt. The loony sisters of "Crimes of the Heart" are the spiritual younger cousins of those women over at "Morning's

⁵⁶ Scot Haller, "Her First Play, Her First Pulitzer Prize," Saturday Review, November, 1981, p. 40.

at Seven," and they're nearly as well acted.⁵⁷

John Simon was even more effusive in his praise. "From time to time a play comes along," wrote Simon,

that restores one's faith in our theatre, that justifies endless evenings spent, like some unfortunate Beckett character, chin-deep in trash. This time it is the Manhattan Theatre Club's Crimes of the Heart, by Beth Henley, a new playwright of charm, warmth, style, unpretentiousness, and authentically individual vision. . . .

Crimes of the Heart bursts with energy, merriment, sagacity, and, and, best of all, a generosity toward people and life that many good writers achieve only in their most mature offerings, if at all.⁵⁸

Edith Oliver also contributed to the praise of the production. "Miss Henley, a newcomer to New York, is a talented and original dramatist," she wrote,

her script starts slowly, but once it is launched, it stays aloft, and, with the help of this distinguished company, under Melvin Bernhardt's strong, sensitive direction, every moment is believable. Miss (Mary Beth) Hurt, Miss (Mia) Dillon and Miss (Lizbeth) Mackay achieve, among other things, a family resemblance, which is rare indeed in the theatre. This kind of play (loose-knit, precise and free) and this kind of acting (first-rate by any standard) are what Off Broadway is all about.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Crimes of the Heart,' Comedy About 3 Sisters," The New York Times, December 22, 1980, p. C-16.

⁵⁸ John Simon, "Sisterhood is Beautiful," New York Magazine, January 12, 1981, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, January

The play captured the attention of the Manhattan Theatre Club's audience, as evidenced by its sold-out run, as well as the interest of commercial producers. However, Warner Theatre Productions, Inc., headed by Claire Nichtern, had acquired the rights to the play before it was staged at the Manhattan Theatre Club.⁶⁰ When the show eventually opened on Broadway, it was a co-production of Warner Theatre Productions, Inc., Mary Lea Johnson, Martin Richards, and Francine LeFrak.

In addition to the Broadway run, the screen rights were bought at a cost of one million dollars, the play received the New York Drama Critics' Award for Best American Play of the season and Beth Henley received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, making her the first woman to do so in twenty-three years.⁶¹

As with Mass Appeal, the desire was to effect the transfer without any cast changes. For this reason, the anticipated Spring 1981 opening was delayed until November 4th, when it began its well received run at the Golden Theatre-----

12, 1981, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Carol Lawson, "Broadway: Warner is planning at least five plays for the new season," The New York Times, July 3, 1981, p. C-2.

⁶¹ Scot Haller, "Her First Play, Her First Pulitzer Prize," Saturday Review, November, 1981, p. 40.

tre. "Crimes of the Heart . . . has arrived intact on Broadway . . . and is sure to enjoy a long 'run,'"⁶² predicted Brendan Gill in The New Yorker, adding "The members of the cast play together with a finesse even greater than that of the earlier production; they are a true ensemble." In fact, the production ran for a total of 535 performances before closing on February 13, 1983.

Beginning in November of 1981, and continuing for some months thereafter, three Manhattan Theatre Club transfers were running simultaneously on Broadway: Ain't Misbehavin', Mass Appeal and Crimes of the Heart. This fact enhanced the Club's reputation as a quality producing organization, and benefitted the theatre monetarily, although Barry Grove points out that compared to Ain't Misbehavin',

the rest of our transfers have generated substantially less money. . . . Straight plays, first of all, simply don't do anywhere near the kind of business that musicals do. Crimes of the Heart and Mass Appeal both helped some, but we're talking a hundred thousand dollar magnitudes, rather than million dollar magnitudes.⁶³

With three shows successfully transferred to Broadway in a very short span of time, it might be perceived that the Manhattan Theatre Club was assuming a more commercial orien-

⁶² Brendan Gill, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, November 16, 1981, p. 182.

⁶³ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 8.

tation. Yet a statement of the artistic policy of the Club negates this perception. Beginning with the 1979-1980 season, and continuing for several seasons thereafter, the theatre club's Showbill programs include a statement outlining the Club's artistic goals. It reads,

There are two ways to produce theatre--you can produce a play because it will draw audiences willing and able to pay \$25 a ticket, not to mention audiences large enough to fill 1,000 seats nightly. Or you can produce a play because it has artistic merit and something important to say--without regard to its commercial potential.

MTC has chosen the second course. And that is why we will always need financial support from government agencies, foundations, corporations and YOU.

If in producing art we can once or twice a season produce something that also has commercial promise, whether on Broadway, television or on tour, we are delighted. Then we help to enrich the American theatre and reach a larger audience. That's what happened with our productions of Ashes, The Runner Stumbles, Ain't Misbehavin' and Catsplay.

But these commercial successes must never take our minds off our goals. And they never ⁶⁴ will if we have your understanding and support.

Lynne Meadow emphatically denies ever having any interest in transforming the Club into a tryout house for the commercial theatre, and the fact that she has remained the Artistic Director of the Manhattan Theatre Club, refusing

⁶⁴ "Why Help the MTC," Statement included in Showbill programs.

offers of more lucrative positions in the commercial sector, gives credence to her statement. "I have been very fulfilled (here) so I haven't been looking elsewhere," she explains, ". . . this is home and there is a tremendous satisfaction in watching my own personal growth and the growth of others around me."⁶⁵ Despite the commercial successes which the theatre club has enjoyed, Meadow insists that the fundamental goals of the Club have never changed. "Basically, we are here to develop and create and produce new work for the theatre," she says, adding

If some of that moves on to Broadway, terrific. If it can go to a regional theatre, terrific. If it just runs at MTC for five weeks, that too is what we're about. To me, some of the most successful things we've done have not had a life beyond the Manhattan Theatre Club.⁶⁶

American Days, by Stephen Poliakoff, the Club's next Downstage offering did not have an afterlife, although there initially was some interest to transfer the show to Broadway.⁶⁷ The play, which dramatizes the audition of three would-be punk rock stars from the working class before a record industry tycoon, had been previously produced in London.

⁶⁵ Joanne Kaufman, "Meadow & MTC," in Playbill for Loot, February 3, 1986, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Carol Lawson, "News of the Theatre," The New York Times, January 14, 1981, p. C-21.

don. In its American premiere at the Manhattan Theatre Club, under the direction of Jacques Levy, it attracted positive critical attention from Frank Rich, who began his review,

The Manhattan Theatre Club may have gotten off to a slow start earlier this season, but it is quickly making up for lost time. Last week, in its small Upstage theatre, this company introduced New Yorkers to a fresh young playwright named Beth Henley, whose Crimes of the Heart is one of the funniest shows in town. Last night, Stephen Pollakoff's American Days arrived on the main stage, and it, too, is a provocative comedy that has been directed and acted to the hilt. As both these plays have limited runs, let me recommend that you take in a double bill at your earliest possible convenience.⁶⁸

The play, which both Frank Rich and John Simon intimated was a new version of "the angry young men" works characteristic of Britain's "New Wave" writers, unfolds in an impersonal record company listening room, designed for this production by Andrew Jackness, and lighted by Dennis Parrichy. Both critics noted that the design strongly reinforced the antiseptic atmosphere indicated by the script, and also praised the work of director Levy for realizing the vision of the play.

⁶⁸ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'American Days,' a British Comedy," The New York Times, January 2, 1981, p. C-3.

John Shea's portrayal of the neurotic record executive was, according to Rich, "played with extraordinary shading," while Simon singled out John Snyder, who played the leather attired, protest songwriter hopeful as the best of the cast.⁶⁹ Anna Levine, as a provincial girl turned tough punk rocker, and Pippa Pearthree, as a pop singer with purely pragmatic motives, were complimented on their performances, with the latter being selected as Best Actress in a Secondary Role in The Burns Mantle Theatre Yearbook's review of the season.⁷⁰

American Days was followed in the Downstage by another American premiere of a British work. Simon Gray's Close of Play received its initial staging at the National Theatre in London in 1978, directed by Harold Pinter, with Sir Michael Redgrave in the central role. The circumstances surrounding that production were somewhat inauspicious, including a labor strike at the National Theatre which interrupted rehearsals for a six week period, and a last minute injury which required that an understudy replace Dame Peggy Ashcroft. Consequently, claims Gray, the reviews were luke-

⁶⁹ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, January 19, 1981, p. 39.

⁷⁰ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1980-1981 (Dodd Mead and Company, 1981) p. 22.

warm.

The play is about a family reunion involving the patriarch of the family, his three sons, three daughters-in-law, and a housekeeper-aunt. In a series of encapsulated encounters, the man's family attempts to unburden their troubles and disappointments upon him. The curious twist is that the patriarch, Professor Jasper Spencer, is dead. "Instead of a living man visited by ghosts of the dead, you have a dead man visited by ghosts of the living," explains the playwright, "The play opens with this man suddenly finding himself back in a familiar world, as life always was for him, but heightened. He has been absent from it through death."⁷¹

Unfortunately, in the London production it was not made satisfactorily clear that the central character was, indeed, dead; many in the audience thought Professor Spencer was a stroke victim. "In London we were rather too genteel and the audience wasn't quite sure what was happening," explains Gray, adding that at the Manhattan Theatre Club, the production, directed by Lynne Meadow, was more "full blooded" and thereby clearer.⁷²

⁷¹ Eleanor Blau, "Simon Gray Tries A 'Ghostly' Comedy," The New York Times, February 22, 1981, p. B-4.

⁷² Ibid.

Clive Barnes agreed. "I must say that against all reasonable probability," wrote Barnes, "the MTC staging, directed by Lynne Meadow, is preferable (to the National Theatre production)."⁷³ Barnes explained his satisfaction with the Club's production as owing to the farce-like pacing Meadow stressed. He elucidated,

In the original Pinter production, Pinter stressed, as one might expect, the Pinteresque elements of mystery in the play. The professor was seen as a poetic symbol, and his final enigmatic remarks were endowed with a sibyl-like portentousness, and Pinteresque pauses were as plentiful as berries in August.

Miss Meadow will have none of this. These plays, these domestic horrors are described with a joyful callousness, the play being seen as an ink-black farce with an undertow of reality to it. The performances are larger than death, and the actors are rightfully, I think, sent out to scoop up laughs like irreverent scavengers. It works far better than did Pinter's restrained subtlety that always aspires to a symbolism that never became apparent.

Other reviewers were less enthusiastic, but generally dissatisfaction was with the play and not with the production. To Stephen Harvey, writing in The Nation, the play's central character was still too vague, although he noted, "I don't think Lynne Meadow's direction of a uniformly capable cast is in any way to blame."⁷⁴ Similarly, The New Yorker

⁷³ Clive Barnes, "'Close of Play' not to be missed," New York Post, February 26, 1981.

review asked rhetorically, "How is it possible for a play to be so constantly entertaining, and, moment by moment so convincing, and yet ultimately be unsatisfactory and shallow?"⁷⁵ A possible explanation, the review concludes, lies with the author's pessimism, not with the production.

The season continued with an Upstage musical offering, Real Life Funnies, based on a comic strip in The Village Voice which uses dialogue transcribed from real life encounters in locations around New York City. The transcriptions provided by Stan Mack were set to music by composer/lyricist Alan Menken and librettist/director Howard Ashman, responsible for a successful Off-Broadway production the previous season of Kurt Vonnegut's God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.

Also offered, as part of the Club's In the Works series were four "plays in process" which were presented for fourteen performances each: After All by film critic Vincent Canby, The Chisolm Trail Went Through Here by Brady Sewell, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's A Call from the East and Anthony Giardina's Scenes from La Vie de Boheme. Overseeing the series was Douglas Hughes, who directed two of the shows

⁷⁴ Stephen Harvey, "Theatre," The Nation, March 14, 1981, p. 315.

⁷⁵ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, March 9, 1981, p. 74.

(After All and Scenes from La Vie de Boheme), and who called upon the professional services of his mother, actress Helen Stenborg, to perform in The Chisolm Trail Went Through Here. While that show was running, the next Downstage offering, Brian Friel's Translations was beginning previews with Barnard Hughes in the central role. "I badgered my father for weeks to take the part,"⁷⁶ explains Douglas Hughes, adding that he was successful only after convincing his father that Translations was the best script he was being offered.

Otis Guernsey agreed on the quality of the script, and the play was selected as one of the Ten Best Plays of the Season by the Burns Mantle Theatre Yearbook. "Brian Friel's Translations was a shade the best of the entire off-Broadway year," wrote Guernsey, "with an affectionate, caring dramatization of an 1833 episode in the English-Irish struggle of character and policy."⁷⁷

The play examines the effects on Irish cultural identity of the British army's program to re-map Ireland and, in the process, Anglicize every place name in the country. Bun na hAbhann becomes "Burnfoot," Druim Dubh becomes "Black Ridge" and Lis na Muc is newly translated as "Swinefort."

⁷⁶ The New York Times, April 7, p. B-5.

⁷⁷ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1980-1981 (Dodd Mead and Company, 1981), p. 24.

In the course of the action it is made clear, however, that the literal translation of Gaelic names is a clinical process which robs the culture of much of its vital heritage. "It's an eviction of sorts," says one of the characters, "Something is being eroded."⁷⁸

But not everyone reacts to the changes with alarm. Gaelic is a rich language, as the central character of Hugh describes it, "full of mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception," but, he continues,

. . . words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen . . . that a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of fact.⁷⁹

The work is a study of English-Irish relations. It explores the Irish resistance to British colonizing efforts, the antipathetic relationship between Irish country peasants and British army troops, and the difficulties of maintaining a cultural heritage in the face of changing political and world conditions. What makes the play all the more intriguing is that these issues are explored as a consequence of the work's main focus on language.

⁷⁸ Brian Friel, Translations (Faber and Faber, Ltd., London, 1981) p. 43.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 42-43.

Translations was the find of Jonathan Alper. "I can't claim any great credit for it," says Alper, "it would have been produced certainly anyway--it's a wonderful play--but I happened to call Audrey Wood on the right day and I got the play."⁸⁰ Wood, the literary agent who controlled the script, agreed to let the work be produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club, giving the play its American premiere.

Brian Friel, who gained international recognition for his play, Philadelphia, Here I Come! which was produced on Broadway in 1966 and subsequently in every major theatre center in Europe, America and South America,⁸¹ accompanied Joe Dowling, the then Artistic Director of Dublin's Abbey Theatre and director of Translations, to the United States to see the work staged. "We had a wonderful cast," remembers Jonathan Alper, "and I was just very proud of the fact that we did it. . . . I wish it had received a better review in the Times, but that's life."⁸²

Frank Rich did have problems with the play, noting "this play's failures are of a structural nature" with unfinished characters and undeveloped situations, but he con-

⁸⁰ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 7.

⁸¹ Program notes to Translations (Showbill, May 1981) p. 21.

⁸² Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 7.

cludes by saying "Though one wishes that Mr. Friel's follow-through fully matched his intentions here, there are far worse playwriting sins than leaving the audience hungry for more."⁸³ Of the production, he wrote that it was well designed (by Kate Edmunds), but that the director failed to "bring much coloration" to the minor roles, adding that the performances of some of the larger roles ranged from "uninspired" to "inept." Actors Daniel Gerroll and Jariath Conroy were complimented, and Barnard Hughes was singled out as "especially exciting."

Douglas Watt, in The Daily News described the play as "an astonishingly turgid and quite literally tongue-tied comedy . . . earnest to the point of tedium."⁸⁴ He goes on to say, however,

This misshapen play is given every advantage in the MTC's mounting. . . .

Joe Dowling, faced with the formidable task of directing such a difficult and unrewarding play, has pulled the pieces together remarkably well. The atmospheric set and lighting, and the varied costumes could scarcely have been improved upon.

So much fine effort squandered on such an effortful piece of playwriting.

⁸³ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Translations' From Brian Friel," The New York Times, April 15, 1981, p. C-23.

⁸⁴ Douglas Watt, "Language of tedium mars new Friel play," The New York Daily News, April 15, 1981.

Clive Barnes did not believe that the effort was squandered. He described the work as a "fine new play," and one with "a special importance in the history of Irish drama." He wrote, "After one early, over-praised success, Friel has seemed a playwright in waiting. The waiting is now over."⁸⁵

Jack Kroll, writing for Newsweek magazine, however, heaped the greatest amount of praise on the production. He described it as a "sweet and subtle play, which deals tenderly with the rape of a culture," adding, "Beneath its lilt-ing, sometimes romantic surface, Translations is a powerful study of the roots of imperialism, the take-over not just of a country but of a spirit through the take-over of its language."⁸⁶ He concluded the review with his opinion that Translations was one of Friel's best plays, well directed by Joe Dowling, who "plays his American cast like a harp--the chief string being Barnard Hughes." Unfortunately, the production ran without its chief string for a good portion of the forty-eight performance run. Hughes had to leave the show a week after it opened to meet a film commitment, being replaced for two weeks by his standby, John Bennes.

⁸⁵ Clive Barnes, "A play worthy of 'Translations,'" The New York Post, April 15, 1981.

⁸⁶ Jack Kroll, "Theatre," Newsweek, May 4, 1981.

The final Downstage offering of the 1980-1981 season fared the least well of the schedule. Hunting Scenes From Lower Bavaria, written in 1965 by the then twenty-one year old playwright, Martin Sperr, deals with the trying social conditions of post-World War II Germany, and the resulting disintegration of values and morals. The production was staged by the German director, Ulrich Heising, who had previously directed the play in Germany. His attempt to re-stage the play with an American cast was apparently unsuccessful. Frank Rich described the production as "inept," noting "there isn't one effective performance among the 14 on display." Said Rich, "At the Manhattan Theatre Club, where it opened last night, Martin Sperr's Hunting Scenes From Lower Bavaria is every bit as deadly dull as its forbidding title might suggest."⁸⁷

Given the intensity of Rich's dissatisfaction, John Simon is surprisingly gentle. "The dominant pork-butchery images are not made forceful enough in this production," noted Simon, ". . . so much auctorial anger so powerfully controlled needs more insinuating direction and suggestive acting than is accorded here." Of Heising's direction, he wrote, "Working with American actors, he does not hit upon the -----"

⁸⁷ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Hunting Scenes From Lower Bavaria,'" The New York Times, June 15, 1981, p. C-11.

right rhythms and intonations, or establish a unified tone in speech and mood."⁸⁸

Overall, 1980-1981 was not a bad season for the Manhattan Theatre Club. The Downstage series of mostly foreign works received generally good reviews, at least in regard to production values, and the Upstage series, while it produced little else of lasting interest, did produce Crimes of the Heart. The Club was represented with three productions on Broadway, and was basking in the warmth of critical admiration for its contribution to the New York theatre scene. The time seemed right for expansion.

"We . . . had a lease on (the building) on 73rd Street," explains Barry Grove,

the landlord . . . (the Bohemian Benevolent Association) . . . also owned the adjoining building on 74th Street. We were interested in expanding, and that seemed the logical place to expand to. . . So we talked to them about renting space on 74th Street as well, and the then leadership of the organization decided that it wanted to potentially sell the buildings . . . so we set about trying to buy them.⁸⁹

Negotiations with the owners actually began during the summer of 1980, and on June 21, 1981, the Club executed a "sale and leaseback contract" to occupy the premises. It

⁸⁸ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, June 29, 1981, p. 36.

⁸⁹ Interview with Barry Grove, 11/20/85, p. 1.

was the first step of what was to become a protracted legal battle between the Manhattan Theatre Club and the owners of the Bohemian National Hall, wherein the Club resided. Shifts within the political power structure of the Fraternal Organization of Bohemians were accompanied by a decision not to sell the properties. Grove explains,

We tried to purchase the buildings from the Bohemians, and it took some time to raise the money . . . and then it took a lot of time to negotiate contracts. And before the sale was closed, a splinter group of their organization sued them to stop the sale. . . . They became, within themselves, a kind of divided community. However, they had given us, with binding votes within their organization and everything else, absolutely clear signals⁹⁰ that they wanted to go forward with this.

The landlord's refusal to convey title in accordance with contracts made with the Manhattan Theatre Club resulted in litigation by the Club which was to last several years. On September 2, 1983, the Supreme Court of the State of New York decided in favor of the Bohemian Benevolent Association's refusal to convey title of the property to the Manhattan Theatre Club. The decision was appealed, and on June 28, 1984, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court affirmed the prior decision. A second appeal brought a reaffirmation of the original Supreme Court decision.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

"We believed we had an enforceable agreement, and we litigated, and that litigation took some time, and we ultimately failed," says Grove,

We got some split votes along the way through the litigation process that gave us strong indications that our position was not way out of line with what the law was, but it's a tricky area of law, and there is no clear-cut answer. We felt that we had entered a deal in good faith, and that we should be entitled to proceed. . . .

But we ultimately lost, and it was clear that we had to leave, because the landlord having prevailed also in the course of the litigation--that splinter group, which was indeed a tiny minority of the organization when we were in negotiations to buy the buildings, became the leadership when the old leadership resigned in disgust. So they took control of the organization and their interests, when the litigation was ultimately solved, was to get all of the tenants out of the buildings and to potentially go ahead with a development deal which would preserve a certain amount of space on 73rd Street for their organization⁹¹ but then sell off a lot of the other spaces.

The plan, apparently, was to construct high-rise condominiums on the sites which were sold on East 73rd and 74th Streets. Ironically, changes in the zoning laws of the Upper East Side occurring during the 1980s contained new provisions which set strict limitations on the maximum height of new properties being constructed. High-rise condominiums of the kind envisioned were, therefore, no longer permitted,

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

and after the tenants of the real estate owned by the Bohemian Benevolent Association vacated, the buildings remained uninhabited while new strategies were planned.

The unexpected turn of events posed an enormous problem for the Manhattan Theatre Club. With an audience comprised largely of residents of the Upper East Side of New York City and the number of suitable and affordable theatre spaces in that area negligible, the enforced move of the Club, in essence, threatened its existence. The developments of this period undercut whatever stability the Club had been perceived as having attained, and despite financial and artistic successes, once again, the Manhattan Theatre would have to struggle for survival.

Fortunately, the Club was aided in this period of transition by the profits reaped from Ain't Misbehavin' which had been earmarked for expansion and development. Grove explains,

During that period of time, we had assumed that we would be moving into larger quarters, and our long term budget projections were such that the increased revenue would happen as the expenses were rising. That was not, unfortunately, the case, because this project, just as we thought it was about to happen and reach fruition, collapsed. And we, therefore, had costs continue to rise as we took our place as a major institution, but without any increased revenue.

So fundraising . . . was going on, but it couldn't possibly go on fast enough, so we had long discus-

sions with the Board about what to do, and in part, came to the conclusion that while we might reduce the number of plays in one year or something, we couldn't simply keep paring away at the events until we were doing virtually nothing. We didn't want to reduce the quality of events by trying to do the same number of events for substantially less dollars, so we made the decision to, in effect, enter each of those succeeding four years, '80 to '84, with an approved deficit for each of those years, rather than a balanced budget. . . .

The Expansion and Development Fund underwrote, in effect, those deficits while we re-grouped and began to explore other possible options. . . . So that fund . . . served its purpose . . . it saw us through expansion. It did not get spent on 73rd and 74th Street, but in a very different kind of way, accomplished the same goal. . . .

We were . . . fortunate that we had, in fact, set aside those funds, because they at least underwrote the deficits that allowed us not to compromise quality.⁹² . . . and bought us the time to find another space.

An extensive search was undertaken for a new space for the Manhattan Theatre Club. Numerous kinds of spaces were examined, including vacant commercial theatres, and garages and warehouses in need of total renovation. Initially, the search was conducted in the immediate vicinity of East 73rd Street, but this geographical region was gradually expanded to include properties anywhere between 96th Street and 14th Street, north and south, and the entire width of Manhattan island. It was feared that to go beyond this grid would run

⁹² Ibid.

the risk of losing the overwhelming majority of the Club's audience.

With the territorial parameters set, the search continued, led by Meadow and Grove, working under the advice of Board President Edwin C. Cohen and Board member Philip E. Aarons, both of whose professional expertise encompasses New York City real estate, and other Board members, particularly Michael H. Coles, Gerald Freund and Paul B. Kopperl. Three principle criteria were established for selecting a new location. Aware that the further from East 73rd Street, the greater the loss of current subscribers, the first criterion was that the new site be proximus to the 73rd Street space.

The second criterion was that the new space have the capability of being transformed into multiple performance spaces. So as not to undercut a vital aspect of the Club's artistic policy, the Club's eagerness to produce different levels of performance and works-in-progress, more than one space was needed. The main space was to be a theatre which accommodated between three hundred and five hundred patrons, with another space or spaces which would permit the necessary expanded seating required to increase income.

The final criterion was that the price of the new property be affordable.

"We then started talking to a number of people," says Barry Grove,

and looking at a number of sites . . . and Joyce Schonfeld and Liz McCann, in particular, pointed us to City Center as one of the possible places to look. And we looked at the space, and we immediately saw the potential in it, and I think Lynne initially had a conversation with Margaret Wood, who is the Executive Director there, and we subsequently had a series of meetings with her and others on her⁹³ staff, and felt that that was the best solution.

A five year lease, with built-in options for renewal, was signed.

It was not, however, the ideal solution. While City Center was relatively close in terms of geographical distance, being located on 56th Street, it was also on the West Side of Manhattan, to many residents of the Upper East Side a far distance, psychologically. The site did have the capacity, through renovation, for more than one performing space, but reconstruction would be costly and would take time. The space was affordable, in relation to the exorbitant rental costs of other midtown locations, but offered space only for mounting productions. Office space was not included.

⁹³ Interview with Barry Grove, 11/20/85, p. 4.

"If we could relocate the audience to Brooklyn or relocate them to Staten Island or relocate them to 125th Street or even some parts of lower Manhattan," remarks Barry Grove, "we probably could have solved (the problem), but . . . it quickly became clear that we were not going to solve the office and performance space (problem) in the same place, (midtown)."⁹⁴

Once it was decided to make the eventual move to City Center, another search was undertaken for office space, using similar criteria to that of the first search. The space needed to be close to City Center, it had to accommodate the needs of the ever-growing staff, and it had to be affordable.

The costs of midtown locations were untouchable, but from a computer printout of vacant real estate from the Office of Business Administration of the City of New York, a suitable site was eventually located at 453 West 16th Street. The location was affordable, required relatively little renovation to make it functional, and was close to a subway line which led directly to City Center. With sufficient space to permit the entire administrative staff to be housed on one floor, the 16th Street location was viewed as

⁹⁴ Interview with Barry Grove, 11/20/85, p. 4.

an improvement over the 73rd Street space, which divided the staff in a hierarchy of three levels. There was also adequate space in the building on 16th Street to be reserved for auditions and rehearsals, so that the division between administrative staff and artists would not be geographically reinforced. 16th Street would be where productions were planned and developed, and 130 West 56th Street would be where the final product was presented.

"I think one may see more and more of that kind of separation happen," says Grove,

because you can't afford to pay midtown prices for the square footage you need to create the art and, at the same time, you can't entirely move a large audience into some less desirable neighborhood, so it's not ideal but, on the other hand, we went into it knowing that there might be problems, and planning for those problems.⁹⁵

Both sites required significant renovation, amounting to over \$100,000 for each space. Costs incurred at City Center were solely for the preparation of the primary theatre space, and did not include costs for a planned second stage. The Club's new mainstage, called "The Space," was located in the basement of City Center and had previously been the home of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. Working within a very limited time-frame, (the Club took occupancy

⁹⁵ Ibid.

in September, 1984 with its first show there scheduled to open on October 30th), the space was re-designed by John Lee Beatty; Dennis Parichy served as lighting consultant.

"My feeling was that it needed to be a warmer space with a communal atmosphere and a proper focus for theatre," says Beatty, "Before the renovation, the basement was a very long, wide space with seating that faced head-on for dance concerts."⁹⁶ To help solve the problem, Beatty used a partial herringbone seating arrangement of the two side sections of seats. The center section was kept parallel to the stage, while the side sections were angled inward.

City Center assisted the Club in the move by contributing substantial lighting equipment, dimmer boards, and various other kinds of equipment, which made the transition somewhat easier. Nevertheless, the move was to result in the largest deficit in the history of the Manhattan Theatre Club.⁹⁷

The renovation of the spaces and the relocation of the theatre club was made possible by contributions and grants from individuals, corporations and foundations. Contributions specifically earmarked for the move to City Center

⁹⁶ Steve Pollock, "The Manhattan Theatre Club moves down to City Center," Theatre Crafts, April 19, 1985, p. 56.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

were placed in a newly created restricted account called the Board Designated Plant Fund. The major contributors to this fund were AT&T Foundation, Bankers Trust Company,⁹⁸ the Booth Ferris Foundation, the Coles Family Foundation, Exxon Corporation, The Ford Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, The New York Community Trust, The New York Times Company Foundation, Inc., the Emma A. Sheaffer Trust and The Shubert Foundation; all had previously contributed to the Manhattan Theatre Club.

The actual move to City Center did not occur until the start of the 1984-1985 season, but the need to relocate, which became evident during the summer of 1981 with the landlord's refusal to complete the sale of the property, placed an enormous stress upon the Club. The pressure was an unwelcomed addition to that which always attends the start of a new season. "Each time you start a new production, you're entering uncharted territory," says Meadow, "the only thing you know is that you got through the last one."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ A \$35,000 grant from Bankers Trust Company is repeatedly cited for making the move possible.

⁹⁹ Joanne Kaufman, "Meadow & MTC," Playbill, for Loot, February 3, 1986.

Crossing Niagara, by Alonso Alegria, the first play of the Club's 1981-1982 season, is a play about exploring uncharted territory; specifically it is about the death defying chances taken by the French-born daredevil Jean Francois Gravelet, who performed feats of skill in the nineteenth century under the name of Blondin. Blondin came to the United States in 1855, and worked for circus owner P. T. Barnum as a tightrope walker. After a visit to Niagara Falls, his tightrope walks became more and more dangerous and flamboyant (on one walk, he prepared an omelette). He completed twenty-one crossings and, at the height of his skill, he attempted his most daring feat: crossing Niagara Falls on a rope with a man on his back. The year was 1859.

Crossing Niagara, which had been previously produced at the Folger Theatre in Washington, D.C., opened the Manhattan Theatre Club's Downstage season. In it, Alegria, a Peruvian born writer, explores the circumstances which led to Blondin's decision to risk two lives: his own, and a young man named Carlo, who offers the challenge. Carlo wishes to make the attempt to eradicate the shame he feels over a childhood incident of cowardice and to spur his idol onto one magnificent feat of courage. The play is about friendship and the special trust which is needed for two individuals to fuse

themselves into "a third tightrope walker." The intensity of that bond is illustrated in the play's second act in a climactic scene in which Blondin loses his confidence in the middle of the stunt and has to be talked through his fear by the younger man.

Frank Rich opened his review with an ominous statement, but then shifted instantly to praise the production. It was to be yet another case of a good production of an unexceptional play and, in this case, the designers received as much attention as the performers and the director. Wrote Rich,

It isn't until very late that we realize why the Manhattan Theatre Club has chosen to open its new season with a play as ordinary as Crossing Niagara. The light dawns in the final scene, when we find ourselves transported, quite literally, to heaven.

It's a beautiful place. With the possible exception of God, no one could spin a better sky than this play's designers--Santo Loquasto (sets) and Jennifer Tipton (lighting). The stage fills with clouds of smoke that form prismatic patterns in the icy, gray light; in the distance we peek into a limitless horizon. And floating downstage center in this abstract, trompe l'oeil void, is that fine actor Alvin Epstein, here playing Blondin. . . .

The actor isn't really on a tightrope--he's marching in place. But through sheer concentration and balletic physical poetry, Mr. Epstein makes us believe that Blondin is doing what he claims to do: bringing time to a stop, defying the laws of nature, taking us to the center of the universe's infinite space.

And then, halfway through his journey, he does something even more gripping--he falls into a frightened panic. All of a sudden Mr. Epstein's proud, glinting eyes begin to flirt, suicidally, with the sight of the rapids below; his noble brow fills with beads of sweat; his delicate hands lose their once rigid hold on his long balancing pole. Blondin's passenger, Carlo (Paul McCrane), soon talks him back into his wits--but not before Mr. Epstein, the designers and the director, Andre Ernotte, have made us share Blondin's vertigo by means of exuberant theatrical technique.

So rich is this climax that you can't really blame these artists for wanting to meet its dare--even if they must also do the play that goes with it. Still, it is a long wait to enter heaven.¹⁰⁰

With the exception of this scene, the play, to Rich, lacked dramatic tension; the characters were not sufficiently detailed and the dialogue was mechanical. Richard Gilman, writing in The Nation made similar observations, noting that the first act is too expository. The final scene, he agrees, was "expertly staged," but he concluded,

There are some affecting moments in this scene; there is lyricism and philosophy. But the poetry is spotty and the philosophy is not very profound. One feels that an opportunity has been muffed, that something more ought to have been made of the promising situation. But by the time the play gets back on the right course, it's too late for anything but surfaces. . . . Andre Ernotte's direction¹⁰¹ is sound, but the evening is a disappointment.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Crossing Niagara' on a Rope," The New York Times, November 4, 1981, p. C-26.

¹⁰¹ Richard Gilman, "Theatre," The Nation, November 28, 1981, p. 585.

Robert Brustein saw more to the play, however, stating the work "evokes the magisterial ghost of Henrik Ibsen, for it seems to be a reworking of The Master Builder, now equipped with a more affirmative ending." His conclusion, however, echoes that of the other reviewers. He wrote,

Crossing Niagara is a small piece, which sometimes seem to dawdle over its minor theme, but it is written with conviction and some poetry, and it is performed . . . in a symbiotic manner that makes acting the equivalent of a double tightrope walk. Santo Loquasto's set moves from bed-sitting room realism into abstract gesture, rather like the acting, and, like the acting, suggests the kind of aerial flights our theatres could actually accomplish if we ever had¹⁰² the financial and physical and human resources.

Words of praise from even a single major reviewer can do much for a theatre's recognition and the level of confidence within the organization. The Club began this season with at least three positive reviews for its treatment of Crossing Niagara and was cited by Brustein as the epitome of quality production. The reception for the next offering was mixed, however.

The 1981-1982 Upstage season at the Manhattan Theatre Club began with a a play which had originally been produced in the Yale Repertory Theatre's 1980 Winterfest of new works in progress. The Resurrection of Lady Lester by the drama-

¹⁰² Robert Brustein, "Robert Brustein on Theatre," The New Republic, November 25, 1981, p. 25.

tist Oyamo, recounts the life of tenor saxophonist Lester Young. "Anybody with music in their souls is a lady," declares the character of Young in the play; hence the significance of "Lady Lester" in the play's title.

The Manhattan Theatre Club's staging was the first full production of the play, and was directed by Andre Mtumi. The central character of Young was played in this production by Clevon Little, whose work Edith Oliver praised in The New Yorker and Mel Gussow skirted comment on in The New York Times.

"Nothing is more difficult than basing a believable character on a real person," wrote Oliver, ". . . Oyamo, a compelling dramatic writer, is up to the task, and so is Clevon Little in the leading role. . . . Mr. Little's depiction of Young is not even an attempt at impersonation, it is a performance."¹⁰³ Oliver concluded her review with the comment, "The Resurrection of Lady Lester is scheduled to close at the Manhattan Theatre Club after the performance of November 22nd; God knows why."

Mel Gussow was of an entirely different opinion. To Gussow, the production at the Club was "a step backward" from the Yale Repertory Theatre's staging of the play. Al-

¹⁰³ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, November 23, 1981, p. 69.

most surprisingly, Gussow noted, "the problem is less one of script than of production." He goes on to point blame at the director,

Totally recasting the play, Mr. Mtumi has given it a cabaret or jazz club-style staging--in itself not a bad idea. However, he is unable to integrate the work's three basic elements: time present, Young's dying in 1959 in a seedy hotel room; flashbacks to ghosts in his past; and the music.¹⁰⁴

He described the staging as "awkward," observed that Clevon Little, "in contrast to his Yale predecessor, Darryl Croxton, . . . does not convey the saxophonist's exultation in his music," and noted that "as Young's father and sideman, Arthur French is the only supporting actor to emerge with credit from the production." The show closed on November 22nd.

The next Upstage offering was a musical revue. And I Ain't Finished Yet, by Eve Merriam, was intended to celebrate the strength of selected black women at challenging and, on occasion, overcoming, racism. Compiled from documentary materials, the revue is essentially a one-woman show in which the central performer portrays seven characters, ranging from a nineteenth century slave through a freedom fighter of the 1960s.

¹⁰⁴ Mel Gussow, "Theatre: 'Lady Lester,'" The New York Times, November 14, 1981, p. C-13.

Lynne Thigpen, noted for her performance in Tintypes, which appeared on Broadway the previous season, portrayed the central role--as effectively as the script allowed, according to Frank Rich. "Lynne Thigpen," he wrote, "is a riveting figure on stage. A tallish black woman with a jutting jaw, penetrating eyes, and a stern, vibrato voice, she seems to travel in her own magnetic field--one that her fellow performers enter at their own peril."¹⁰⁵ Her performance in this revue was described as that of a "dynamo," but hampered by a script which was not fully developed. He concludes his review, "One can only imagine how much brighter Miss Thigpen will burn when some playwright sets her free."

The character of Bela Veracek, nicknamed Vera, is set free in Howard Barker's No End of Blame, which followed in the Downstage series. Barker, noted reviewer Mel Gussow, "is one of a young crop of virulent theatrical commentators on the collapse of English civilization, and his view is cynical in the extreme."

In No End Of Blame, the character of Vera, based loosely on the life of cartoonist Victor Weisz, nicknamed Vicky, goes from his native Hungary, to Russia, and then to "free-

¹⁰⁵ Frank Rich, "Revue: Lynne Thigpen in 'I Ain't Finished Yet,'" The New York Times, December 9, 1981, p. C-28.

dom" in England. It is in England in 1936, however, that he experiences the greatest intolerance to the caustic social criticism expressed in his cartoons. No political system is willing to face the truth and, it is suggested, blame had best be targeted at something specific rather than at all humanity, even though to do so is to compromise.

The work, which had previously been produced in London, was described by Mel Gussow as "an outline for a play, an erratic, scattershot view of life in transit and in turmoil, and a work that too often succumbs to grandiloquence."¹⁰⁶ He described the production as "sketchy," and notes of Michael Cristofer's portrayal of the central character of Vera that the actor "conveys the cartoonist's youthful passion, . . . (but) does not intensify his portrayal. . . . Though the role spans 55 years, he does not age."

John Simon, not a fan of Cristofer's writing, as evidenced in his earlier reviews of the Club's production of Ice, and the preceding Broadway production of The Shadow Box, wrote of Cristofer's performance, "Michael Cristofer overacts relentlessly, is never still, and remains much the same whether young or old, affluent or starving, sane or

¹⁰⁶ Mel Gussow, "Stage: 'No End of Blame,' Cynical British Drama," The New York Times, December 24, 1981, p. C-3.

near-mad. Yet he does have a few surprisingly effective moments."¹⁰⁷

Of the script, he wrote,

There is a good deal of bitter wisdom in this play, not a little effective satire, and language that ranges from awkward to inspired. Barker's views on art, politics, society, life are never uninteresting, but the play is insufficiently fleshed out.

The majority of the cast, he noted, performed "expertly under Walton Jones's resourceful direction," and he concludes, "No End of Blame provides ample food for thought, and pulls off scene after dramatically effective scene."

With three of the four productions so far presented in the 1981-1982 season being resurrections of previously produced works, the Manhattan Theatre Club now presented its own commissioned work. Stephen Metcalfe's Strange Snow opened in the Club's Upstage on January 19, 1982, in a production directed by Thomas Bullard.

Metcalfe's play deals with the psychological damage inflicted on veterans of the Vietnam war, the "post-traumatic stress syndrome" that many returning soldiers experienced, and the subsequent difficulties of re-adjusting to a society which was largely unsure of how to receive them. Strange

¹⁰⁷ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, January 11, 1982, p. 53.

Snow is a kind of "homecoming" play which focusses on the obstructed relationships among two veterans, Megs and Dave, and the latter's sister, Martha. In the development of the action, the trauma which is responsible for the obstruction, the loss of a friend in the war, is exposed, and the suggestion is that as a result, repair and growth can then commence.

Once again, the refrain of "adequate production, inadequate play" was repeated, but this time it was tempered with subdued praise of the playwright. Mel Gussow wrote the play "begins and ends unconvincingly, and raises issues that it is unwilling to resolve, but it has a middle that bears watching."¹⁰⁸ He notes that "Thomas Bullard has led his cast into achieving a well-balanced performance," and concludes that "Strange Snow is untidy, but the playwright has potential, and the actors . . . offer dramatic sustenance."

Edith Oliver expressed reservations about the author's credibility, stating, "It is my conviction that only a playwright who served in Vietnam . . . can write about it with any clarity or conviction, and nobody else should even try." Metcalfe did not serve in Vietnam. Of the show, she wrote,

¹⁰⁸ Mel Gussow, "Stage: 'Strange Snow,' Echo of Vietnam," The New York Times, February 1, 1982, p. C-12.

This play is filled with action, and with a number of mistakes, too, the worst of them being a foggy and unconvincing reminiscent scene of some terrible incident during the war. . . . Nevertheless, mistakes or not, there are any number of dramatic and arresting moments in the play--more than enough to make it evident that he (Metcalf) is in the right profession. There is no question about the competence of Thomas Bullard, the director, or of Christopher Curry, Dann Florek, and Kaiulani Lee, the actors.¹⁰⁹

Of those subscribers responding to the audience development survey for this season, 50.8 percent rated the production of Strange Snow as excellent. The majority of respondents rated The Resurrection of Lady Lester as only fair, while Crossing Niagara, No End of Blame and And I Ain't Finished Yet were all rated good. The most appealing production of the season, based on subscriber reaction, was the show which next opened in the Downstage, Sybille Pearson's two character play, Sally and Marsha, with Bernadette Peters and Christine Baranski, directed by Lynne Meadow.

In the tradition of Crimes of the Heart, Sally and Marsha was Pearson's first play. It had been presented at the O'Neill Center's National Playwrights Conference in 1980, at the Yale Repertory Theatre in 1981, and at the Pepsico Summerfest at the State University of New York at Purchase during the summer of 1981, in a production directed by Lynne -----

¹⁰⁹ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker, February 15, 1982, p. 111.

Meadow. Christine Baranski first created the role of Marsha in that production.

For Bernadette Peters, the production would mark the first stage appearance in New York in eight years. Peters first attracted attention with her performance in a 1969 Off-Broadway production of Dames at Sea, and worked on Broadway in 1974 on Mack and Mabel. From 1974 through 1982, her energies were directed towards work in the movie industry, for which she gained considerable recognition.

With Meadow convinced that Baranski was the best actress to perform the role of Marsha, she went about casting the other role, "looking for the right combination of women, the right balance. . . . Bernadette came to New York, read the play and liked it immediately. I presume she really wants to be back on the stage here,"¹¹⁰ said Meadow before rehearsals began.

The critics were pleased by Peters's return to the stage and accorded her unanimously glowing reviews for her work in Sally and Marsha.

The play, which Otis Guernsey described as "a solid vehicle for the exceptional performances of Bernadette Peters

¹¹⁰ "Bernadette Peters to Star Off Broadway," The New York Times, January 12, 1982, p. C-13.

and Christine Baranski,"¹¹¹ is about the friendship which develops between a transplanted, pregnant South Dakotan housewife, Sally, who loves "being touched by babies," and Marsha, a neurotic New Yorker with two children, an orthopedist husband, and an apartment that she cannot enter because, explains the character, she has not had a tetanus booster as of late. Sally, the more homespun and less educated of the two women, undertakes to save Marsha from the problems which plague her, and in the process, reveals her own loneliness and despair. Sally's distress sparks caring behavior in Marsha, and the result is a friendship bonded by tears of mutual affection.

While intrigued by the performances, Frank Rich was less than intrigued by the play, which he described as a Neil Simon retread. "Have we been here before?," asked Rich, rhetorically. "I'm afraid we have," he responded

Sybille Pearson's Sally and Marsha, . . . is yet another odd-couple comedy, female division. . . . it's a wise-cracking account of two lonely opposites who meet by chance and slowly attract--only to discover that they're in fact sisters under the skin after all.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1981-1982, (Dodd Mead and Company (1982), p. 29.

¹¹² Frank Rich, "Stage: Miss Peters in 'Sally and Marsha,'" The New York Times, February 22, 1982, p. C-18.

While, to Rich, the play was thoroughly predictable, he nonetheless admits that the author "is not an untalented writer. Every once in a while, her play spills beyond its rigid formula to give us honest, even touching glimpses of its heroines' lives." With the character of Sally far more developed than that of Marsha to Rich, he noted, "the playwright provides some terrific opportunities for Miss Peters. . . . It's too bad that Miss Baranski, a good actress, has few equivalent moments."

Rich concluded his review with observations of the play's direction, noting,

Because Lynne Meadow, the otherwise capable director, tends to sledgehammer the jokes, the tall, dark and cynical Miss Baranski is usually at her best when she is listening, not kvetching, to her shorter, softer, more open-hearted co-star. She gets better as she goes along. . . .

But if Miss Pearson has a play here--and she does, somewhere--it's clearly about Sally, not Marsha. . . .

Walter Kerr was more generous in his praise, remarking, "The two performers are immensely satisfying. Lynne Meadow's stage direction is handsomely inventive. Everything that playwright Pearson has put to paper--or planned for the stage--is close to first-rate."¹¹³ He went on to question

¹¹³ Walter Kerr, "A Little Workshop Wizardry," The New York Times, April 5, 1982, p. C-12.

the commercial potential of the production, as certainly others did as well, concluding "Broadway . . . may well be beyond it" for Pearson "has kept her canvas--her dramatic steps, her 'acts'--small and fragile." While the play was effective in an intimate workshop production, he reasoned, its appeal might be lost on a larger stage in a bigger house. He ended his review with a metaphor which evokes memories of the season's opening production, stating

What the author has done is really very effective to do. But it tends to become not so much a play as a wire-walking act. Can everything be kept alive and moving on the slenderest of supports? That's the challenge and that's what met.

The play did not make the transfer to Broadway, although its run at the Manhattan Theatre Club was extended by eight performances beyond the usual forty-eight performance run. Two seasons later, however, Sybille Pearson would be represented on Broadway with Baby, a musical about childbirth for which she wrote the book and David Shire and Richard Maltby, Jr. wrote the music.

Maltby directed the next of the season's offerings, a musical spoof of the "Beach Party" films of the early 1960s which followed the pure sun and fun adventures of Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon. Livin' Dolls, written by Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman, whom Frank Rich described as

"true believers" of the beach party genre, traces the trials and tribulations of three sixteen year old girls as they comb the beach at Waikiki in search of three perfect boys.

Rich described the formula of the show to be "that of A Midsummer Night's Dream flattened out to the rigidity of a surfboard."¹¹⁴ "The show works well when this less-than-deathless material is mined for its utter absurdity," he noted, ". . . but the authors' nostalgia sometimes dulls their libretto's comic attack, and their slavish faithfulness to their source leads to overlength."

Rich's review was quite favorable, overall. He described the direction and musical staging as "breathless" and "clever," and praised the cast, whose leads, James Rich and Deborah Van Valkenburgh, successfully incarnated the Ken and Barbie dolls of the shows title. Livin' Dolls ran in the Upstage for fifty-six performances.

The next Downstage offering was a production of John Guare's Gardenia, with Sam Waterston, Jobeth Williams, Edward Herrman and James Woods in the central roles. The play is the second of an historical trilogy which focuses on the character of Lydie Breeze, a liberated Union Army nurse, and three Civil War veterans whom she inspired to join with her

¹¹⁴ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Livin Dolls,' An Image From the 60s," The New York Times, April 5, 1982, p. C-12.

in purchasing "a piece of America." The four form a commune on an island off Nantucket, but the venture soon fails and Lydie Breeze eventually commits suicide.

In the first play of the trilogy, Lydie Breeze, which had been produced earlier in the season at the American Place Theatre, the action is set in 1895, after the title character's suicide. The play reveals the people whose lives were ruined by the failed attempt at creating a Utopia and the loss of their guiding spirit. In Gardenia, directed by Karel Reisz, the action takes place in 1875 and 1884, and presents events which occurred after the collapse of the commune but before Lydie Breeze hangs herself. "Here, as before," wrote Frank Rich,

the talk is about America's failure to live up to its democratic ideals and about the plundering of the land by Gilded Age entrepreneurs. This time the playwright has added another theme, about the birth of a realistic, distinctly American literature: His hero . . . aspires to write a novel that will sweep away "the dust of European libraries."¹¹⁵

The production of Gardenia proved to be one of the most emotionally satisfying experiences for Literary Manager Jonathan Alper in his time at the Club. "Personally, Gardenia was the happiest moment," he says,

¹¹⁵ Frank Rich, "Stage: Guare's 'Gardenia' Antedates His 'Lydie,'" The New York Times April 29, 1982, p. C-20.

I guess because I lobbied very strongly for that play. I think John Guare is one of the major American playwrights whose work has never quite gelled in terms of the audience, and probably the critics--but in terms of just pure imagination and linguistic ability, I mean he's way up.

I really wanted to do that play. I managed to get it done, and a lot of wonderful work happened on it here. And the production itself was brilliant for that play. . . . The second act, particularly, was exquisite, and a lot of that was the result of the work Karel Reisz did on the play with John when we worked on it here. . . .

Despite the fact that it was dismissed in the press, by and large, it was a wonderful thing, and I'm very glad we were part of what has turned out to be a much longer process for him in terms of writing these Lydie Breeze plays. . . . The Goodman (Theatre) has been involved, California has been involved. He's really building a network of his plays. I personally wish we could actually mount another one. We'll see.¹¹⁶

Lydie Breeze did not fare well with the critics, who found it thoroughly lacking in dramatic tension. The same criticism was levelled against Gardenia. Frank Rich was the most vehement in expressing his disappointment with the play, beginning his review,

John Guare is still at sea in Gardenia, which opened at the Manhattan Theatre Club last night. It's hard to accept that the author of this emotionally blocked, almost willfully undramatic work is the man who wrote The House of Blue Leaves, Landscape of the Body and the screenplay for Atlantic City. Sad to say, it is all too easy to believe that Gardenia comes from the playwright who earlier this season unveiled Lydie Breeze.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 7.

Mr. Guare's new play is about the same 19th-century characters as its immediate predecessor, and the two dramas are related in perhaps more ways than the author might wish. Gardenia is even weaker than Lydie Breeze but, distressingly enough, it manages to diminish¹¹⁷ the earlier play, such as it was, retroactively.

Largely at fault, claimed Rich, is "the turgid form of omniscient prose and literary quotations that leave little room for characterization." The bottom line appears to be that the voice of the plays is not Guare's. Rich continued,

What makes both plays seem so pretentious is Mr. Guare's insistence on regurgitating his literary sources without remaking them into art of his own. The sections of Gardenia which seem pure Guare are scant and don't add up. . . .

Meanwhile the biggest question remains: Why is Mr. Guare, who is no fool, writing these plays? Presumably because he has his own burning views about our country's history and destiny, about the passions between men and women. And perhaps the feelings are so raw that he needs the esthetic distance he gains by retreating ceaselessly into the past.

But if that's fine in principle, the distance in this case proves far too vast. When a writer as talented as Mr. Guare creates plays as elaborately evasive and disembodied as Gardenia and Lydie Breeze, one can only wonder if he's afraid to confront whatever it is he really wants to say.

Similarly, Walter Kerr confesses that his expectations were not met. His review begins,

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

John Guare is capable of imagining such bizarre and bitterly amusing theatricalized truths that I am at a total loss to account for his apparent determination to make Gardenia . . . almost as undramatic as its companion piece, Lydie Breeze . . .

(The play) feels as if it might more readily have been a novel; a lengthy descriptive stretch by the third-person author might have better served to acquaint us with the emotional facts in the case. In Gardenia we learn almost everything, and in Lydie Breeze everything, at second hand. It's a distinct way¹¹⁸ of doing things, and a dull one for the stage.

Robert Brustein, too, was unsatisfied and frustrated by the plays, which he caustically described as "nags" in the "Lydie Breeze Sweepstakes." "Guare no doubt sees some grand historical plan behind these Gothic events," he wrote, "but the intent is more impressive than the execution. . . . It is maddening to find this gifted writer continually betraying his own talents through a failure of craft."¹¹⁹

All three reviewers expressed the wish that Guare return to a style which was more recognizably his, with Brustein adding,

I await the third play in the trilogy, less out of expectation that it will produce something significant than out of hope that John Guare will finally have gotten this damned Lydie Breeze business

¹¹⁸ Walter Kerr, "John Guare: A Distant Way of Doing Things," The New York Times, May 2, 1982, p. B-5.

¹¹⁹ Robert Brustein, "Back at the Starting Post," The New Republic, May 19, 1982, p. 24.

out of his system. Perhaps then he can settle down to write a coherent and consistent play. . .

Edith Oliver was subdued in her review of the production, although she does seem to bend in favor of the work. She acknowledges that, for Guare, both plays are

departures from his earlier work--he is much more absorbed in abstract matters: the failure of the utopian commune and its significance for America, the meaning of Thoreau, the great themes of Whitman. I cannot deny that I missed those sudden spurts of wild humor, those marvelous little bits of perversity he used to give us, but, even so, his dramatic imagination is so original and so fertile that it takes precedence for me over any philosophical abstractions.¹²⁰

John Simon was not pleased that in Gardenia, "the crucial traits of character and radical change are . . . not seen evolving but are presented as givens or, worse yet, narration." While this auctorial approach provided an obstacle for audience involvement with the action of the play, Simon noted that

This is not to say that there are no sallies of humor, no flights of unfettered fancy, no gripping outbursts of emotion here and there; but the moments of truth hover outside the time of the play; we witness mostly prologues and epilogues to missing epiphanies. It is as if Gardenia were written not so much by a dramatist as by a clever, well-read, and vastly ambitious furrier who had to be a playwright at any cost to the audience.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker, May 10, 1982, p. 148.

Only Jack Kroll, writing in Newsweek came down strongly on the side of praise for Guare. He wrote,

Guare has found the deep pathos and the high comedy in the picaresque adventures of American idealism. These plays have a double focus: the characters are rooted in their time and yet seem like dreams of a troubled modern spirit. This is hard to bring off; inevitably there are slips. But this cycle of plays is something rare: it is a true romance, a deeply compelling refraction of a central American myth. And theatrically it is a whiz-bang; Guare finds his flash point where tragedy, melodrama and comedy ignite one another. Director Karel Reisz gets a warm and vibrant ensemble performance from his excellent cast, and Santo Loquasto's sets make beach and prison a vivid dip-tych of America caught between openness and con-
striction.¹²²

All of the reviewers praised the production. Frank Rich described the staging as "generally adept," Walter Kerr made reference to the "excellent company the Manhattan Theatre Club has bestowed upon Gardenia, Robert Brustein categorized Karel Reisz's direction as sensitive and forceful, and the cast as "strong and, apparently, committed." Edith Oliver characterized the direction as "superior," Sam Waterston as "splendid," Edward Herrman as "a wonder," and the performances by Jobeth Williams and James Woods as properly suited to the demands of the script. And John Simon noted

¹²¹ John Simon, "Of Gardens, Gardenias and Garbage," New York Magazine, May 10, 1982, p. 75.

¹²² Jack Kroll, "Nantucket Gothic," Newsweek, May 10, 1982, p. 89.

that the director "has devised some pleasing B rhythms and tableaux, and as much movement as could decently be come by."

A direct result of the production of Gardenia was the creation at the Manhattan Theatre Club of the Playwrights Unit. Guare, who considered his experience at the Club to be a positive one, was aware that his feelings were not unique. "There are a lot of people who felt that they had very positive experiences there," he explains, "and did not want to leave it (at that)."¹²³ He also expressed the sentiment that writing can be a lonely business, and playwrights could benefit from a place where they could come together--to gossip, to socialize, and then to honestly respond to each others' work.¹²⁴

Members of the Playwrights Unit meet informally approximately once a month. At these meetings, a writer will usually share some of his or her latest work with the other writers present in order to receive some critical response. Members are not required to attend the sessions but, notes Jonathan Alper, the rate of attendance has been good over the years that the Playwrights Unit has been in existence,

¹²³ Telephone interview with John Guare, 8/20/85, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 6.

and the program has proven valuable, both for the writers and for the theatre club.

"I have heard first drafts of plays that I wouldn't necessarily have seen," says Alper, ". . . so from my own programming point of view, it's useful."¹²⁵ For the writers, the Playwrights Unit provides feedback, as well as an ongoing connection with the Manhattan Theatre Club. Apparently, the informality of the meetings is a desirable quality in that it poses no demands upon the writers, who include Nancy Donohue, Joseph Dougherty, Andy Foster, Tony Giardina, John Guare, Harry Kondoleon, Donald Margulies, Ellen McLaughlin, Terence McNally, Steve Metcalfe, Richard Nelson, Sybille Pearson, Keith Reddin, John Shanley and Kathleen Tolan. "It's a mix," adds Alper, "you see very experienced writers and less experienced writers, which is why it works."¹²⁶ Says John Guare of his association with the Manhattan Theatre Club, "It's wonderful working in a theatre where there are interesting people."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid., 12/11/85, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Telephone interview with John Guare, 8/30/85, p. 2.

The 1981-1982 season drew to a close with an Upstage production of Anthony Giardina's comedy, Scenes From La Vie de Boheme, and a Downstage production of The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs, adapted from a George Moore short story by Simone Benmussa. The Downstage production fared the better of the two.

The promotional material for Scenes From La Vie de Boheme described the play as charting "the sometimes hilarious, sometimes poignant adventures of a group of passionate, outrageous young artists searching for true love and great art in New York City."¹²⁸ Frank Rich described it as "a three-act collection of scenes, not a play,"¹²⁹ which fails to realize the goal stated in the first act, of tracing the lives of six characters over an eventful three-year span. To Rich, the span was long and uneventful, and the characters and plot were not sufficiently developed. He concluded his review with an attack:

The director, Douglas Hughes, has assembled a cast of non-entities and hams--with the exception of Mr. (Daniel) Gerroll and Mr. (John Christopher) Jones, who are not up to usual form. The staging is high-spirited and resourceful, making good use of Adrienne Lobel's effective non-set (whitewashed

¹²⁸ Promotional flier for Scenes From La Vie de Boheme, May, 1982.

¹²⁹ Frank Rich, "Stage: Scenes of Boheme," The New York Times, May 21, 1982, p. C-3.

space, with standing canvases for movable walls) and a swinging door that permits running exits right onto East 73rd Street. Our hearts go with the actors every time they fly out.

Swinging doors also figured in the production of The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs, where the action transpires in a hotel in Ireland in the 1860s. Albert Nobbs is, in fact, a woman disguised as a man, and played in this production by Glenn Close. Nobbs has remained in disguise for some seventeen years, working as a waiter, when she is approached by the hotel's proprietress who asks that she (he) share a bed with a housepainter guest named Hubert. Trapped by circumstance, Nobbs discloses her secret to Hubert, only to discover that the housepainter is also a woman in disguise (played by Lucinda Childs). Hubert, sympathetic to Nobbs's plight, suggests Nobbs "marry" a woman, as she has done; a lifestyle which has proven to be free from complications. The action of the play is concerned with Nobbs's search for a suitable "mate," and the rejection she encounters, which leaves her in solitude.

The play was adapted from George Moore's 1895 short story of the same title by Simone Benmussa, associate director of the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault, who directed the show at the Manhattan Theatre Club, as well the previous productions done in Paris and London. The script adaptation was translated from French to English by Barbara Wright.

Mel Gussow saw the 1978 London production, noting that the Manhattan Theatre Club mounting of the show was "almost an exact copy." Susannah York performed the role of Nobbs in London and, wrote Gussow, "with no disparagement intended toward Miss York or toward Miss Close's femininity, it must be noted that the American actress gives an even more convincing performance."¹³⁰ Gussow raised no objections to the production, which he described as "imaginative," and moreso than the adaptation. He heaped praise upon Glenn Close, noting the actress

is almost unrecognizable as Albert. It is not simply a matter of her boyish hairdo--darkened and cut short--but of her manner, movement and sensibility. She is a timid youth who is efficient at work but without grace, eager to please but afraid to be expressive. The play is a curio, but the performance is transforming.

Edith Oliver described the production as "a triumph all around,"¹³¹ noting that the performers were all "excellent," and remarking that Simone Benmussa "is a most canny and resourceful director." Overall, the production was "enchanting."

¹³⁰ Mel Gussow, "Stage: 'Albert Nobbs,' An Earnest Masquerade," The New York Times, June 18, 1982, p. C-3.

¹³¹ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker, June 28, 1982, p. 87.

It was not so, however, to John Simon, who referred to the original short story saying that it is "a work that cries out not to be so adapted."¹³² Simon declared himself of the opinion that Moore is the "sort of stylist who can best be savored on the page," evidently in agreement with Martin Seymour-Smith, who described Moore's "Albert Nobbs" as "the greatest comic short story of the century in any language."¹³³ To Simon, the production paled in comparison to the original work, becoming, in the final analysis, "an exercise in futility." He did, however, praise some of the performers, noting "the only thing that stood between me and total lethargy was the fine, restrained acting of Glenn Close as Albert, as well as her almost disquietingly persuasive male impersonation."

Simon was the only major reviewer to voice dissatisfaction with the production, so the season came to a close with a show receiving mixed reviews, but more of a positive nature than negative.

¹³² John Simon, "Two Down, One To Go To," New York Magazine, June 28, 1982, p. 49.

¹³³ Martin Seymour-Smith, Guide to Modern World Literature (Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1973), p. 194.

The 1981-1982 season attracted its share of interest, and sparked a measure of controversy ("Why is Mr. Guare, who is no fool, writing these plays?").¹³⁴ It introduced several new works, and re-introduced a film actress to the stage. Its selection of plays was varied, with a greater number of plays from American authors than in previous seasons (the entire Upstage schedule consisted of works from American writers and two of the five Downstage productions were of American plays), and it brought Lynne Meadow and the Manhattan Theatre Club the 1981 Margo Jones Award for continued encouragement of new playwrights. There was nothing, however, which truly distinguished the season as being fundamentally different from any previous season. There was no outstanding literary find, and no commercial transfer. There was, however, apparently some dissatisfaction among Manhattan Theatre Club subscribers with the Club.

The audience development survey for the 1981-1982 season provides few surprises in terms of demographics. Of the admittedly small percentage of subscribers (roughly seventeen percent) who took the time to complete the survey, the greatest proportion were between the ages of fifty and sixty-five, married, with graduate degrees, and household in-

¹³⁴ Frank Rich, "Stage: Guare's 'Gardenia' Antedates His 'Lydie,'" The New York Times, April 29, 1982, p. C-20.

comes amounting to over \$100,000 per year. Non-subscribers, on the other hand, tended to be younger (between twenty-six and thirty-fives years of age), single, with graduate degrees, and household incomes amounting to between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year. Over one-third of respondents in the survey were contributors to the Manhattan Theatre Club, which "confirms the expectation that those people who bothered to complete the survey were likely to be more involved with the MTC than those who did not."¹³⁵

The results of the survey are interesting. The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they subscribed to the Manhattan Theatre Club because of the quality of productions (65.7%). Thirty-one percent of respondents said that they perceived the "artistic mission" of the Club to be to present new plays. Thirty-percent indicated the theatre's goal was to support new talent, while only fourteen percent perceived its "mission" to be the presentation of innovative, quality theatre. Nine percent defined the Club's existence as an alternative to commercial theatre, while three percent viewed the Club as a Broadway tryout house.

¹³⁵ Introductory remarks for "Audience Questionnaire results for 1981/82" (Internal document), April 8, 1982.

The often verbose comments which respondents supplied about the Club include a significant number of complaints in regard to the theatre's artistic policy. In no case is the production of a play faulted, but the question is repeatedly raised as to why a particular play was chosen in the first place. One response seems to epitomize subscriber dissatisfaction,

It has been very discouraging for me to attend your productions this year. When I received the subscription as a gift, I was quite pleased as I was well aware of your "reputed" success in presenting good theatre. Your productions have been a total disappointment. The thing that bothers me the most is that you have the facilities for producing good theatre, and instead you've opted for poor scripts that offer no challenge to the audience. Surely among the plays that you read there must be a few with content--one that doesn't rely on trite situations or stock theatrics. If this is the best that you can find, and for the sake of American theatre I hope it isn't, then you have a severe problem. I just reread your description of MTC in the program and I must say that, judging from what I've seen this season, it is a lie. Maybe you should consider doing revivals of old standards. Not that they'd be interesting, but they couldn't be any worse. Better yet--find some decent playwrights who can provide you with materials that "challenge," "ask hard questions," and "illuminate some aspect of our lives and society."¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Respondent's comment in Audience Questionnaire for the 1981-1982 season.

Summarizing the contrasting opinion was a respondent who wrote simply, "Keep up the wonderful work! The productions are always professional and imaginative."

Certainly it would be difficult to substantiate the claim that the Club's productions were "unprofessional" or "unimaginative." The Manhattan Theatre Club attracted the most talented actors, directors and designers, and this fact was repeatedly acknowledged. There is a distinction, however, between form and content; and while the form of Club productions was consistently superior, the content was often not. During this period, this observation was made with increasing frequency: by the audience, the critics, and by members of the theatre club's board.

With the start of the 1982-1983 season, Albert E. Jeffcoat's title changed from Chairman, to Honorary Founder Chairman. In an interview conducted at the beginning of the 1982 season, Jeffcoat reflected back upon the theatre's history, making a somewhat startling observation:

Crimes of the Heart, Mass Appeal and Ashes, I would say, are the only three plays we've produced in twelve years that fit my description of what we ought to be doing. It's only because we haven't been able to find, or get the rights to more of that kind of thing that we haven't done it. But . . . in my opinion, literally all of the other things we've produced--enormous numbers of things--have been beautifully done: the highest standards of acting and staging and everything else--but it's just that the plays themselves weren't

worth it, in my opinion.¹³⁷

"Well, I know how Jeff feels," comments Lynne Meadow, "because he certainly has been extremely blunt in what his opinions are." She adds that the real question is not what the Manhattan Theatre Club chose to produce over the twelve years of its existence, but what was available for production. "When you think back over theatre history," she continues,

how many . . . really important plays emerge in a decade? . . . The thirties . . . was a very prolific time, but of the plays of the thirties, how many stand out?

You have a dilemma, when you are a producing organization, in that you are obliged to produce. . . I sometimes think that if I didn't have an obligation to produce anything because of my job, I wouldn't produce anything because I would sit and analyze everything and decide that that nothing was any good ever to produce.

The fact is that each season we are bound to come up with a certain number of plays, . . . and you look at what's out there, and you find things that are worthy, and you stop looking for something definitive. There's very little definitive work; and there's a lot of work that has a wonderful scene, or a wonderful character, or a terrific vehicle for somebody, or very interesting ideas. And I think what's so interesting about the Manhattan Theatre Club is the composite of our work. I feel that adds up to making some sort of statement, that if . . . one play itself doesn't answer somebody's needs intellectually, or emotionally, that somehow the totality will add up to something

¹³⁷ Interview with A. E. Jeffcoat, 9/10/82, p. 9.

that's more meaningful.¹³⁸

Artistic Associate Jonathan Alper dismisses Jeffcoat's observation with the comment,

He's definitely talking about results. He's talking about the package with the bow on it. . . . You see, this is what non-theatre people really don't understand: You can't know. You have to do the plays to find out what you've got, in a sense. You have to produce them--you have to produce a lot of them--to turn over the good new plays.¹³⁹

In a similar vein, Meadow comments that out of extreme productivity can often come surprising finds, as was the case, specifically, with Ain't Misbehavin'. The need to meet deadlines can result in unusual discoveries, and, with reference to the Club's early years, she draws an analogy:

Dickens and Balzac wrote some fantastic work because they had to get their manuscripts in, and I think, you know, to be really arrogant, to compare the amount of productivity that we had to, say, the work of Dickens, or the work of Balzac, is not wrong, because there were deadlines to meet. . . . We had to slot certain things because we were committed to doing them, and we filled them.¹⁴⁰

Unfortunately, however, the Manhattan Theatre Club was entering into a period during which it would mount fewer and fewer productions each season. During the 1982-1983 season, the Club would offer a schedule of eight programs. The fol-

¹³⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 4.

¹³⁹ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 6.

lowing two seasons would be comprised of six productions each, and the 1985-1986 season would reduce the total number of offerings to five--the fewest number of shows to be presented by the Club since the arrival of Lynne Meadow in 1972.

With fewer slots to fill, notes Thomas Bullard, "there is more pressure . . . to pick plays that will satisfy all needs--that is, . . . the varying needs of the audience . . . for entertainment and for education and for stimulation."¹⁴¹ Jonathan Alper adds,

It would be nice if all our choices had to do with merely the quality of the work we're producing, . . . but we've also got to deal with the subscription problem. . . . Sometimes we do choose material that's going to keep the subscribers happy on some level--the problem is you never know (what that material is). . . . Sometimes there's a slight warping that occurs, I think, in the selection process--trying, to a certain degree, to second-guess what they're going to like for a couple of slots. So that kind of, what I would consider, external¹⁴² or extrinsic criterion comes into play.

The 1982-1983 season was not a season of light plays. One subscriber, referring to the season's offerings, defined the goal of the Manhattan Theatre Club to be "to depress the audience."¹⁴³ A member of the board of directors labeled

¹⁴¹ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 5.

¹⁴² Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 4.

1982-1983 as "the dead woman season," because a large proportion of the plays had to do with women or death, or some combination thereof. For the first time in the history of the theatre club, it became possible to easily isolate a theme relevant to each of the plays which made up the season. Says Jonathan Alper,

We did Skirmishes about the dying mother. We did Summer, the Edward Bond play about somebody dying of cancer; Elba, two old plays about the old people who were about to keel over any minute; Standing On My Knees--the woman who was crazy. And we didn't plan it that way, I assure you. I mean there was no thematic decision. Far from it. . . . But it seemed that people tended to feel it was a very "down" season.¹⁴⁴

The Downstage production which began the season was an import from the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Talking With is a collection of eleven monologues presented by widely varied women characters, which was named as an outstanding new play in the 1981-1982 season by the American Theatre Critics Association. The monologues were written by "Jane Martin," a pseudonym for an intensely modest writer who allegedly slipped a manuscript beneath the door of the Actors Theatre, and was later to be named one of the theatre's Resident Playwrights. In Louisville, the production was di-

¹⁴³ Subscriber's comment recorded in the MTC Audience Development Survey for 1982-1983 (internal document).

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 5.

rected by Jon Jory, who was commissioned to direct the play at the Manhattan Theatre Club. With him, Jory brought several of the actresses who appeared in the original stage version.

Penelope Allen originally performed the role of a bored housewife who escapes the drudgery of her routine by fantasizing she is in "the Land of Oz" in "Scraps." Susan Cash created the role of an evangelical snake handler in "Handler." Lee Anne Fahey portrayed a woman experiencing the pain of childbirth in "Dragons." In "Twirler," Lisa Goodman performed the part of a baton-twirler who has suffered a hand-disfiguring accident. Laura Hicks, likewise, originated the role of an actress preparing to face her audience in "Fifteen Minutes." Anne Pitoniak in "Lamps," played the part of a woman who speaks of the relationship between light and death, illustrating her ideas by switching on and off the many lamps which crowd her attic. And Sally Faye Reit originally performed the role of the woman in "Clear Glass Marbles" who recounts the story of the final days of her mother's life, using marbles to symbolize each of the days.

Joining the original cast were Margo Martindale, as a forgotten rodeo performer who bemoans the commercialization of her profession in "Rodeo." Theresa Merritt portrayed a

hearty, chuckling black woman who describes, with religious fervor, the virtues of MacDonald's fast-food restaurants, and the healing powers of Big Macs in "French Fries." Lynn Milgram added her portrayal of a woman who has covered her body with tattoos for each of the misfortunes she has experienced in "Marks." And Ellen Tobie assumed the role of an eccentric actress preparing to audition (with one classical piece: taking off her clothes; and one contemporary piece: beating a cat's head in with a hammer) in "Audition."

"I thought it was fascinating," says Jonathan Alper of the collection of monologues, adding, "I thought it was rather patronizingly received in New York, partly because it was from Louisville, which is the kiss of death these days--it's a question of what's trendy or fashionable."¹⁴⁵

The reviews of the production were consistent to the extent that they agreed that the eleven monologues which make up Talking With, vary from riveting to mediocre. There was, however, no consistency in rating the individual pieces along this continuum.

Frank Rich said of the work that it "ranges from fresh to warmed over."¹⁴⁶ Edith Oliver noted that a few of the

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Talking With,' A Find From Louisville," The New York Times, October 4, 1982, p.

monologues "seem pretentious or overloaded, but more often than not they break free from the author's typewriter."¹⁴⁷

John Simon was less generous, stating, "these are vignettes of vastly varying quality, ranging from the mundane to the desperately elucubrated, from the genuinely touching, funny, or horrifying to the banal or unpleasantly artificial."¹⁴⁸ Of the eleven pieces, he considered four to show "true insight."

It was also generally noted that being a collection of monologues, it was difficult to assess Martin's skill as a playwright. "It is not so obvious that she was born to write for the theatre," noted Rich,

Even if she does prove capable of writing plays in which her people interact, one wonders whether she can shake the literary mannerisms that too frequently endanger her characterizations. . . . the author's metaphors, which might play well in the mind's eye, can seem precious and overpolished when carried out in the literal realm of the theatre.

Robert Brustein noted, "some of these vignettes are sensitive and delicate; but even the best are far too slight to hold the stage. Instead of watching a play, I imagined I

C-16.

¹⁴⁷ Edith Oliver, "Talk Show," The New Yorker, October 18, 1982, p. 161.

¹⁴⁸ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, October 18, 1982, p. 88.

was witnessing actresses trying out for parts."¹⁴⁹ He continued,

I was left with some question about the motives behind this presentation. Was Talking With created to function as a work of art, or as a display of produce for the New York marketplace? Do these pieces have not only the form of auditions, but also the motivation, in attempting to attract the attention of producers, critics, and casting agents? If so, then I hope the effort is successful, but I also hope that the future plays of "Jane Martin" display a little more grit, a little less bathos, and considerably more dimension than these slender exercises in feminine consciousness-raising.

Finally, John Simon stated definitively, "a monologue will never take the place of a dialogue."

The eleven actresses who performed the pieces received varying degrees of praise, with Edith Oliver most generously declaring, "The sketches are all but faultlessly performed . . . under the direction of Jon Jory."

Of the respondents to the 1982-1983 audience development survey, forty-four percent rated the show as excellent; thirty-six percent rated it as good; sixteen percent considered it fair, with only four percent terming it poor. Almost identical ratings were received for the Club's second offering of the season: the Upstage production of John Olive's Standing On My Knees.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Brustein, "Robert Brustein on Theatre," The New Republic, November 1, 1982, p. 26.

The play, which featured the actress Pamela Reed, is the story of a schizophrenic poet whose illness has been brought under control through a combination of drugs and vitamins. The poet, Catherine, meets and falls in love with a rather typical businessman, Robert, who knows nothing of her illness. The first act explores the development of their relationship. The hesitancy which Catherine experiences at revealing her secret eventually gives way and the two become lovers by the close of the act. The central crisis of the second act focusses on the poet's discovery that the medication which has effectively controlled her symptoms has also deprived her of the ability to create. Robert, now apprized of her condition, begins to withdraw rather than offer the emotional support she needs, and the play closes with Catherine spilling her medication across the floor and retreating into madness.

Edith Oliver described the play as "a kind of love story" and a good vehicle for the talent of Pamela Reed. She wrote,

To convince an audience that a character is a poet, and a crazy poet at that, takes some doing. Miss Reed does it, with considerable help from Mr. Olive; the part is believably written. No aspect of it--emotional, humorous or clinical--escapes Miss Reed in her beautifully modulated, varied performance, her moments of stillness being as el-

loquent as those in which she speaks.¹⁵⁰

To John Simon, the play was less convincing. "The author has a neat way with a line," he wrote, ". . . unfortunately, Mr. Olive cannot turn an epigram into an epiphany, and we never know why the truly imaginative--as well as crazy--Catherine takes on the mostly plodding Robert."¹⁵¹ He too, however, lauded Reed's portrayal, noting "all the uncontrollable complexities of madness are in this performance, controlled. Miss Reed truly is two persons, each perfectly realized and inextricably encapsulated in the other. We watch this performance on our knees."

Frank Rich shared the opinion regarding the actress's work, noting "the one excellent performance comes, unsurprisingly, from Miss Reed as Catherine." He did not view the play in a positive light, however, comparing it instead to a soap opera. "The contrived and colorless writing is studded with prefab jokes that archly contrast Robert's bourgeois tastes and Catherine's bohemian habits," he wrote, ". . . it's a shame that the playwright has wasted his star's talent by cutting all those pieces (of character) from the

¹⁵⁰ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker, November 8, 1982, p. 160.

¹⁵¹ John Simon, "Even the Kitchen Sink," New York Magazine, November 8, 1982, p. 59.

same synthetic cloth."¹⁵²

Standing On My Knees was developed in a series of readings and workshops at The Playwrights Center, the Ensemble Studio Theatre and at the Midwest Playwrights Program. Like the majority of plays which comprised the 1982-1983 season, the play had been previously produced, in this case by the Wisdom Bridge Theatre in Chicago.

Next on the Downstage schedule was a revival of Anton Chekhov's The Three Sisters, in a translation by Jean-Claude van Itallie. "It's a translation that hasn't been done before," said Lynne Meadow, who directed the show, during rehearsals, "I think it's a wonderful translation . . . it's very easy, sort of light . . . not written in that sort of stilted, British, 'now we're doing Chekhov' (style)."¹⁵³

For Meadow, directing Chekhov represented a departure from the kind of plays she had previously chosen to work on. Therefore, it is understandable that there is a hint of insecurity in her comments as she described her preparations for the production,

¹⁵² Frank Rich, "Stage: Pamela Reed in 'Standing on My Knees,'" The New York Times, October 25, 1983, p. C-13.

¹⁵³ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 1.

It's enormous. It's just a vast play. Somebody asked me the other day how I wanted to approach it, and I said I wanted to finish it--my "concept" was that I would hopefully try to get through with act four. . . .

(Nevertheless) I look forward to doing it. You know, the more I read it, the more I love it. I just hope I don't love it too much. You know, I think sometimes you can't be too reverential; on the other hand, it really feels good to be going to be working on a play that I have such respect for. . . . I think it's important for me, just in my work matter, to do this. I've been working on new plays for ¹⁵⁴so long. I really need to get back to the source.

Meadow assembled an impressive cast including Dianne Weist as Masha, Lisa Banes as Olga, and Mia Dillon as Irina. Sam Waterston performed the role of Vershinin, Masha's lover, and Baxter Harris played her husband. Baron Tuzenbach was played by Bob Balaban; Jeff Daniels portrayed the sisters' brother, Andrei; Christine Ebersole played Andrei's wife, Natasha; Captain Solyony was performed by Stephen McHattie; Margaret Barker played the role of the nanny, Anfisa; and Jack Gilford was cast in the role of Chebutykin.

"I don't see how it would be possible to assemble a more distinguished cast Off Broadway . . . than Miss Meadow has done," wrote Edith Oliver, ". . . all those splendid actors--yet they do not make a company, and a company is es-

154 Ibid.

sential to Chekhov."¹⁵⁵ Oliver, however, was far from dissatisfied with the production, noting, "although the running time for the performance is over three hours the play could have lasted twice as long, for all of me." What, to Oliver, appeared to be lacking in the production was the humor, which she defined as the "missing third" of the performance.

Frank Rich praised many of the performances, particularly Banes's, Dillon's, Waterston's and Weist's, while noting that several other capable actors were miscast or misdirected, specifically, Balaban, Daniels, Ebersole and Harris. The production he described as "stultifying," noting,

The evening begins with a real rush of anticipation, . . . the director seems to be going for a slangy, contemporary, even zippy reading of the play. . . . The pace is lively, not mock-Stanislavskian; the actors get the laughs that are there for the asking, usually without straining for them.

But well before the first intermission, which occurs after the second of the four acts, the early breeze of fresh air subsides. However one chooses to do Chekhov, the approach must be unified and sustained. Miss Meadow's is not.

What first breaks this version's back is a perceptible slowing down and eventual collapse of the staging, until finally we are watching a stilted and seemingly under-rehearsed stock company rendition. There's a fatal lack of essential fine detail in the production's ensemble playing and even in its atmosphere. In Act III, we get no sense of

¹⁵⁵ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker, January 3, 1983, p. 51.

the portentous offstage conflagration, and by the doom-laden Act IV, the enervated company is plodding on and off the stage in clumps, as if everyone were yearning only for bed, not Moscow.¹⁵⁶

Interestingly, van Itallie's translation was also used for a production that was mounted concurrently with the Club's at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, directed by Andrei Serban. According to Jack Kroll, who reviewed both productions for Newsweek magazine, "Serban's staging . . . seems to violate all the rules for doing Chekhov, yet the result is beautiful and moving. Lynne Meadow's version at the Manhattan Theatre Club is traditional and orthodox, yet it falls flat."¹⁵⁷

Serban's staging utilized a mirror-like floor which he scattered with symbolic objects (children's toys; red and gold leaves) to reinforce the action of the play. The actors moved with "dancelike energy" before red velvet curtains that rose and fell at the back of the stage. Fourth-wall realism was avoided, while in the Manhattan Theatre Club production it was stressed. According to Kroll, however, the Club's production failed to capture the electrici-

¹⁵⁶ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Three Sisters,' A Revival of Chekhov," The New York Times, December 22, 1982, p. C-19.

¹⁵⁷ Jack Kroll, "A Pair of 'Three Sisters,'" Newsweek, January 10, 1983, p. 70.

ty found in the Chekhov's text. He wrote,

Most fatally, Lynne Meadow's production never captures the Chekhovian music, the tones and rhythms that infiltrate your heart and brain. Even Santo Loquasto, that heretofore impeccable designer, provides a realistic setting that seems to freeze the action in an inertia more wooden than its material. . . . Lynne Meadow has remained outwardly faithful to the texture of Chekhov's play and has missed its pulse of innermost meaning.¹⁵⁸

It is quite likely that the Club's production suffered simply as a result of an insufficient period of rehearsal. Meadow indicated a desire for more time to mount the show at the very beginning of rehearsals, saying, "You know, we only have a four-week rehearsal period. It's so expensive to try to tack on one more week with that number of actors, so it's going to be a lot to get done. . . ." ¹⁵⁹

The show did have the largest cast to appear at the Manhattan Theatre Club in a single production in quite some time. During the 1982-1983 season, only Triple Feature, which opened in the Upstage on March 8, 1983, had a cast size which even approached that of The Three Sisters, but Triple Feature used actors in three one-act plays, not a single ensemble. The reasoning appears to have been that while an additional week of rehearsal may have benefitted

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/4/82, p. 1.

the unusually large cast, it definitely would have increased the salary line of the production's budget in a sizeable way.

In any case, cast size was not a problem with the Club's next Upstage offering: Catherine Hayes's Skirmishes, the story of a dying mother and her two daughters. The play, directed at the Club by Sharon Ott, had been produced the previous season in London. Often using sharp black humor, the play is set in a sick room where Mother--deaf, incontinent and supposedly incoherent--has been attended to for months by her daughter, Jean. Her second daughter, Rita, whom Mother has disowned for becoming involved with a married man, reluctantly pays a visit. In scattered moments of consciousness, Mother throws hateful stares at her unknowing caretaker daughter and, at one point speaks clearly to Rita, saying, "Make sure there's nothing for Jean." The reason for her obvious hatred is never made clear; a fact which troubled Walter Kerr in his review of the play.

"We can't help asking the play for some bits and pieces of logic that will account for the mutual outrage binding mother and daughter together," he wrote, equating the mother-daughter relationship to a game of cat-and-mouse,

Does Mother so detest her own helplessness that she is bound to detest the daughter that does the helping? Or is there something more intimate,

more complex, festering inside their long, close relationship?

As it happens, the play Miss Hayes has written is not going to answer these natural and nagging questions--not completely, not precisely. It is going to play cat-and-mouse too.¹⁶⁰

The sisters also are players in the game. Forced together in the tension-filled hours preceding their mother's death, they verbally battle with each other as they recount past disputes and explore present ones.

"The sisters' arguments are not manufactured histrionics," noted Frank Rich, "they rise and fall out of a natural continuing conversation. Miss Hayes uses little forced exposition and springs few surprise revelations. She makes us feel that we have been transported directly into the heart of the play's family."¹⁶¹

Rich's review of the play is glowing. He continued his review,

"Skirmishes" is a small, quiet work that does everything it wants to do with precision and grace.

What Miss Hayes has written is a fine-boned family portrait, full of dark ironies and intimate, etched-in details. . . .

¹⁶⁰ Walter Kerr, "Will a Fine 'Skirmish' Lead to a Main Battle?" The New York Times, January 16, 1983, p. B-7.

¹⁶¹ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Skirmishes,' English Family Drama," The New York Times, January 3, 1983, p. C-17.

The writing is matched by the production, which as been ripened to a high poetic sheen by the director, Sharon Ott. In its original London staging last season, Skirmishes proved a triumph for its two stars, Frances de la Tour and Gwen Taylor. . . . It's hard to imagine how even those two fine actresses could have been better than the pair at the Manhattan Theatre Club.¹⁶²

While the production attracted the praise of Walter Kerr and John Simon, neither critic was as enthusiastic about the script as was Frank Rich. Kerr stated, "The writing is spare, careful, honest, sometimes attractively blunt. The performances . . . are exemplary. . . . It would be really very difficult to fault anything that is there, in the playmaking, in the production." But, he continued,

Skirmishes is all too aptly titled, suggesting as it does that we are eternally working around the edges and that the main battle has been deferred. The evening is interesting always but unsatisfactory as a memory to take along home. It wants substance, and not simply because it is short . . . or essentially because it is a duologue. It is thin because it is all backward glance, and the glancing is terribly fractional.¹⁶³

Similarly, John Simon wrote, "There is much that is perceptive, rawly honest, eerily reverberent about Skirmishes, . . . But it isn't quite enough to make a work of consequence. . . . There is not much to take home from Skir-

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Walter Kerr, "Will a Fine 'Skirmish' Lead to a Main Battle?" The New York Times, January 16, 1983, p. B-7.

mishes. The acting, Simon noted, "could scarcely be improved on," adding, "Sharon Ott's staging helps tremendously."¹⁶⁴

The staging did little to help Edward Bond's Summer, which opened next in the Downstage. The play, which had previously been produced in London at the National Theatre, was directed at the Club by Douglas Hughes and featured Frances Sternhagen and Betty Miller in the roles of two women in a confrontation over past events which include the Nazi occupation of their area.

Xenia, played by Sternhagen, is the daughter of a wealthy liberal father who covertly aided the resistance during the Nazi occupation. She was directly responsible for saving Marthe, played by Miller, years earlier from a German firing squad. After the war, however, the ungrateful Marthe gave testimony which led to the execution or exile of all of Xenia's family. Her reason for this action was her (and Bond's) view that while the generous and powerful family was kind, it was "corrupting" by confusing the lower classes into equating kindness with justice. The two women are brought together again when Xenia learns that Marthe has a fatal illness. Rather than ask forgiveness of Xenia,

¹⁶⁴ John Simon, "Unholy Dying," New York Magazine, January 17, 1983, p. 78.

Marthe spits in her face, a gesture intended, as Frank Rich described it, "as a triumph of class hatred over bourgeoisie sentimentality."¹⁶⁵

Rich's review of the production was scathing. "Edward Bond . . . has written a work that is meant to frighten and affront a liberal audience," he wrote,

But the drama is so pallid and inept that stupefied theatregoers can hardly even focus on the playwright's shrieking. . . .

We don't often see a play that upholds radical ideology by minimizing the moral virtue of saving lives from Nazi firing squads. But Summer is so torpid it might as well be about fishing in the Adriatic. Its entire present tense is dithering and static. . . . The subsequent revelations of the women's past are set forth in wan dribbles that, theatrically speaking, make about as much impact as pebbles dropped on to a desert.

Walter Kerr also expressed dissatisfaction with the play, describing it as confusing and unfocussed. He wrote,

There is a limit to the indirection a playwright can safely employ. Before it is done, Summer is exasperating. . . . The facade of the play is uncomfortably languid, giving the characters little to do, while we are required to do a very great deal if we are at last to assemble the substance behind the shadow. We are forced to edit, edit all night long, discarding what is near character-color, what is minor-league symbolism, what has been introduced merely to stir up the sound of drama. . . . Having discarded half the play, we must now fit together what is left, hoping we've made the right choices.

¹⁶⁵ Frank Rich, "The Stage: 'Summer,' Adriatic Recriminations," The New York Times, February 11, 1983, p. C-3.

It's all rather like trying to see the play through a rear-view mirror. That's more than a chore. It's an invitation to accident.¹⁶⁶

The production of Summer did not prove an instance where an unfulfilling play was saved by good production values. While Kerr did compliment moments of Sternhagen's performance, and Rich was impressed by the set, designed by Tony Straiges, these elements were not enough to sustain the production. Rich adds,

It doesn't help that Miss Sternhagen is wildly miscast as an aristocratic European, or that Miss Miller, while giving the evening's most sensitive performance by far, never quite convinces us that she has ever met Xenia prior to their current reunion.

The supporting players border on the ludicrous. . . . Aside from piping in some ominous electronic music during the scene breaks, the director, Douglas Hughes, contributes little. . . .¹⁶⁷

Audience response to the play was, similarly, not good. Thirty-seven percent of those responding to the audience development survey rated the production as fair, thirty percent rated it good, twenty-five percent considered it poor, with a small minority of eight percent rating the work as excellent.

¹⁶⁶ Walter Kerr, "Why Make the Audience Do All the Work?" The New York Times, February 20, 1983, p. B-3.

¹⁶⁷ Frank Rich, "The Stage: 'Summer,' Adriatic Recriminations," The New York Times, February 11, 1983, p. C-3.

It is interesting that the next production, Triple Play, presented in the Upstage, generally showed audience response to be exactly opposite the opinion of Frank Rich. The program consisted of three plays: The Groves of Academe, by Mark Stein; Half a Lifetime, by Stephen Metcalfe; and Slacks and Tops, by Harry Kondoleon.

The Groves of Academe, which was originally produced by the Actors Theatre of Louisville, details the relationship which develops between an English professor named Groves and intelligent iconoclastic student. The relationship, at first adversarial, becomes transformed over time into one of mutual respect. Rich thought the writing to be "cute," but concluded, "Though Mr. Stein is erudite and makes a few good jokes at the expense of academia, his formulaic play amounts to little more than a wan secular retread of a previous Manhattan Theatre Club hit, "Mass Appeal."¹⁶⁸ Ninety-three percent of audience respondents who rated the play separate from the others on the program considered it to be good to excellent.

¹⁶⁸ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Slacks and Tops,' One of a 'Triple Feature,'" The New York Times, March 30, 1983, p. C-27.

Stephen Metcalfe's Half A Lifetime explores the friendship shared by a group of four men who never quite lived up to the ideals they established for themselves back in high school. Confronted by lives which are uninteresting and plagued by domestic demands, the play reveals the importance of their friendship in maintaining their sense of self-worth.

Audience reaction to this play was almost identical to that for The Groves of Academe, with ninety-five percent rating the work as good to excellent. Frank Rich enjoyed the production, but noted, "there is nothing new in what this play has to say." Having established that, he goes on to praise Metcalfe's style and the execution of the production,

one nonetheless admires Mr. Metcalfe's ability to portray the vulgar rowdiness and ultimately the mutual affection that binds the men together. He doesn't sentimentalize his characters--they can be outrageously juvenile, bullying and even racist--but he does make the case that male camaraderie isn't always a bad thing. Friendship is the only solid possession these buddies have, and, by the end, we feel its full value.

Dann Florek, who acted in Mr. Metcalfe's Strange Snow at the Manhattan Theatre Club last season, has done a very strong job of directing Half a Lifetime. Though he can't always cover up the clumsy transitions, italicized epiphanies and bald passages of exposition, he firmly establishes the raucous atmosphere of the recreation-room gathering and delivers the emotional punch at the play's conclusion. The cast is excellent: John Goodman,

James Rephorn, Peter Zapp and particularly J. T. Walsh.¹⁶⁹

The final play on the bill, Harry Kondoleon's Slacks and Tops, takes place in a motel room near Kennedy International Airport where a somewhat mad all-American family is preparing to relocate to Africa. The family is a bizarre combination of a mother who is constantly high on marijuana and infatuated with Vogue magazine; a college professor father who seeks out affairs with his students, whom he then has expelled; and an adult daughter, unliked by both parents, who enters in a clown's costume. In a whirlwind of action and interaction, grievances are unloaded by the truckload, and a murder takes place.

"Mr. Kondoleon's work has been done before Off Broadway," wrote Frank Rich, "but he's seen to exceptional advantage in this outing." Rich went on to describe the play as a unique find made all the more salient by the two plays which preceded it in the program. The sketch, he wrote,

which might be described as an absurdist nightmare, is imperfect and unevenly cast, but its caustic surreal humor and bizarre vision are original and special. . . .

Mr. Kondoleon has wholly eccentric things to say about families, organized religion, shopping, sex, marriage, and even "the desiccation of European cities." Nearly every line contains bracing lan-

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

guage and the charge of high-voltage anxiety, and that quality is captured in Douglas Hughes's fast-paced staging.¹⁷⁰

By contrast, the play was rated poor by one-hundred percent of those audience members who responded to the theatre's survey, rating the play alone. Audience dismay with the show, apparently noticeable, prompted one patron to comment in the survey,

Try to recruit more interesting subscribers. Your audiences are insufferable philistines from your accursed neighborhood. . . . Those complacent, overstuffed fools weren't ready for Slacks and Tops,¹⁷¹ which was a wonderful play, so what do they know?

Taken together, this information might suggest that, in general, the Club's subscribers preferred plays by writers who, as Frank Rich characterized, "speak in more familiar and measured tones."¹⁷² Unconventional dramas, or plays which utilize unusual stylistic approaches, seemed to fare less well with the subscribers than more conventional literary works, particularly "intelligent" comedies, such as Sally and Marsha, and dramas on an identifiable domestic theme,

170 Ibid.

171 Comment recorded in Audience Development Survey for 1982-1983 season, (internal document), p. 32.

172 Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Slacks and Tops,' One of a 'Triple Feature,'" The New York Times, March 30, 1983, p. C-27.

such as the play which followed next on the Club's schedule.

In terms of recorded audience response, the final Downstage offering fared the best with sixty-two percent of the respondents rating the show as excellent and twenty-three percent rating it good. Elba, by Vaughn McBride, an actor-turned-writer from the Actors Theatre of Louisville, addresses the issue of aging. An elderly couple, relegated to a nursing home by their children, escape in a laundry truck and return to their deserted home in Elba, Idaho. The action of the play is concerned with the couple's daughters convincing them to give up their freedom. In this production, the couple was played by James Whitmore and Audra Lindley.

Both Edith Oliver and Frank Rich admired aspects of the production, the former moreso than the latter; and both cited the structural flaws in the play. Wrote Oliver,

The production, under Thomas Bullard's direction, is so expert and convincing that it almost masks the weaknesses of the play and surely enhances its strengths. The first act is lively indeed; . . . but the second act, with its foregone conclusion, runs out of steam and seems to just taper off. What is best in Elba is its details of character (of three of the five characters, that is) and its dialogue. And what is worst is the weak plot and a blankness in the writing when it deals with the two grown daughters. . . . Nevertheless, it is a brave beginning for Mr. McBride, who is never dull

and is usually funny when he means to be.¹⁷³

Frank Rich was much more critical of the script, although his objections basically echo Oliver's. "After a promising opening," he wrote, "Elba becomes a predictable and syrupy entertainment in the manner of On Golden Pond." The most disappointing aspect of the play, to Rich, is its failure to address the serious issues which surround aging, such as the responsibilities of the elderly person's children and spouse. He wrote,

Mr. McBride has successfully evaded all the important matters that Elba might have illuminated, and he has made too many glaring failures of craft to allow his play to pay off simply as escapist soap opera. . . .

the most moving moment of the evening occurs at the very end, when all the actors have left the stage. The cheery, old-fashioned ranch home, designed by Kate Edmunds, seems to expire before our eyes as the lighting designer, Dennis Parichy, shrouds it with the shadow of death that Elba otherwise never makes real.¹⁷⁴

Rich did, however, make mention of the "spiffy cast" and acknowledged the "polished and effective" performances of the actors in the central roles.

¹⁷³ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker April 25, 1983, p. 138.

¹⁷⁴ Frank Rich, "Theatre: In McBride's 'Elba,' the Exiles Are an Elderly Couple," The New York Times, April 11, 1983, p. C-20.

The season concluded with another collection of three one-act plays in the Upstage, presented under the title, Early Warnings. All three plays, Sunset Freeway, Bag Lady and Final Orders were written by Jean-Claude van Itallie and directed by Steven Kent. Viewed together, the plays present a pessimistic perception of man's likelihood to continue to survive.

In the first of the plays, Sunset Freeway, a talkative actress is caught in traffic on the way to an audition. While she talks of her life and dreams, munching all the while on snacks, emotionless reports on the car radio increasingly suggest the occurrence of a nuclear disaster. In Bag Lady, Shami Chaikin recreated her 1979 performance, seen at The Theatre of the New City, of the self-proclaimed Empress of New York. Through her ramblings, fantasies and hallucinations that take place amidst a set of empty milk crates, the character's absolute isolation is made poignant. In Final Orders, two male astronauts go about the rigid routines attendant to flying the flagship Crucible which is set on a course leading to its destruction. As the inevitable end approaches, the the pointless stream of offstage commands eerily continues.

Mel Gussow wrote of the program,

The first two plays on the triple bill . . . are somewhat attenuated. Each of the three demands concentration; for theatregoers as well as actors; they are an intense experience. The acting, direction and sound design . . . are united in their precision.

Taken together, the plays offer three-course food for thought. The highly theatricalized imagery and the free-flowing dialogue represent a return in spirit to Mr. van Itallie's most celebrated success, "America Hurrah."¹⁷⁵

Five of the productions which made up the 1982-1983 season related directly to problems which were experienced by women or between women: Talking With, Standing On My Knees, The Three Sisters, Skirmishes, and Summer. Mental illness and/or death was an integral concern in six of the shows: Standing On My Knees, Skirmishes, Summer, Elba, Early Warnings and several of the pieces in Talking With. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that many people voiced the opinion that it this was an emotionally heavy season.

It was also "a very good example of how we program," explains Jonathan Alper,

because having done that season, Lynne then decided, "Well, all right, we're going to begin the next season with the silliest thing I can find. I just want a piece of totally mindless entertainment"--which turned out to be Blue Plate Special, which was actually quite bad, partly because of

¹⁷⁵ Mel Gussow, "Stage: Van Itallie's 'Early Warnings,'" The New York Times, May 9, 1983, p. C-14.

the production, but that's a long story--but that's the kind of consideration one finds oneself realistically dealing with. We have these subscribers who are sitting there saying, "I'm just so depressed by all these plays, give me something else," and you've got to give them something else. And then you try to balance. . . .

This is probably the hardest part of theatre to talk about, and I do think people . . . would prefer it if artistic vision was something like toothpaste that came out of a tube--you just sort of squeeze it out. You've got it, you count it, you quantify it, there it is. In fact, it's very hard to simply respond to what your artistic instincts tell you to do. There are so many factors involved outside of that. . . . So it's never, unfortunately, as pure a process as it should be.¹⁷⁶

As described by Alper, the artistic vision in 1983 was nowhere near as "pure" as it was eleven years earlier when Meadow arrived at the Club. It is almost inconceivable to imagine the determined, idealistic, twenty-five year old Meadow even briefly considering whether her artistic vision would be amenable to the audience. Then again, in 1972, there really was no audience to please.

"I think I am naive now, and I think I was really naive then," says Meadow,

I believe you have to be naive to begin a venture of any kind. You can't have a clue of how impossible it is or else you just wouldn't do it. I think there was a gift in being just 25 and full of ignorance and optimism and belief. I plunged in as they say, rolled up my sleeves and got to

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 5.

work. . . .

My artistic policy at the time was "why not?" I think there's still a little bit of a "let's try it" spirit in me but it's become more refined. I'm more aware of the risks.¹⁷⁷

The risks were increasing during the 1980s. In reviewing the 1983-1984 season, Otis Guernsey observes, "we can't help the sinking feeling that rising production and ticket costs and changing public entertainment habits are slowly strangling the theatre as we have known it for several generations." In regard to the Off Broadway arena, he adds, "Off Broadway can still scrape up an audience for quality theatre . . . though rising costs are beginning to limit play-producing and playgoing opportunities even there."¹⁷⁸

The Manhattan Theatre Club had a capacity subscription audience, and one that was often quite vocal. One subscriber commented in an audience development survey, "You should realize that we subscribers are the reason you can function and once we subscribe we are not yours forever."¹⁷⁹ Certainly, this was an acknowledged fact, and maintaining audi-

¹⁷⁷ Joanne Kaufman, "Meadow and MTC," Playbill for Loot, February 3, 1986, p. 6.

¹⁷⁸ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1983-1984 (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1984), p. 40.

¹⁷⁹ Comment recorded in Audience Development Survey for 1983-1984 (internal document), p. 29.

ence satisfaction was a major consideration, particularly in light of the Club's impending move to a new location (still undetermined in 1983), which potentially threatened a reduction in the subscriber rolls.

The 1983-1984 season was noticeably lighter than the previous season. It included one revival, one musical, two foreign works and two new American plays, including one by Beth Henley, who authored Crimes of the Heart, which was to make the transfer to another theatre for an extended run.

Contrary to Jonathan Alper's recollection, Blue Plate Special did not open the season, but was second on the schedule (it was the first Upstage production). The 1983-1984 season began with a revival of Christopher Hampton's play, The Philanthropist, which had appeared on Broadway in 1971. Written when Hampton was twenty-four years old, the play relies heavily upon the literary device of the anagram.

The central character of Philip is a philologist-don at an unnamed British university who is simply unable to criticize anyone or anything. In the opening scene, Philip and a colleague, Donald, are listening to the end of a recitation of a play written by another colleague, John. John is seeking criticism of the play, which is an obviously dreadful

melodrama ending in a suicide in which "great gobs of brain and bright blood" are splattered against the wall. Donald offers some criticism of the piece, but Philip can only offer praise--which, surprisingly, motivates John to pull out what appears to be a toy gun, stick it in his mouth, and pull the trigger. Instantly, the wall behind him is splattered with brain and blood, to which the two dons can only register dismay. It is the first instance in which elements from one form are rearranged, anagrammatically, to create a new form.

As the work progresses, it becomes evident that The Philanthropist is a inverted rearrangement of the elements which comprise Moliere's The Misanthrope. Whereas Moliere's Alceste can utter nothing but scorn, Hampton's Philip can speak nothing but compliments. Alceste is full of passionate indignation, while Philip is virtually devoid of feelings, except for a vague sense of loneliness and a fondness for playing with words. The opposing social tacks employed by Alceste and Philip lead them to the same end, however; excessive loathing and excessive liking both result in alienating others, and a form of self-imposed exile.

The Philanthropist is both a satirical comment on social customs and character eccentricities, as well as a sar-

castic attack on the English intellectual/academic community. The action of the play occurs "sometime in the near future," when political assassinations are commonplace; but in the midst of these disturbing societal occurrences, English academia remains consumed with the pursuit of word games and, presumably, pointless abstraction.

The production at the Manhattan Theatre Club, directed by Andre Ernotte, opened to unanimous praise. Frank Rich described the production as "solid," noting that David McCallum's portrayal of the protagonist was "wholly credible without being inventive."¹⁸⁰ Edith Oliver described McCallum's performance as "strong and affecting," characterizing the production as "stylish."¹⁸¹ John Simon, expressing some reservation with the production, concluded that "the play, even in a shaky mounting, is good civilized, thought-provoking theatre."¹⁸² And Benedict Nightingale, Walter Kerr's replacement as weekly theatre reviewer for the Sunday edition of The New York Times declared that "under Andre Er-

¹⁸⁰ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'The Philanthropist,' in an Ivory Tower," The New York Times, October 14, 1983, p. C-3.

¹⁸¹ Edith Oliver, "Theatre," The New Yorker, October 24, 1983, p. 148.

¹⁸² John Simon, "Words and Deeds," New York Magazine, October 24, 1983, p. 99.

notte's canny direction, The Philanthropist struck me as both funnier and more serious than I recall 13 years ago."¹⁸³

Subscribers, too, seemed pleased by this clever, literary work, with eighty-four percent of those responding to the Club's audience survey ranking the production as good to excellent. There were, however, apparently a substantial number of audience members who were startled by the violence of the opening scene, as Nightingale makes note of in his review. Whether these subscribers composed the bulk of the sixteen percent of respondents who did not approve of the production is impossible to conclude.

If The Philanthropist represented the kind of work which contented the audience and critics, Blue Plate Special was the kind of work which caused dismay. John Simon admitted being at a loss in understanding the reason for the production. He wrote, "The Manhattan Theatre Club is inexplicably serving up something imported from Atlanta and called Blue Plate Special that makes one wonder about regional theatre in its culinary subdivision."¹⁸⁴ Frank Rich ascribed

¹⁸³ Benedict Nightingale, "Hampton's 1970's Play Has Grown in Resonance," The New York Times, October 30, 1983, p. B-5.

¹⁸⁴ John Simon, "Diner Theatre," New York Magazine, November 28, 1983, p. 108.

the motivation behind the production to be an attempt to recreate the success of the previous season's Off Broadway Pump Boys and Dinettes, a country-western musical which rapidly made the transfer to Broadway.

The action of this "musical comedy soap opera" takes place in Della's Diner in Morning Glory, Tennessee, and introduces a cast of characters who revere Elvis Presley, the Grand Ole Opry and "The Tonight Show." The book, by Tom Edwards, is intended as a spoof of daytime soap operas, and involves a highly complicated plot including the discovery of a nuclear waste dump beneath the produce garden of the diner. The music, by Harris Wheeler, with lyrics by Mary L. Fisher, which punctuates the action was performed by a four person band under the direction of Art Wolff. The cast was headed by Gretchen Cryer in the role of Della.

The show received unfavorable reviews both from Frank Rich and John Simon. Rich noted that the author "cannot sustain his premise for 15 minutes, let alone two hours. . . . There's no edge or clear point of view to Mr. Edwards's satirical attack." (185) Simon declared the one funny thing in the show to be the hairstyle of one of the characters,

(185) Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Blue Plate Special,' Rural Touch," The New York Times, November 16, 1983, p. C-26.

but praised the production values and some of the performances, particularly Gretchen Cryer's. Rich was in agreement, observing,

In the role of the diner's proprietor, the always reliable Gretchen Cryer is most appealing, and so is the set over which she presides. Using curdled oranges and blues suggesting vintage color postcards, David Jenkins has designed an old-time diner as real as those in John Baeder's pictures of roadside Americana.

Audience reaction to this, what Jonathan Alper referred to as, "totally mindless entertainment"(186) was mixed, with thirty-nine percent of respondents to the theatre's survey rating it good and thirty-one percent categorizing it as fair. Fourteen percent apparently appreciated the simplicity of it and considered the show to be excellent, however, seventeen percent rated it as poor, including, no doubt, the subscriber who commented, "Blue Plate Special was worse than a high school production. If the next few shows do not improve, I will not renew."(187)

Based on the recorded audience reaction, the next show was a significant improvement. Fifty-seven percent of respondents rated Friends, by Lee Kalcheim, an excellent production, with thirty-five percent rating it good. The two -----

(186) Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 5.

(187) Comment recorded in Audience Development survey for the 1983-1984 season (internal document).

character play, like the previous season's Half a Lifetime, is a study of male camaraderie; however, Kalcheim's characters are drawn from higher on the social scale.

Okie, played by Craig T. Nelson, is an Oklahoma farm boy who grew up to be a United Nations diplomat with a wife, two children and a Mercedes Benz. Mel, played by Ron Silver, is a transplanted New Yorker, working as a freelance cartoonist in Vermont, unable to maintain a relationship or to afford better than a run-down jalopy. The two men were close friends as undergraduates at Yale University. Now approaching middle age, they come together for a reunion at Mel's rustic log cabin, and gradually disclose the fears which they share. Neither is content with the life he has made, and both recognize the vital importance of the bond of friendship which they have too often neglected.

Frank Rich admired the production and commented upon the "excellent" acting, directing (by Barnet Kellman), and set design (by David Jenkins), but while he found the play "entertaining," he admits being disturbed by the play's formulaic structure,

The principal difficulty with Friends, aside from a repetitiveness that leads to overlength, is that we can too often see through the characters to the playwright who is manipulating them. When Okie and Mel are just bantering, they speak in the bright, funny, casual dialogue that Mr. Kalcheim can write so well. Let the men discuss their

angst, however, and the air is stilled with manufactured authorial revelations (a suicide attempt among them). The air of contrivance is further heightened by the fact that the friends' parallel symptoms of discontent dovetail so diagrammatically. Too often, we watch Mel and Okie as if we were watching two straight lines slowly but surely intersecting on a graph; when the cathartic convergence occurs, it is too formulaic to be moving.

Because Mr. Kalcheim has a sharp eye for ritualistic male behavior and camaraderie, there are many amusing diversions along the way to the foregone conclusion. . . .

Watching Mr. Nelson and Mr. Silver trade jokes, memories and anxieties under Mr. Kellman's firm hand, we do believe that Okie and Mel, different as they seem, are made for each other. What we don't believe is that they would discover their perfectly symbiotic kinship in three methodical acts.(188)

Given the range of plays available, Friends represented a fairly "safe" choice in terms of the Club's schedule of programs. A conventionally structured two character play which deals with comradeship and the universally shared experience of aging, there was little in the production which could cause offense. While not the lightest of the plays which made up the season's schedule, it nevertheless was a comedy, and one of the type of which many in the audience approved. Such was not the case with the next Downstage offering, a production of Mensch Meier, by the West German

(188) Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Friends,' by Lee Kalcheim," The New York Times, January 11, 1984, p. C-16.

avant-garde writer, Franz Xaver Kroetz. No production, certainly during this season, and, it is possible, in the history of the Club, sparked as much audience outrage as this work, translated by Roger Downey and directed by Jacques Levy. There was nothing "safe" in the selection of Mensch Meier, which was rated poor to fair by seventy percent of those responding to the audience development survey.

Frank Rich wrote,

When a play puts an audience to sleep, chances are that something is wrong with the play. But when a play makes theatergoers squirm in their seats, mutter in exasperation and storm out at intermission, the author may be doing at least something right.

Such is the case with Franz Xaver Kroetz's Mensch Meier, which I saw with a somewhat irritated preview audience at the Manhattan Theatre Club. Mensch Meier is far from a successful work--either as written by Mr. Kroetz or as directed by Jacques Levy--but its ability to antagonize a crowd is not one of its failings.¹⁸⁹

The subject of the play is the contemporary industrial underclass and its response to the sense of imprisonment it experiences under the pressures of a capitalist system. Using a single family as representative of the down-trodden masses, Kroetz examines the rage which the system instills through its insidious process of dehumanization. Otto Meier

¹⁸⁹ Frank Rich, "Theater: 'Mensch Meier,' Set in West Germany," The New York Times, February 29, 1984, p. C-19.

is an assembly line worker (played by Stephen McHattie) who takes out his frustration in brawls with his wife (played by Barbara Eda-Young) and threats directed at his teenage son (played by Thor Fields). The all-consuming concern of financial survival leads to the destruction of lines of communication between members of the family. Accusing his son of stealing money, he humiliates the boy by forcing him to strip to the nude to prove he's not concealing anything. Driven to the limit of exasperation, Otto resorts to smashing the family's living room furniture in an explosive emotional display which closes the first act. In the second act, the family tries to resurrect the values which initially they shared, living as "human beings" rather than servants of industry.

Wrote John Simon of the production,

Like most problem plays, the scan of a typical blue-collar family on the latter phase of the German economic miracle is much better at assessing the problems (Act I) than at suggesting resolutions (Act II). The slow burns of the production line worker Otto Meier, his wife, Martha, and son, Ludi, age fifteen, intensify into a three-way explosion that is as credible as any frustration anywhere; even if it is viewed from a rather orthodox Marxist angle. . . .

With the wife's and son's somewhat nebulous emancipations from Otto's ineffectual paternalism, the second act runs into trouble. Trying to mute with the ambiguities of art the strident optimism of the party, Kroetz lands in a dramatic irresoluteness that stifles interest. Moreover, Ludi, seen

only in the family context, remains two-dimensional. And there are problems with the production. Though Jacques Levy's direction is apt, Barbara eda-Young is an unresourceful and un-German Martha, and though Thor Fields makes no mistakes, only the god Thor could breathe full life into Ludi. But Stephen McHattie's Otto is both particular and universal,¹⁹⁰ both stolid and touching--in short, on the nose.

Frank Rich agreed with Simon that the second act did not match the first act, dramatically. He noted that when Kroetz "is dramatizing the family's bleak diurnal rituals in Act I, he writes at times with his customary pungency," but described Act II as "unconvincing." He remarked that the structure of the play--a series of abruptly ended unresolved scenes--"is what makes Mr. Kroetz's writing . . . disconcerting," but added that the underlying tension of the scenes is compromised by the set design,

Ray Recht's set is a monochromatic abstraction: The Meiers' apartment has blank cinder-block-colored walls, and its furniture is artily represented by packing crates. Dwarfing this set from behind is a Cinemascope-sized screen that fills with a mural at the beginning of every scene. While the murals are meant to serve as Brechtian banners--each illustration prefigures the action of the scene to come--the colorful artwork is too precious and loud. Between the studied George Seagalesque living room and the Alex Katz-style backdrops, Mensch Meier can become a remote, rarefied artwork--an exotic curiosity on display under glass--rather than a play whose grotesque realism

¹⁹⁰ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, March 19, 1984, p. 76.

should slash away at us without mercy.¹⁹¹

John Simon also made mention of the inappropriate set, writing that the "sliding-panel murals . . . are deliberately derivative and unintentionally confusing. They duplicate, indeed anticipate, the content of each scene, yielding a dizzying double vision that makes the play very nearly unwatchable."¹⁹²

If, as Rich noted, the play was distanced from the audience by the set design, one can only imagine the kind of reaction the production would have evoked had the play's "grotesque realism" been fully reinforced. Even with Reich's set, audience members complained that the play was "outrageous," uncalled for, insulting to the intelligence, and "far out." Several people simply indicated that they wanted the Manhattan Theatre Club to do "less Mensch Meier." One obviously outraged respondent wrote, "With so many young talented American playwrights--where and who made such a terrible choice!?" Another irritated subscriber complained, "After a day's work I am not interested in disaster, yelling, screaming and nudity!"¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Mensch Meier,' Set in West Germany," The New York Times, February 29, 1984, p. C-19.

¹⁹² John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, March 19, 1984, p. 76.

There was no screaming and no nudity in the next Down-stage offering, and there was no on-stage disaster. Where violence erupted before the audience in Kroetz's play, it was merely described when it occurred in Other Places, a collection of three short works by Harold Pinter, directed by Alan Schneider. The production represented the American premiere of the newest plays for the stage from Pinter, all of which had been previously produced in London.

Opening the evening's bill was a curtain-raiser entitled Victoria Station, which involves a taxi dispatcher (played by Henderson Forsythe) and one of his cabbies (played by Kevin Conway). The "Controller" radioes the driver to pick up a fare at Victoria Station, but the recalcitrant cabby barely responds. When he does answer, he claims he does not know where Victoria Station is, refuses to move, and makes some vague comments about being in love with an unseen female passenger who supposedly lies asleep in the back seat of his car. The reason for his stubbornness is never made clear.

193 Comments quoted or paraphrased from those recorded in the Audience Development survey for the 1983-1984 season.

Motives are also clouded in One for the Road, about the investigation and torture of three political prisoners in an unnamed police state. A State interrogator (played by Kevin Conway), dressed in a three-piece suit and seated in an office with antiques and an oriental rug, questions a family that is being held for investigation. Beneath the civilized facade of the interviewer is a sadist who enjoys sending his captives to off-stage rooms to be beaten, as in the case of the father (played by Greg Martyn); raped, as in the case of the mother (played by Caroline Lagerfelt); or, presumably, killed, as with the seven year old son (played by twelve year old David George Polyak), who had provoked the investigation for allegedly kicking and spitting at some state official.

Completing the bill was A Kind of Alaska, inspired by the physician, Dr. Oliver Sacks's book Awakenings, about a young woman who contracts sleeping sickness and is brought back to consciousness with the drug L-Dopa. In Pinter's play, the audience is introduced to the character of Deborah (played by Dianne Wiest), a forty-five year old woman who contracted encephalitis lethargica twenty-nine years earlier. She is about to receive the newly found cure, and, when she awakes, she does so as a sixteen year old girl in the body of a middle-aged woman.

Critical reaction to the three plays varied, but there was general agreement that the best of the three was A Kind of Alaska. Dianne Wiest's performance attracted unanimous praise. Benedict Nightingale wrote,

Dianne Wiest, playing this gray-haired Sleeping Beauty, squints and blinks from her bed, a 16-year-old consciousness incredulously, angrily, pluckily getting its bearings in a world way beyond anyone's emotional compass. She recites the few terrible facts she can grasp, and declares, with poignant dignity, "I think I have the matter in proportion. Thank you." ¹⁹⁴ It's a fine performance, a moving play . . .

Frank Rich noted,

If the play's size isn't quite as grand as its fascinating premise, it is often gripping. Miss Wiest's contribution is crucial. Playing a character who is at once a headstrong English school-girl and an incipiently embittered matron, the actress is both comic and forlorn. . . . Miss Wiest shows us a woman whose true awakening is the realization ¹⁹⁵ that she's left most of her life behind.

Reflecting back upon the 1983-1984 season, Mel Gussow observed,

There was no more provocative, albeit short, play seen in New York this season than Harold Pinter's A Kind of Alaska. . . . The (central) role was played by Dianne Wiest, who, had she done it on Broadway, would certainly have merited a Tony nom-

¹⁹⁴ Benedict Nightingale, "Three Plays Illuminate The Range of Pinter," The New York Times, April 22, 1984, p. C-3.

¹⁹⁵ Frank Rich, "Stage: Three by Pinter," The New York Times, April 18, 1984, p. C-21.

ination.¹⁹⁶

Only John Simon saw little of merit in the work, which he claimed had little to say. The central character he described as "not even credible, with her adult vocabulary and ideas from a however brilliant but apocopated teenager."¹⁹⁷ While Simon faulted the writing, he was also less impressed than most other critics with Wiest's performance, stating the actress "begins well as the woman but ends up overdoing things, perhaps as overcompensation for not enough to work with." He was even less impressed by the other plays on the bill, objecting strenuously to Pinter's refusal to define motives, offer insights to characters, or provide revelations. Victoria Station, he suggests, is simply manipulative, raising questions for which the playwright can supply no answers. One for the Road, he described as, "self-indulgent and exploitative, and needlessly, unjustifiedly ugly," noting the play "makes neither political nor psychological sense."

¹⁹⁶ Mel Gussow, "Off Broadway's Sparkling Brevity," The New York Times, May 31, 1984, p. C-19.

¹⁹⁷ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, April 30, 1984, p. 90.

Such was not the objection that Frank Rich had for One for the Road. To Rich, the play was clearly a statement on the abuses of human rights under totalitarian governments and, he notes, "His message is worthwhile, but his play is uncharacteristically obvious." Victoria Station, Rich described simply as "filler." It was A Kind of Alaska which saved the evening, as Rich concludes,

With the exceptions of Miss Wiest and of Caroline Lagerfelt in two supporting roles, the production's cast is less than ideal. There are too many stylized mannerisms and wavering accents. The director is the formidable Alan Schneider. He and his designers try to 'keep us awake with stark and arty stagecraft, if not L-Dopa, while we wait for Other Places to reach its one worthwhile destination.

There was nothing soporific about Beth Henley's The Miss Firecracker Contest, which concluded the season. The second full-length play by Henley, it was the writer's third New York City production. Two years earlier, Henley's The Wake of Jamey Foster, written after The Miss Firecracker Contest, opened on Broadway to a lukewarm reception. This third offering from Henley had been previously produced in regional theatres in Dallas, Detroit, Buffalo and Chicago, as well as in London, before reaching the Manhattan Theatre Club.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1983-1984, (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1984), p. 362.

Like Crimes of the Heart, The Miss Firecracker Contest, focuses on members of a small-town family, with unhappy and unusual pasts, who try to find out "what you can reasonably hope for in life." The central character of Carnelle Scott hopes that by being crowned Miss Firecracker at the Brookhaven, Mississippi annual Fourth of July celebration, she will escape her outdated reputation as town tart and gain a new identity. To this end, she puts together an outrageous routine, which opens the play, as described by Richard Schickel,

The lights come up on a young woman standing awkwardly, boldly, downstage center. She is wearing a leotard, mesh stockings and tap shoes. Without a word of explanation, she picks up a white rifle and begins twirling it to the strains of the Star Spangled Banner. Before the national anthem is finished, she will work flips, splits, flag waving and roman candles into the hilariously awful act she is practicing. Doing this lunatic parody of a beauty contest talent routine without on-stage preparation or any chance to establish character is, for an actress, the equivalent of an operatic soprano hitting a high E-flat on her first note. Holly Hunter, who has to come on cold every night at the Manhattan Theatre Club and open the show with this scene, is clearly the bravest performer currently working in New York City.¹⁹⁹

Holly Hunter's performance was praised by every critic who reviewed the show, as was the work of the rest of the cast. Belita Moreno played the character of Popeye Jackson,

¹⁹⁹ Richard Schickel, "Jagged Flashes of Inspiration," Time Magazine, June 11, 1984, p. 80.

so named because of a childhood prank in which eardrops were placed in her eyes, causing them to bulge and giving them the unusual ability to hear voices. Popeye, who began outfitting bullfrogs at the age of four because her family was too poor to afford dolls, assists Carnelle as her costume seamstress. Patricia Richardson played the role of Carnelle's cousin, Elain, herself a former Miss Firecracker, who has fled from her wealthy but boring husband, whom she does not miss, and her extensive collection of clocks, which she does. Elain's brother, Delmount, played by Mark Linn-Baker, has been recently released from an insane asylum for chivalric displays of violence. He admits to pursuing women with "at least one classically beautiful characteristic," but is tortured by nightmares in which he dissects women's faces in order to construct one perfect one. And Budge Threlkeld played the role of a balloon man who is dying of tuberculosis.

The intermingling of tragic and comic elements, and the depiction of a world in which anything can happen, along with the manic energy intrinsic in the script, attracted the interest of critics with the production of Crimes of the Heart. The same characteristics were evident in The Miss Firecracker Contest, although, it was generally agreed, to a lesser extent.

Frank Rich described the play as "a slighter, messier version of the author's first success,"²⁰⁰ however, he also wrote, "When Beth Henley is really flying, her comic voice has the crazed yet liberating sound of a Rebel yell. . . . Who but Miss Henley can describe one tragedy after another and send us home smiling?" He noted with admiration Henley's ability to combine "hyperbolic comic shenanigans" with credible characterization, and concluded his review with the observation that the production was "faithful to Miss Henley's amalgam of realism and 100-proof Southern consciousness."

Edith Oliver was in agreement, and expressed delight over the author's "astonishing, humorous vision,"²⁰¹ but John Simon expressed serious reservations about the work, noting,

Sometimes character and dialogue catch comic fire, . . . but much of the writing and all the characters as well as most of the plot twists smack of assiduously cultivated strangeness, weirdness hauled in by the gross. . . . The agglomeration of studied bizarreness is at first coy, then cloying, and finally intolerable, though not without some genuine wit or touching insight cropping up among the erector-set oddities.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Firecracker,' A Beth Henley Comedy," The New York Times, May 28, 1984, p. C-11.

²⁰¹ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, June 11, 1984, p. 112.

Simon objected to Stephen Tobolowsky's direction as well, describing it as "manic;" an approach which "galvanizes into hysteria whatever it cannot pound into sentimentality." Richard Schickel also noted that the direction "sometimes seems too busily antic for the cramped confines of the Manhattan Theatre Club stage," but regarded the approach as legitimate. Benedict Nightingale, however, wrote,

there's no avoiding the truth about Stephen Tobolowsky's production as a whole. It is feverish, sometimes frantic, in tone and mood. Its veins are packed with adrenaline, its heartbeat veers from 100 to 150 a minute, and its nerves are the nerves of New York, not those of long, slow afternoons in Mississippi. It grabs for laughter, instead of letting laughter emerge from carefully prepared character and atmosphere. Its climaxes have the glatter of farce, not the watchfulness of comedy.²⁰³

Objections about pacing aside, The Miss Firecracker Contest attracted sufficient attention to have its run at the Manhattan Theatre Club extended, and to make the move to the Westside Arts Theatre in October, 1984.²⁰⁴

²⁰² John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, June 11, 1984, p. 112.

²⁰³ Benedict Nightingale, "A Landscape That Is Unmistakably By Henley," The New York Times, June 3, 1984, p. B-3.

²⁰⁴ Nan Robertson, "A Georgia Dynamo in 'Firecracker,'" The New York Times, November 12, 1984, p. C-12.

The 1983-1984 season could be considered a successful season for an institutional theatre. It began with a critically successful revival of The Philanthropist, attempted a musical entertainment with Blue Plate Special, and offered a selection of contemporary plays which ranged from the relatively "safe" works of established writers (Friends and The Miss Firecracker Contest), to the esoteric writing of Pinter, and the evidently provocative writing of Kroetz.

Also included in the season was an Upstage production of Israel Horovitz's Park Your Car in Harvard Yard, which was directed by Lynne Meadow. The production of the two-character play, which featured Ellen Burstyn and Burgess Meredith, was not reviewed,²⁰⁵ but audience reaction expressed satisfaction, with seventy percent of audience respondents rating the show good to excellent. It was the only show which Lynne Meadow directed during the season, and was to be the last show that she would direct for the next two years.

Having married Ronald Shechtman, a partner in the New York City law firm of Gordon, Shechtman and Gordon, the Manhattan Theatre Club, which Meadow described as her

²⁰⁵ On the show's opening night, Burgess Meredith gave notice that he was unable to complete the scheduled run. The show ran for only two weeks, and never opened to the press.

"baby,"²⁰⁶ was about to have a sibling. Meadow took a maternity leave during the 1984-1985 season. It was the first time that she was absent from the Club since her arrival twelve years earlier.

Meadow states that, particularly in most recent years, a theme for each season becomes apparent in retrospect.²⁰⁷ If the 1982-1983 season emphasized women and death, it appears that the 1983-1984 season was concerned with individuals seeking identity. With the exception of Blue Plate Special, the central characters in each of the other plays either express dissatisfaction with their identities (Friends and The Miss Firecracker Contest), or lack any identity except that imposed by circumstance. Philip in The Philanthropist is described in the play as "hopelessly weak and indecisive;" he is unable to maintain more than the most superficial relationship with another human being, and sinks deeper into anomie by the play's end. The identities of the characters in Mensch Meier have been destroyed by the political and economic systems under which they live. The concern with identity is repeated in the Pinter plays, particularly in One for the Road, in which the focus is on the

²⁰⁶ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 14.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 3.

dehumanization of the arrested captives, and in A Kind of Alaska, where the search for identity is most obviously displayed.

Perhaps the interest with self-definition reflected Meadow's concern over the Club's identity in the face significant change. The Manhattan Theatre Club was about to take a major, survival-threatening step with its move to City Center. With the overwhelming majority of its audience located on the Upper East Side, the move to the West Side of Manhattan wrought considerable anxiety. The move, however, was deemed essential. With a one-hundred-fifty seat auditorium, the Club was unable to develop its subscriber rolls beyond the six thousand members which it had attracted by 1984. The obvious result was a loss of income. Even with the extended runs of The Philanthropist, Other Places and The Miss Firecracker Contest, Barry Grove stated that the Club lost \$130,000 during the 1983-1984 season.²⁰⁸

In addition to the impending move, the Manhattan Theatre Club, like other Off Broadway theatres, was being affected by new financial realities. Costs of real estate in New York were escalating and administrative costs were also

²⁰⁸ Samuel G. Freedman, "Cramped Theatre Club Seeks City Center Site," The New York Times, August 8, 1984, p. C-17.

rising. In the case of the Club, administrative expenses increased by twelve percent during the period 1982 through 1984.²⁰⁹ At the same time, cutbacks by funding agencies were exacting a toll. Income from contributions and grants to the Club decreased by eighteen percent from 1982 to 1984.²¹⁰ In fact, a \$30,000 cut in a New York State grant caused the cancellation of one of the Club's planned productions during the 1983-1984 season.²¹¹ "The irony," says Lynne Meadow, "is that at the same time we're on the brink of producing a very exciting season, we're on the brink of asking how we can do it. I feel more excited than ever about what we're doing but terrified about whether we can afford it."²¹²

Meadow's terror was certainly not unfounded. Many other Off Broadway theatres were registering financial distress, and both New York City's Phoenix Theatre and Chelsea Theatre companies were forced to close under the weight of

²⁰⁹ Manhattan Theatre Club, Inc. Financial Reports of June 30, 1983 and June 30, 1984.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Samuel G. Freedman, "As Off Broadway Thrives, Its Problems Mount," The New York Times, October 9, 1983, p. B-1.

²¹² Ibid, p. B-5.

economic pressures.²¹³

Writing about the non-commercial theatre circuit, Samuel G. Freedman observed in 1983 that questions existed

about whether the alternatives to Broadway can survive their own success. In the last 20 years, the numbers and influence of non-Broadway theatres have grown dramatically, as they have nurtured Pulitzer Prize-winning plays and playwrights and attracted prominent actors and actresses. At the very time of their artistic success, however, these theatres remain as financially vulnerable as ever, and they are contending with woes wrought by their own growth. Yesterday's basement theatre is today's institution, large and unwieldy at times and held to heightened critical standards that are not always compatible with experimentation.²¹⁴

This account is an accurate description of the transition undergone by the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Another of Freedman's observations is also pertinent to the Club. He writes that the artistic directors of Off Broadway theatres

believe that their roles--to innovate on stage, to develop young talent--set them apart from Broadway, but the alternative theatre is in some ways drawing closer to the mainstream from which it sought to break away.

In the same way that the expense of mounting a Broadway show virtually eliminates from consideration all but the most tested and promising commercially viable scripts, so the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. B-1.

Club, during the 1980s, began to rely much more heavily on scripts which, while not necessarily commercially viable, had prior production histories or were the products of recognized writers. Nearly all of the shows which comprised the 1982-1983 and 1983-1984 seasons had been produced elsewhere before arriving at the Club. Also, beginning in 1983, at the recommendation of Jonathan Alper, the artistic policy was changed so that unsolicited scripts were no longer accepted for consideration.²¹⁵ The production of untested material by new and unknown writers, which was a key aspect of the Club in its infancy, was officially discontinued in response to the changing nature of the organization and its environment. To some of the members of the founding committee of the theatre club, this change, while inevitable, was regrettable.

Founding member A. Joseph Tandet remarked in a 1983 interview, "There are complaints all over the place that American actors and writers do not get a fair hearing at the Club. And the original group has been disappointed because of that."²¹⁶ Also disappointing to Tandet was the change of direction which the Club appeared to have made by the

²¹⁵ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 8.

²¹⁶ Interview with A. Joseph Tandet, 6/28/83, p. 12.

1980s. Says Tandet,

I think we could make more of a contribution to the American theatre by being more open and by developing more plays in readings and in workshops. . . . We spend a lot of money now, considering where we are, on full-scale (productions). We're beautifully produced, and we have professional set designers and all that--this is very expensive. We didn't start off that way and I don't know if that's necessary. It's more the play than the trappings around (it).²¹⁷

Commented Meadow, in a 1985 interview, on the changes which occurred within the Club from the early days of its history,

First of all, the theatre itself has changed. Theatre in New York has changed a lot. When you look at that era, that was a time of enormous flourishing of the theatre. And it just isn't that way now. And it's been diminishing over the last five year period, I think. Number one. Number two, . . . we were doing maybe fifteen to twenty events in the course of a year, and I think there is something that we have lost in having had to cut back the number of productions that we do . . . (but) . . . with that kind of enormity of activity, and taking the kinds of risks (we did), crazy things happen. And we're not taking such risks anymore. In a way, we can't afford to. . . . I feel a sadness at this. It's like the sadness though of, in certain ways, growing up. . . . There's a sadness there at that loss, but I think we've gained something, which is that we do have high standards.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

²¹⁸ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 6.

The Manhattan Theatre Club did not abandon its initial goal to help develop new writers, but its efforts to do so were restrained by practicalities. The move to City Center was to further limit the Club's ability to provide a testing ground for new works. While during the 1982-1983 and 1983-1984 seasons, the theatre did present an In-the-Works series,²¹⁹ which consisted of staged readings of previously untried plays, without costumes, sets or critics, the series had to be curtailed for lack of an available playing space shortly after the move to City Center. Nevertheless, the series was evidence of the Club's continued commitment to the development of new plays. To Lynne Meadow, one of the goals of the series was to

re-create the environment I felt when I came to the Manhattan Theatre Club. . . . There was no pressure because nobody knew who we were. We're trying in the series to get away from the pressure for immediate results. It's important we keep developing plays--work that ²²⁰may not be complete today, but may be tomorrow.

Jonathan Alper provides a brief history of the In-the-Works and the problems which it encountered,

²¹⁹ The series presented Andrew Foster's Americans Abroad and Nancy Donohue's Warning Signals during the 1983-1984 season.

²²⁰ Samuel G. Freedman, "Theater Fare For The Daring," The New York Times, April 27, 1984, p. C-1.

It's been through several incarnations. In 1980-81, Doug (Hughes) ran a program called "In-the-Works" which, at that point, was four plays rehearsed for three weeks, played for two weeks, sort of with technical (assistance), costumes and things. . . . Everybody was terribly confused about what it was all about--I mean to say that was a little bit of overkill. So two years later we actually--tailoring our program to what Equity would allow us to do--we did an In-the-Works series which was a staged reading series. We did it for two years, and it was very valuable, I think, although none of the plays actually, unfortunately, (were produced). . . . But that was a way of actually getting staged readings up and allowing enough time for the whole process for the writer to be able to do some re-writes in the course of the process.

It costs a lot of money. It costs three weeks' Off Broadway salary per actor. There's no way ticket revenue can come up with that. In fact I think we . . . performed it too many times for the sake of getting some ticket income. It's very difficult to do something eight times if you've only rehearsed it for virtually a week because you haven't got anything set, and the actors begin to do all kinds of strange things. So that wasn't ideal, but it was the best we could come up with.

I always want to do more of them. . . . It's not dead by any means. . . . Equity itself has somewhat relaxed their rules for doing readings so that I can now get actors in for like eighteen hours and if I pay them carfare, then that's OK. Well, it's not ideal, but it's better than it was before, so we hope to do a few more on that plan. . . .

Essentially, we want to create a kind of O'Neill (Theatre Center) situation in-house--that's what this is about--which gives the writer time to do some work on the play, and gives him a chance to get some audience feedback; and the focus is pure-

ly on the writing.²²¹

The series, however, in order to be operational, required a second space, of which the theatre was to be deprived for several seasons.

During the 1984-1985 season, the first season at City Center, the Club maintained its offices at East 73rd Street, and the plan was to utilize one of the performance spaces there for works which previously would have been reserved for the Upstage. The City Center space was to be used for the more fully developed works that comprised the Downstage schedule. However, interest seemed to wane among subscribers towards the work done at the theatre's old address. The audience development survey for the year indicates that the overwhelming majority of patrons subscribed to the main-stage program only. The second stage schedule, which consisted mostly of cabaret-style revues, did not attract as much interest. Functioning essentially with only one performance space, the Club's productivity was much more greatly restricted.

The stated artistic goals of the theatre remained fundamentally unchanged, however, despite the obstacles which it was encountering. Speaking in 1985, Jonathan Alper de-

²²¹ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 6.

scribed the artistic purpose of the Manhattan Theatre Club to be

To produce new plays--which is easier said than done these days. To find new writers; and also to give a chance to established writers to have their work done in a non-commercial setting. Essentially, to preserve some sort of non-commercial theatre in New York, to put it in a nutshell.²²²

Was the Club succeeding in this endeavor? In Alper's opinion, despite the theatre's mounting difficulties, it was meeting its goals, as he describes,

Goals are, in a way, sort of artificial things reality tends to change. I think in a broad way, we've lived up to those goals. I think, specifically, I'm always struggling to find ways to do more of that kind of work (with developing new plays). I don't think we're doing that at the moment, partly because we haven't got a second stage, which is a major problem in terms of getting new plays on. We keep trying to find new plays to get back to it; we keep struggling to put together some kind of reading series, or playwrights' unit--just to find a way to keep new plays coming through here. And I'm sure once we again have more slots to fill, we'll be able to produce more.

It's difficult to produce raw new work in that 300 seat space at City Center because the space creates certain expectations. . . . So there are certain things you can't put in there, because they're too small or too unfinished. So we desperately need that (additional) hundred seat space to be able to really address ourselves to those original goals.

²²² Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 1.

Reflecting on the 1984-1985 and 1985-1986 seasons, Alper concedes an apparent change in the theatre's programming, but contends that

nothing is proceeding from a deliberate change in policy. There has been a change as a result of practicalities. We're doing far fewer things than when I started here . . . so the more you narrow down, the harder it is to really go out on a limb and take a flying chance on something.

There's no question that in the last two years we've been a lot more conservative in terms of play selection than we have been before--although, I mean certainly with Messiah and California Dog Fight, we took two rather large chances--neither of which paid off, for different reasons--but there has been an effort to sort of find plays that a larger audience is going to be able to relate to. . . .

But, as I say, I don't think that's a sort of a conscious artistic policy change; I think it's a result, as I say, of the space and money involved, which is why I keep coming back to this business of the second space. Because, as far as I'm concerned, when we get the second space, we're going to go in the other direction entirely. I hope, anyway, to do a lot of very raw, untried stuff of some new writers, and try to find some sort of a mix--which we don't have at the moment, there's no question.

Renovations to create a second space at City Center were being planned at the time of the Club's move to its new quarters in the fall of 1984. Projections were that the second space could be operational by the fall of 1986, but until that time, the Manhattan Theatre Club would have to suffice with a single stage. This reality was problematic, as Alper notes,

We really feel the lack of that (second space). . . . It's oddly very hard to program the mainstage season without that other space. It's hard to explain why, but it's just very difficult to choose only five plays. It becomes some artificially difficult problem, because we feel we have to balance, and you want to get the new work in there, but somehow--if you can't do those other five plays₂₂₃ (in the "Upstage"), everything loses proportion.

Balancing the season was a problem made more difficult by a growing perception, presumably shared by new playwrights, that producing new work in New York carried potentially serious professional risks. As a result, the number of plays available for production was, according to Alper, diminishing,

One thing I have been finding is that a lot of playwrights do not want their new plays being done in New York. I have had to scramble for some things and to promise, "Well, we'll do it in a closet, and there'll be no critics, nobody's ever going to know about it," because there is this fear that New York is only for window shopping. It's not where you actually do it. And that's, certainly in the last five years, that's become more and more the case. Agents send the plays elsewhere first around the country.

I think it's a cliché, but it's true: there is a national theatre now, and the better regional theatres are a part of the circuit. We like to think that we're a part of the circuit in terms of both providing work for them₂₂₄ and also being a place where that work can come.

223 Ibid., p. 3.

224 Ibid., p. 4.

Evidence that the Manhattan Theatre Club was, in fact, a part of the "national theatre circuit" could be found in the number of transfers the Club was able to effect from the Actors Theatre of Louisville, for example, and also in the transfer of its own productions to other theatres as, for instance, in the case of Stephen Metcalfe's Strange Snow.

During the 1984-1985 season, the Club did import a show: Husbandry, by Patrick Tovatt. The production, which was mounted at the theatre's East Side location as a "Special Event," was originally produced by the Actors Theatre of Louisville, and was directed by that company's artistic director, Jon Jory. It was, however, the only import of the six events which comprised the schedule.

The 1984-1985 season consisted of one revival, In Celebration, by David Storey; one fully produced musical revue by Richard Maltby, Jr. called Hang On to the Good Times, and three new plays: Messiah, by Martin Sherman, Digby, by Joseph Dougherty and California Dog Fight by Mark Lee. Of these three, only Messiah had been previously produced.

The season was not to prove exceptional in terms of critical reception, although it did attract a measure of praise. The season's first show, In Celebration, directed by Lindsay Anderson, who directed the original 1969 Royal

Court production, was well-received by Frank Rich and Edith Oliver, although both reviewers had reservations concerning the script.

The play, the author's second full-length work, presents a family reunion which occurs in celebration of the fortieth wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Shaw. Mr. Shaw is a coal miner who is nearing his retirement. His wife is a woman with social aspirations and a secret sexual episode in her past. Returning for the celebration are their three sons, all of whom have managed to escape the working class. Ironically, however, their laborer-father seems to be far more content with his life in the mines than any of the sons. Steven is a school teacher and aspiring writer who has just abandoned the book which he spent seven years writing. Andrew is a lawyer by training, but has opted for a career as a painter despite his admission that he has little interest in art. And Colin is an automobile-factory labor negotiator who simply goes through the motions of his role. As the play discloses the frustrations of its discontent characters, it unfolds as an attack on the values of the bourgeoisie.

Edith Oliver subtitled her review of the production "not much to celebrate," noting that in spite of the noted

director and his "distinguished" cast, "the play doesn't work." Oliver found no fault with the production, the first to be presented on the City Center stage, but wrote of Storey, "although there is no question here of his talent, the play is weak, and even the splendid cast cannot strengthen it."²²⁵

John Simon considered the work understated, and the result was that

the whole play skirts boredom, despite some racy, saucy, aromatic dialogue. It is, however, a fine occasion--although just short of a field day--for actors. . . . Malcolm McDowell . . . has canny timing and an inchoately psychotic quality leaping out of his fake cheerfulness. . . .

There is fine work from Pauline Flanagan, as a dignified but not quite undamaged mother; from Margaret Hilton, as the radiantly obnoxious neighbor; from John C. Vennema, as the dogged, not unbright but charmless Colin; and perhaps especially from Frank Grimes, as the outwardly amiable yet inwardly tormented Steven--and Grimes does some wonderfully subtle, intricate things.²²⁶

Frank Rich described the writing as "pungently authentic," and noted that the second act is "unsettling," but conceded that there were flaws in the script, if not in the production. He wrote,

²²⁵ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, November 11, 1984, p. 184.

²²⁶ John Simon, "Storey Theatre," New York Magazine, November 19, 1984, p. 69.

At the M.T.C., Mr. Anderson has assembled an assured cast, led with bristling authority by his frequent film collaborator, Malcolm McDowell. The actors can't quite camouflage Mr. Storey's prosaic and humorless exposition which accounts for the sleepy first act; but they strike hard once the characters reach the tense, alcohol-fueled climax of their long day's journey into night. . . .

The cast usually finds sharp details that enliven the writing's bleak palette. Mr. Grimes' blocked writer has the consumptive pallor and burning anguish of O'Neill's Edmond Tyrone, and Mr. Symonds' wheezing, well-meaning father seems both heroic and pathetic as he somewhat fondly reminisces about his half-century of drudgery in a 13-inch-high crevice beneath the earth. As the catalytic Andrew, Mr. McDowell anxiously jiggles the coins in his pocket, delivers his lines with sarcastic venom and constantly seems about to gore the parents he blames for everything that's gone wrong.

Even so, when the moment of truth finally comes, Andrew can't quite bring himself to settle the old scores. He freezes instead of exploding. While many family plays end with cathartic confrontations, In Celebration achieves its distinct chill by dramatizing feelings that are well beyond a playwright's power to resolve.²²⁷

Rich was not as kind in his review of Husbandry, which launched the season's East Side series of Special Events. The play, intended as a depiction of the plight of America's family farmers at the hands of "agribusiness hotshots," failed to work, in his opinion. He wrote, "Far from dramatizing the small-time farmer's plight, Mr. Tovatt merely ex-

²²⁷ Frank Rich, "Stage: 'In Celebration,' By David Storey Opens," The New York Times, November 9, 1984, p. C-3.

exploits it to impose unearned significance on an otherwise amateur soap opera. The play's only cash crop is corn."²²⁸

The plot revolves around the manipulations engaged in by an aging, fifth-generation farmer and his wife to convince their city-dwelling son to return to the farm. The hope is that if he returns, the farm can be saved; however, because the author repeatedly asserts that the independent farmer has no chance of survival, the son's decision is ultimately unimportant and, to Rich, the result is a plot of "dramatic insufficiency."

The production fared better than the play, although it too was flawed in Rich's opinion,

Husbandry has been staged by the Actors Theatre's Producing Director, Jon Jory. His cast is a good one, but it was surely a dubious decision to instruct the actors to yell incessantly during the play's final stages. While the rapid escalation of the decibel level promises a big dramatic payoff, that expectation is frustrated when Mr. Tovatt leaves all his play's issues and plotlines completely unresolved at the final curtain. By then his self-righteous farm family has been screaming for so long that an audience can't be blamed if it goes home secretly rooting for the bank to foreclose.²²⁹

²²⁸ Frank Rich, "Theatre: 'Husbandry,' Play by Patrick Tovatt," The New York Times, December 10, 1984, p. C-14.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Given the very small sample of reactions to the play recorded in the audience development survey, it is hard to make any definitive conclusion as to how the play was received by subscribers, but of 203 respondents, forty-two percent rated the show good, thirty-one percent rated it fair, fourteen percent rated it poor and thirteen percent considered it to be excellent.

If the Club's audience development surveys are a true indication of subscriber reaction to programming, the reaction was decidedly negative to the Club's next offering at City Center. Thirty-eight percent of respondents rated Martin Sherman's Messiah as poor, thirty percent considered it to be fair, twenty-five percent ranked it good, with seven percent terming it excellent. There was general agreement among theatre critics that the production was not successful, but that it did have some redeeming characteristics.

The play, Sherman's first offering since writing Bent, which had a successful Broadway run during the 1979-1980 season, treats the hopes of the inhabitants of a seventeenth century Polish village for salvation. Following a pogrom led by the Cossacks, which has decimated the population of the village of Yultishk, the people turn to a mysterious rabbi in Asia Minor whom they become convinced is their mes-

siah. The play follows their trek to Gallipoli, and provides a character study of those who undertake the journey.

Messiah was originally produced in London in 1982, directed by Ronald Eyre. At the Manhattan Theatre Club, it was directed by David Leveaux, a British director, and featured Diane Venora in the central role of Rachel.

Frank Rich wrote,

Mr. Sherman remains a frustrating playwright. Messiah . . . is a failure, but it can't be summarily dismissed. While there are plenty of writers today who trivialize historical nightmares for melodramatic ends, Mr. Sherman is not one of them. He often (if not always) aims for illumination rather than cheap effects, and in both Bent and Messiah he strives for a modern style of epic theatricality. . . .

But Mr. Sherman's writing, the eloquent and shattering pogrom descriptions excepted, rarely proves as sizable and compelling as his ambitions.²³⁰

John Simon agreed:

The ambition is great, and this stab at a philosophical, theological, epic chamber play--its six characters are supposed to convey a world--is not without interest. There is a seductive skill in the early scenes, though, finally, it all bogs down into a Yentl on the Roof or an Isaak Babel of tongues stitched together with an I. B. Singer sewing machine.²³¹

²³⁰ Frank Rich, "Theater: Sherman's 'Messiah,'" The New York Times, December 24, 1984, p. C-11.

²³¹ John Simon, "False 'Messiah,' Fake 'Diamonds,'" New York Magazine, January 7, 1985, p. 54.

Paul J. McCarren, writing for America, also responded negatively to the play's development:

The beginning of Messiah by Martin Sherman was a good reminder of why you should go to the Manhattan Theatre Club and other top Off and Off-Off Broadway theatres for the best return on your entertainment dollar. However, what starts in "Messiah" as a knock-about, homespun and irreverent tale about God's apparent inability to make good on His promises to His chosen people slowly becomes a muddled, abstract quarrel about good and evil. The evening was not a bad theatrical investment, but I was feeling less dramatically bullish when it was over.²³²

Unevenness of style and a failure to resolve certain elements of the drama were cited by all three reviewers as the play's fundamental faults. Similarly, all three reviewers wrote positively of the production values and of the staging. Frank Rich noted:

Working with a highly imaginative lighting scheme by James F. Ingalls, stark costumes by Linda Fisher and an abstracted Tony Straiges set, Mr. Leveaux eventually achieves a fabulist mood that suits Mr. Sherman's more mystical intentions.

McCarren observed that the set and the lighting created an environment for the characters and effectively revealed "something about the people who used these places." John Simon added:

²³² Paul J. McCarren, "Godtalk," America, February 23, 1985, p. 149.

The production is fascinating enough to gloss over much that is wrong with the play. Tony Straiges's sets achieve maximum evocativeness with Spartan means. Linda Fisher's costumes are understatedly lovely, and James F. Ingall's lighting is poetic, poignant, jovial and astonishing by turns, staunchly nudging on the playwriting. Robert Dennis's music is astringent and wisely sparing, and David Leveaux's staging is consistently imaginative . . .

Simon concluded his review remarking, "in a season that has tended to be aggressively mindless, an adroit production of a play that at least flirts with ideas is not to be casually dismissed."

The next production on the Club's schedule was of a much lighter nature than Messiah. Hang On to the Good Times was a collection of songs from Gretchen Cryer-Nancy Ford concerts, records and musicals, which included Shelter and I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road. Shelter, about two roommates, one of whom was a computer, had a short run Broadway in 1973, while I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road had an extended run Off Broadway in 1978, starring Gretchen Cryer. The revue at the Club was directed by Richard Maltby, Jr.

The show, which was reviewed by both Mel Gussow and Frank Rich of The New York Times, elicited dichotomous reactions. Mel Gussow wrote that the evening "reminds us of the musical talent of this ideally matched team. . . . Miss

Cryer writes bright lyrics and Miss Ford's music has a contemporary sound without being hard-edged. Seamed together, they are mellifluous." He added, of the production,

Among its other assets, Hang On to the Good Times reaffirms Richard Maltby Jr.'s mastery as director of the anthology form. As he demonstrated in Ain't Misbehavin' (the music of Fats Waller) and Starting Here, Starting Now (the music of Mr. Maltby and David Shire), he does far more than simply collate songs of the same authorship. He finds connective tissue both in the choice and in the performance. The Fats Waller music had a natural theatricality, with one earthy number topping another. Cryer and Ford songs have a softer hue; they are closer in spirit to the work of Maltby-Shire. As director, Mr. Maltby emphasizes the conversational, confidential air.²³³

While Frank Rich admitted that "the authors can create succinct, poignant vignettes," his view of the production was largely negative.

Ever since hitting pay dirt with Ain't Misbehavin', the rollicking Fats Waller revue, the Manhattan Theatre Club has been ransacking old song catalogues with the hope of concocting a worthy encore. The company has put on shows celebrating the work of Jule Styne, Harry Ruby and the team of Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz, among others, but to no lasting avail. Undaunted by failure--though apparently running out of fitting subjects--the M.T.C. has now sprung Hang On to the Good Times, a revue anthologizing the canon of Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford. Even if the modest Cryer-Ford output justified a retrospective, this misconceived entertainment would be counterproductive: One leaves the theatre thinking less of the

²³³ Mel Gussow, "Off Broadway Is Carrying the Tune," The New York Times, February 24, 1985, p. B-5.

team's songs than one did upon arrival.²³⁴

Rich objected to the "saccharin sensibility" inherent in the collection of songs which he found to "sound alike when piled up without interruption--and almost all of them lack and edge." He added,

The show is a vision of life as we're promised it is lived on Columbus Avenue. Although Miss Cryer's lyrics are proficient and sometimes clever, they are laced with predictable rhymes and psychobabble. . . .

The staging is by Richard Maltby Jr., the gifted lyricist (Baby) and director. While he tries to establish the atmosphere of spontaneity and bonhomie that he did in Ain't Misbehavin', the results are strained here. All four cast members--Charlaine Woodard and Terri Klausner, in addition to Miss (Cass) Morgan and Mr. (Don) Scardino--are highly accomplished musical-theater performers, but only Miss Woodard avoids succumbing to the show's contagious case of the cutes. . . .

A recurrent theme in the songs which made up Hang On to the Good Times was the difficulty which men and women experienced in developing meaningful relationships. The issue of sexual liberation also was addressed in the songs, but in such a way that, to Rich, became cloying. Sexual openness and the problems of creating a solid relationship were also the subjects of the Club's next production at City Center, Digby, by a new writer named Joseph Dougherty.

²³⁴ Frank Rich, "The Stage: 'Hang On,' A Cryer-Ford Revue," The New York Times, February 19, 1985, p. C-18.

The production featured Anthony Heald as Digby Merton, a mild-mannered advertising copywriter who decides to "rise above sex" in his relationships with women, and Roxanne Hart as Faye Greener, an art gallery assistant who has a passion for collecting men. When the two meet, Faye is actively involved in relationships with three men: Nelson Worth (played by John Glover), a painter who creates his art by projecting photographic slides on canvas and painting over the projection in the style of "paint by numbers;" Alfred Becker (played by Tony Goldwyn), a housepainter turned avant-garde actor; and Lester Deleghanty (played by Jon Polito), a surly, paranoid cop. Rather than become the fourth member of Faye's stable, Digby insists on maintaining a platonic relationship which, being a new experience for Faye, makes her all the more enamoured of her new friend. As the two go to baseball games, concerts and museums, the sexual tension between them increases, but Digby remains staunch in his conviction, and politely drops Faye off at each of her increasingly apprehensive lovers' apartments.

Edith Oliver wrote, "The play has its strengths and weaknesses, but there is evidence of a theatrical imagination at work every step of the way, and subjecting it to close scrutiny would be like making a scholarly analysis of

a decent song lyric." That did not stop either John Simon or Frank Rich, both of whom admired aspects of the play but perceived the play in different lights. Simon viewed the work as an attempt to balance contradictory dramatic elements, while Rich considered it an effort at recreating a Broadway genre gone by. Wrote Simon, "Perhaps the hardest thing to manage in the theatre is the harmonizing of extremely divergent tones, whether those of outrageous farce and high tragedy or, as here, of romantic comedy and absurdist caricature. . . ." Referring to a scene in the play in which the lovers react to Digby's tack, he continued,

About this relationship, Nelson reports incredulously, "She says all they do is talk." The baffled Alfred responds, "If he wants to talk, why doesn't he buy a dog?" At an inspired moment like this, morris-chair farce and high-tech absurdism magically blend; more often, however, the play is so busy shuttling that it cannot establish residency--and credibility--anywhere. . . .

A very experienced, very wise playwright could perhaps juggle the contradictions, oscillations and transformations without false notes; Dougherty's tuning fork, unfortunately, has a way of turning into a pitchfork.²³⁵

Frank Rich described the play as

a concerted, though wildly uneven, attempt to recreate the kind of snappy romantic New York comedy that writers like Jean Kerr and George Axelrod once supplied regularly to Broadway. Mr. Heald

²³⁵ John Simon, "Comedies of Errors," New York Magazine, April 1, 1985, p. 70.

and Miss Hart are so winning a pair that, with a stronger script, they could well bring the genre back into fashion again.

Digby could have been that script and, on occasion, it is. Unlike most other writers who attempt slick boulevard comedies these days, Mr. Dougherty, a theatrical newcomer, can rise above the synthetic, automatic joke-spinning of television sitcoms. What's frustrating about Digby is that the writer too often settles for less than his best. If his scenes for the two leads are tender and sophisticated, so those for the half-dozen supporting characters descend to the broad common denominator of prime time.²³⁶

Simon also made mention of the underdeveloped minor characters. All three reviewers lavished praise on the performances of Anthony Heald and Roxanne Hart, however, and director Ron Lagomarsino captured much positive attention for his staging. Edith Oliver declared, "As a comedy team, Mr. Heald and Miss Hart couldn't be better. Ron Lagomarsino has directed with verve and control; one scene seems to melt into the next." Simon observed that "the performances--individually and jointly--of Heald and Roxanne Hart could not be more acrobatically playful, humanly endearing, farceurishly expert," and he described Lagomarsino's staging as "simply the most tirelessly, unself-consciously inventive I have seen all year." Rich described the staging as "exceptionally buoyant," adding,

²³⁶ Frank Rich, "Theatre: Opening Of 'Digby,'" The New York Times, March 20, 1985, p.

This is the first time that the Manhattan Theatre Club has made effective use of its new City Center stage: Faye and Digby briskly tour about a glossy contemporary New York as sweeping and idealized as that of the bygone Doris Day-Rock Hudson movies.

The set, designed by James Leonard Joy and lighted by Curt Ostermann, utilized floating units and slide projections which created a series of environments which Simon described as "hugely enjoyable." It was also apparently costly, for Barry Grove points to it as an example of the relationship between a theatre's funding and the artistic product which it can produce. "We couldn't have done Digby the way we did . . . without any money," he states, "not that the play couldn't have been produced, but it would not have been the evening that it was without that money."²³⁷

Judging from the reviews, no amount of money could have saved the final show of the Club's 1984-1985 season, a work by Mark Lee titled California Dog Fight. The play, which had been produced the previous season at London's Bush Theatre, is about exactly what its title indicates: an illegal dog fight which occurs in a California pear orchard. Apparently intended as a metaphor for the evils of American competitiveness, the script was deemed a complete failure by the three major reviewers.

²³⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 7.

Edith Oliver described California Dog Fight as "itself a dog . . . (which) . . . is, for all its strenuous activity and boiling emotion, as empty as a drum."²³⁸ John Simon reflected,

I can imagine a play called California Dog Fight that really concerns something else being of potential interest. I can even imagine a play called something else but really concerned with dogfighting in California being of some gruesome interest. What I cannot imagine is a play both called California Dog Fight and dealing with a California dogfight being anything but uninteresting, and that is what Mark Lee's California Dog Fight at the Manhattan Theatre Club is in spades. . . . The entire play is the pits.²³⁹

And Frank Rich, who described the play, which took seventy-five minutes to perform, as being "as synthetic as it is endless," quipped "Anyone for 'Cats?'"²⁴⁰

The three reviewers each questioned why the accomplished British director Bill Bryden, known for his staging of the works of David Mamet in England, chose to make his American directorial debut with this play. Both Rich and Simon speculated that Bryden's interest in Mamet's dog-eat-dog plays may have become subverted. Oliver simply concluded-----

²³⁸ Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, May 13, 1985, p. 131.

²³⁹ John Simon, "Theatre," New York Magazine, May 13, 1985, p. 127.

²⁴⁰ Frank Rich, "The Theater: 'California Dog Fight,'" The New York Times, May 1, 1985, p. C-16.

ed that Bryden's obvious "misstep will surely be forgotten immediately after May 19th, when the show closes."

The cast of six--Mariel Hemingway, Bruce MacVittie, Darren McGavin, Sheree North, James Remar and Jimmie Ray Weeks--were received differently by the three critics. Oliver praised the work of all but North and Remar, while Rich singled out Weeks as the "liveliest of the crew," and expressed satisfaction with the work of all but Remar and MacVittie. Simon was the harshest in his criticism, writing,

In the cast, Jimmie Ray Weeks (Rawley) and Sheree North (Lillian) come off best; Darren McGavin (Vern) cannot remember his lines, and Mariel Hemingway (Sarah) cannot act. Even the dogs are so untalented that they can't steal scenes from mere actors.

It was not a desirable end to the season, one of the less distinguished seasons in the Club's history, but the production was not fatal for the Manhattan Theatre Club. The highlight of the schedule, as Otis Guernsey noted,²⁴¹ was In Celebration, but Digby fared fairly well and Messiah captured attention for its daring. Besides Husbandry, Hang On to the Good Times and California Dog Fight, which were not well-received, the Club presented several Special

²⁴¹ Otis Guernsey, The Best Plays of 1984-1985 (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1985), p. 27.

Events, including D, which was not reviewed, and Secrets of the Lava Lamp, a musical collage starring Camille Saviola (cited for her work in the Broadway show, Nine), which Mel Gussow described as a show which "severely strains the singer's talent and the theatregoer's endurance."²⁴²

The 1984-1985 season was one in which the investment was considerable, but the return, artistically, was less than had been hoped. Lynne Meadow's absence from the Club may have been a contributing factor; the fact that the theatre was still in a state of flux may have been partly responsible; or it may just have been an "off" season.

The season certainly did nothing to harm the Club's audience, which was beginning to change and grow. Speaking before the start of the 1985-1986 season, Barry Grove noted,

This season is doing phenomenally well. We moved into City Center last year, of course too late to capitalize on the move because we didn't actually sign the lease until late October. So it's only this season we're in now that Ginny Louloundes, who's our marketing director, really has had the time and ability to focus the campaign. And we've gone from 6,000 subscribers to 8,500 subscribers in terms of the new season.²⁴³

²⁴² Mel Gussow, "Stage: Camille Saviola," The New York Times, May 6, 1985, p. C-14.

²⁴³ Interview with Barry Grove, 10/16/85, p. 9.

Approximately fifty-five percent of the Club's subscribers renewed their subscriptions following the move to City Center.²⁴⁴ Therefore, in reaching a subscription audience of 8,500, the Club attracted approximately 5,200 new members as a result of changing its location. According to the Manhattan Theatre Club's Marketing Director, indications were that off-the-street trade was affecting ticket sales, and there was a growing number of audience members from out of town as well.²⁴⁵

While certainly heartening news, it engendered no laxity on the part of the theatre's administrative staff, and ostensibly did little to reduce Lynne Meadow's anxiety over the health of the Manhattan Theatre Club. "We are under tremendous financial pressure. Things are not stable by any means," says Meadow. "We're in a real transition moving to City Center. Moving our office meant enormous expenses that a little theatre like ours has trouble carrying. It hasn't been this bad, I think, since the beginning."²⁴⁶ It was anticipated at the start of 1986 that the fiscal year ending

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Steve Pollock, "The Manhattan Theatre Club moves down to City Center," Theatre Crafts, April 19, 1985, p. 58.

²⁴⁶ Joanne Kaufman, "Meadow and MTC," Playbill for Loot, February 3, 1986, p. 6.

June 30, 1986 would have a cumulative deficit somewhere between \$150,000 and \$250,000.²⁴⁷

Concurrent with the renovation of the Club's new offices, "The Space" at City Center underwent additional renovation. The entire facility, including seats and lighting equipment, was dismantled during the summer so that air conditioning renovations and a new basement floor could be installed by the landlord. The layout of the theatre, when it began the 1985-1986 season, incorporated minor design changes drawn from the experience of mounting productions during the Club's first year in The Space.

During the 1985-1986 season, the schedule was further reduced to a total of five productions, owing to the absence of a second performing space. Plans were being formulated to construct another smaller theatre behind the mainstage which would accommodate up to 150 patrons, but that construction was not scheduled until at least the summer of 1986. "Whether or not construction and financing time lines will stay on target, I don't know," says Barry Grove, "but that's what our hope is."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Barry Grove, 11/20/85, p. 5.

Ensuring a second performing space for the 1986-1987 season was deemed a high priority. "Lynne and I both feel that if that space is not available at City Center next fall, . . . we're going to have to find some interim measure," says Jonathan Alper. Converting the rehearsal space which was a part of the 16th Street facility into a temporary theatre was being considered as a form of insurance for a second stage series.²⁴⁹

In keeping with the pattern of the previous two seasons, the 1985-1986 season began with a revival. Paul Osborn's Oliver Oliver was produced on Broadway in 1934. It closed after eleven performances. A somewhat plodding drawing-room comedy which intertwines the matters of money and love, the play is set at the country manor of the soon to be bankrupt Mrs. Oakshot, who plots to forestall her financial demise by marrying off her son, Oliver. The intended bride, Phyllis, is the daughter of the wealthy Mrs. Tiverton, who does not approve of the irresponsible Oliver. Phyllis, on the other hand is in love with Oliver, but conceals the fact, indicating her alleged indifference by arriving at the estate with an escort. At the same time, Oliver has a plan to marry his twice-divorced mother to an Ohio pauper-turned-

²⁴⁹ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 3.

multimillionaire. By the play's conclusion, nearly everyone is wealthy and married.

Brooks Atkinson described the 1934 production as "frisky to the point of tedium," to which Frank Rich added, "A half-century later, even the friskiness is gone."²⁵⁰ Allan Wallach, in Newsday, described the comedy as "sluggish,"²⁵¹ John Simon termed it "harmless and boring,"²⁵² and Douglas Watt of the Daily News called it "flat."²⁵³ There was general agreement as well that, what spark the show did contain was generated by Nancy Marchand, playing the hopelessly bored Mrs. Tiverton, and Frances Sternhagen in the role of Mrs. Oakshot. Frank Rich noted that apart from a script which contains "endlessly repeated exposition of both the play's premise and themes," the direction, by Vivian Matalon, was flawed. He wrote,

Mr. Matalon's production calcifies the script's deficiencies instead of attempting to camouflage them. The staging needs more energy, speed and,

²⁵⁰ Frank Rich, "Theater: 'Oliver Oliver,' A Paul Osborn Comedy," The New York Times, November 13, 1985, p. C-25.

²⁵¹ Allan Wallach, "Paul Osborn's 'Oliver Oliver' in revival," Newsday, November 13, 1985, p. 55.

²⁵² John Simon, "From Riches to Rats," New York Magazine, November 25, 1985, p. 105.

²⁵³ Douglas Watt, "Back to the drawing room," Daily News, November 13, 1985, p. 58.

especially, sexual tension. . . . one might well ask why Mr. Matalon has forged so little comic or erotic rapport between the two attractive, capable romantic leads" (Timothy Daly and Patricia Clarkson).

Douglas Watt commented that the director was "unable to pull together Osborn's slack script," while Allan Wallach considered the staging "reasonably pleasant."

Oliver Oliver was the third of Osborn's plays to be revived within a period of a few years, after an extended period of dormancy. During the 1979-1980 season, Morning's At Seven proved to be one of the biggest hits on Broadway. It's stellar cast included Nancy Marchand and earned the director, Vivian Matalon, a Tony Award. Immediately prior to the production at the Club, Circle Repertory Company mounted the author's Tomorrow's Monday. This led several critics to observe, as John Simon did, that "everyone keeps hoping that under the snows of yesteryear lie wonderful American plays only waiting for a passing grave robber to dig them up and make a fortune."

Simon's observation seems to negate the possibility that a company would revive a long forgotten play simply because it seemed to warrant production. While such an attitude is understandable, even justified, in the mecca of commercial theatre that is New York City, it presents yet

another hurdle for non-commercial institutions. Maintaining non-commercial standards in a commercial environment is difficult, as Jonathan Alper acknowledges,

You find yourself being drawn into that orbit (of commercial production). And, of course, the critics view you in the same way. It's very rare for us to be acknowledged as a non-profit, non-commercial theatre. We're judged on a play by play basis, the same as any commercial production, and I'm sure that most New York theatregoers are only vaguely aware that there's a difference. . . . I think it's a big problem. I think in terms of the audience awareness and the critics' awareness and our own work, that we are not trying to do the same kind of theatre as commercial theatre does.

The problem is when you say to yourself, "Well, we've got to get a couple of plays the audience is going to like . . . because we need to fill up the subscriber rolls," the choices one has tend to be that sort of commercial vehicle. I mean, frankly, Oliver Oliver . . . was a play that I had read four years ago, just as a revival possibility out of the library, and I thought it was very funny and I liked it. But after its production in the regional theatres last year, it was snatched up by a commercial management, and until they decided they couldn't do it, we weren't able to go ahead and do it. We then did it, but in the back of everybody's mind undoubtedly was, "Well, if it's a good review, it'll be picked up."

So the distinction--I would say this is the big change, the big shift in the last five years--the distinction between what is commercial Off Broadway theatre and non-commercial Off Broadway theatre is getting very very fuzzy. And it's very hard to keep those two different sets of values in mind.

And it's progressively more difficult to be a theatre that does both kinds of things. That's really where the difficulty comes, because you train your audience and the critics to expect a certain

kind of offering, and when you want to go back and do something totally unproven, you have more obstacles than you would have otherwise. It's more difficult for us to pick a play off the top of a pile and do it, as it was ten years ago. It's much more difficult. But I think we're trying to find a way to get back to that, for what that's worth. . . .

Nobody in this theatre agrees with me about this, but, to my mind, subscription is killing the American theatre. I can't say enough bad things about it.²⁵⁴

It was partly out of a desire to keep its subscribers satisfied that the theatre began making the shift towards producing more revivals than it had in the past. Traditionally, revivals represented a small proportion of a season's offerings; in the 1985-1986 season, two of its five shows were revivals. This represents an apparent change in the theatre's orientation, linked, obviously, to a changing identity. Comments Alper,

We're becoming more like the regional theatres in that our programming is more and more subject to the same problems they've got. . . . So we may be doing more revivals . . . it's never going to be like the classical regional theatre--four revivals and one new play--it's never going to be like that, but it's going to be more like that than it used to be. . . . We have to find plays that the audience will deal with, and theatre audiences tend to be very conservative, by and large. If you astonish them with a wonderful piece of novelty, that's wonderful; but, in fact, in terms of the bread and butter, they tend to like conservative, well-made plays. And those are not being

²⁵⁴ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 3.

written anymore; the ones that are being written aren't very good--they're really cliches, really stale and tired. So you go back to the source.²⁵⁵

As 1985 drew to a close, the Club presented Terence McNally's comedy, It's Only a Play, directed by John Tilling. The play, originally titled Broadway, Broadway had an unsuccessful pre-Broadway Philadelphia tryout run in 1978, was revised and presented at the Manhattan Punch Line in 1982, and was further revised before reaching the Manhattan Theatre Club. The revisions were apparently largely successful.

It's Only a Play is a play about the theatre in New York City, and the eccentricities, pretensions and inflated personalities of some of the cogs in the theatre's wheel. Gathered together in the pink bedroom of an East Side townhouse owned by the producer of a new play called The Golden Egg are: the play's author, Peter Austin (played by Mark Blum); its director, Frank Finger (played by David Garrison), reputed for his all-male Yale production of The Wild Duck, its female lead, Virginia Noyes (played by Joanna Gleason), and its producer, Julia Budder (played by Christine Baranski). They are anxiously awaiting Frank Rich's New York Times review of the show, which they hope will be -----

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

glowing with praise. Also in attendance are James Wicker, a sitcom actor who would have played the male lead in the show were it not for his commitment to his now failing television series (played by James Coco); Ira Drew, a drama critic with a manuscript seeking a publisher (played by Paul Benedict); Gus Washington, an aspiring actor hired to help with the coats (played by Jihmi Kennedy); and Emma Bovary, a female cab driver with philosophical leanings (played by Florence Stanley). Not everyone shares the hopes of those directly connected with the show, but everyone does point out, repeatedly, that, whatever it's reception, "it's only a play."

As the anticipation mounts, the characters become more and more frazzled, the action becomes increasingly manic, and references are dropped to virtually everyone associated with New York City theatre production. When the newspaper does arrive, the disastrous news (for some) is that Frank Rich detested The Golden Egg, and says so in a scathing and funny review.

Frank Rich may have hated The Golden Egg, but he certainly did not feel that way about It's Only a Play, which he described as "frequently uproarious." Wrote Rich,

Only a writer who loves the theatre and has survived its bloodiest wars could have written a comedy like this one, in which naughty show-biz in-

jokes coexist with genuine tributes to the theatrical calling. Mr. McNally, the author of some pricelessly funny hits ("Bad Habits," "The Ritz") and the occasional bomb ("The Rink"), is the ideal playwright for the task. Indeed, "It's Only a Play" is itself an example of the perilous vicissitudes that attend a career in the American theatre. . . .

Mr. McNally's comedy is more a cascade of jokes than a play. But, except for roughly 15 minutes of scattered dead spots in Act II, the jokes are so well made that one doesn't dwell on the playwright's disinclination to provide the fully drawn characters. . . .²⁵⁶

John Simon described the play as having "an extremely funny first act and an inoffensive but rather aimlessly dawdling second," adding, "In a way, it's not McNally's fault if this second act doesn't work, for he has latched on to one of those funny situations that simply cannot be stretched far enough." He continued,

It's Only a Play, you see, is a sort of grand McNally atlas of the theatre, jaundiced as all get-out, and, for one act, just as funny. What it all works up to, besides tiny tizzies for all the players, is the coming of the reviews, notably the decisive Times one, and their effect on all concerned. But once the Frank Rich notice is in (and rather less funny than if Rich had written it), the played is played out; there is no more plot waiting in the wings, and, in any case,²⁵⁷ what further plot could fit into this format?

²⁵⁶ Frank Rich, "The Stage: 'It's Only A Play,'" The New York Times, January 13, 1986, p. C-11.

²⁵⁷ John Simon, "The Plot Thins," New York Magazine, January 20, 1986, p. 56.

Brendan Gill, writing in The New Yorker, was impressed by the play, and wrote that it

is charged with an energy that leaps and zigzags from the merely frantic to the hysterical. Obedient to the playwright's intentions, I found that the closer the many characters came to total mental and physical collapse the funnier I found them. . . .

Every one-liner I laugh at makes me a softer touch for the next; late in the evening, I laughed almost uncontrollably when a character inquired pensively, "How many 'p's are there in 'Papp?'"²⁵⁸

Rich said of the production that "Mr. Tillinger's staging doesn't miss an opportunity for mirth." He cited the performances by James Coco and Joanna Gleason as outstanding, and referred to the "sharp contributions" of others in the cast, but concludes, "Mr. McNally deserves full credit for the evening's warmth."

Simon was also impressed by the work of Coco and Gleason, which he thought was matched by that of Christine Baranski and Mark Blum. He expressed reservations with the direction, however, stating, "John Tillinger's staging is less than manically comic: He has directed with a ferule rather than a knout." Tillinger directed the next production as well, apparently using the knout which Simon implied he should acquire.

²⁵⁸ Brendan Gill, "The Theatre," The New Yorker, January 27, 1986, p. 90.

Joe Orton's Loot was first produced on London's West End in 1966. It was produced on Broadway in 1968 and closed after three weeks. In the words of the author, who, incidentally, was murdered by his homosexual lover at the age of thirty-four, Loot was "vulgar and offensive in the extreme to middle-class susceptibilities." This would account for the mid-show departure by members of the audience at the Manhattan Theatre Club, which John Simon makes mention of in his review, "leaving in disgust or, worse yet, incomprehension." The play is a biting satire of middle-class attitudes and a black comedy which utilizes the techniques of farce. Orton's work is often compared to the work of Oscar Wilde and, Simon suggests, "Loot is arguably the twentieth-century Importance of Being Earnest".

The play begins with the flower-loving Mr. McLeavy mourning the loss of his wife. Mrs. McLeavy lies in a coffin in the middle of of McLeavy household, awaiting burial. Tending to Mr. McLeavy is nurse Fay, a woman who, for her young age has managed to have been widowed seven times. She is now contemplating an eighth marriage, to the widower McLeavy. Hal, his son, who is unable to tell a lie, has just robbed a bank with the help of his bisexual "mate," Dennis, a mortician's assistant who will conduct Mrs.

McLeavy's burial. The stolen money is, for the moment, in a locked cupboard not far from the coffin. The ever-perceptive Fay suspects something is amiss, and learns from the ever-honest Hal the crime which has been committed. Agreeing not to report Hal for a share of the loot, the two become partners. Enter Inspector Truscott of the Yard, who refuses to admit that he is other than a representative of the Metropolitan Water Board come to inspect the plumbing. With Truscott zeroing in on the criminals, Hal, Dennis and Faye have little option but to get the cash out of the house in any way possible; and what more convenient way but in a coffin?--even if it does mean dumping Mrs. McLeavy in the cupboard on her head.

Such is how the play begins. What follows is a series of events which build upon each other, involving the shuttling of the corpse, glass eyes, frenzied dogs, exploding caskets and a multiplicity of other activities, creating a world in which normalcy is inverted.

Orton's style is distinctive, as Frank Rich noted,

The method of the play's madness is highly sophisticated, far more so than in the work of the many Orton-influenced playwrights (among them, such Americans as Christopher Durang and Harry Kondoleon). "Loot" is timeless because its author's rage against hypocrisy is conveyed not by preaching or idle wisecracks but by the outrageous farcical conception and by pungent, stylized dialogue in the tradition of Wilde and Shaw. In making a

house of mourning and a corpse the stuff of humor, Orton goes beyond mere black comedy to exploit the tragic implications of farce. The subversive structure of "Loot," in which money replaces death as the ostensibly bereaved characters' gravest preoccupation, turns the world upside-down for both polemical and mirth-making effect.²⁵⁹

The Manhattan Theatre Club's production received very favorable reviews from both Frank Rich and John Simon. Edith Oliver enjoyed the production but considered it too "tame," as was also the opinion of Douglas Watt of The Daily News, who wrote "the evening, though reasonably short, drags a bit, for while John Tillinger has staged the play with a keen eye for comic detail, the pace is a bit too slow for farce."²⁶⁰ In all other regards, however, Watt described the production as "first rate" with "excellent work . . . done by all."

To John Simon,

The production couldn't be better. Zeljko Ivanek (Hal) is an uproarious combination of stupidity, cunning and compulsive inability to lie in a performance that heroically refuses to pander to the audience with the least cuteness or self-indulgence. As his chum, Dennis, Kevin Bacon is almost as good, which is to say very. As McLeavy, Charles Keating is the image of honest befuddlement, in his firm belief in Church and State, the

²⁵⁹ Frank Rich, "Stage: Joe Orton's 'Loot,' Directed by Tillinger, The New York Times, February 19, 1986, p. C-15.

²⁶⁰ Douglas Watt, "Take the money and bury it," The Daily News, February 19, 1986, p. 41.

infalliable formula for self-destruction he pursues with adorable idiocy. As Fay, the personification of female rottenness, Zoe Wanamaker is pursed and poised to perfection, overacting genteely in a way that proves just right. As Truscott, the embodiment of male corruption, Joseph Maher portrays and idiot savant with sublime near-rationalness that turns the world irretrievably topsy-turvy as he makes madness and evil seem endearingly quixotic. In the small part of a bobby, Nick Ullett does yeoman's work.

John Tillinger has directed ebulliently, though I wish he had not let the delirium slacken somewhat toward the end. Highly proficient scenery (John Lee Beatty), costumes (Bill Walker), and lighting (Richard Nelson) help make Loot a hoot.²⁶¹

Frank Rich's review of the production was glowing.

For "Loot" to realize its full hilarity, it is essential that . . . (its) double-edged jokes be played straight. Only if the characters believe in their own sanctimonious poses does the gap between their proper self-image and disgusting activities become funny--and deliver Orton's scabrous judgement of the world. Mr. Tillinger's production is scrupulous on this score. While one might wish that his staging had provided more inventive slapstick juggling of the mummified mom, every performance is impeccably conceived, every line exquisitely timed.

Miss Wanamaker, a Royal Shakespeare Company actress last seen in New York as the sidekick in "Piaf," is wonderful as Fay; her starched Catholicity remains intact no matter how many cardinal sins she gleefully commits. . . .

Just as masterly is Mr. Keating, as the widower whose slavish worship of civic and spiritual authorities is rewarded by his continuous humiliation at the hands of those authorities. . . . As

²⁶¹ John Simon, "Funeral Games," New York Magazine, March 3, 1986, p. 135.

the indolent son, Mr. Ivanek follows his portrayal of the intellectual journalist in David Hare's "Map of the World" with an impressively antithetical comic creation: the sullen Hal is so stupid that even he is left shuddering by the extent of his own idiocy. Mr. Bacon, as his cheeky partner in larceny and lasciviousness, finds amorality a joke and makes us see the humor in his antisocial activities as well.

In the dominant role of Truscott, a would-be Hercule Poirot ineptly masquerading as a Metropolitan Water Board fact-finder, Mr. Maher conveys the character's megalomania with mid-sentence bursts of anger, usually preceded and followed by mad streams of stiff-upper-lip bureaucratese. It is surely the most unglued--and uproarious--performance of the actor's career.²⁶²

The reviews of the show attracted considerable interest and, after the sold-out run was completed at the Club, the show made the transfer to Broadway. With the exception of Kevin Bacon,²⁶³ whose prior film commitment prevented him from remaining with the production, Loot was moved intact to the Music Box Theatre. As of this writing, the show had yet to open officially. Whether the Manhattan Theatre Club production would prove more successful than the 1968 Broadway run was yet to be determined.

²⁶² Frank Rich, "Stage: Joe Orton's 'Loot,' Directed by Tillinger," The New York Times, February 19, 1986, p. C-15.

²⁶³ Alec Baldwin replaced Kevin Bacon when the show moved to Broadway.

Lynne Meadow, who admits a desire to direct a Broadway show, maintains that the Manhattan Theatre Club's new home, its newly hatched substantial deficit, and the changing theatrical climate in which it exists will not lead to a compromise of the theatre's standards. Says Meadow,

When we moved from a 150-seat theatre uptown to a 300-seat theatre in midtown, I decided to program a season as though we were still on 73rd Street and to continue the work we had been doing for ten years. . . .

One of the things we are addressing ourselves to this year is to make clear to the audience that this is an institution with a past, a present and a future, and that when you come to The Manhattan Theatre Club, it's not about seeing one play, it's about seeing a body of work.²⁶⁴

Given the Club's considerable deficit, it is perhaps not surprising that in looking over the plays which she selected for the 1985-1986 season, Meadow discovered the theme to be "money." The season's first three offerings used plots which all hinged on money, and evidently the theme was to be repeated to some degree in the remaining two productions: Richard Nelson's Principia Scriptoriae and Women of Manhattan, by John Patrick Shanley.

²⁶⁴ Joanne Kaufman, "Meadow & MTC," Playbill for Loot, February 3, 1986, p. 8.

Principia Scriptoriae is described in the Club's promotional material as, "A provocative play of irony, ideas and emotion about international as well as personal politics--that point in human affairs where good intentions collide with vanity and the quest for power." Women of Manhattan is described as focussing on "the elegant urbane world of three young New York women, as they search for happiness and true love in the city of dreams." The director for Principia Scriptoriae would be Lynne Meadow.

"I certainly don't feel remotely complacent," says Meadow, "Every day is some sort of crisis about how we're going to get through. I think I feel a sense of confidence and love that comes with a home. But our existence is so precarious I feel that we're constantly standing on the edge of a precipice."²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Chapter VII

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE GOALS

The Manhattan Theatre Club in 1986, while espousing the same goals as in 1972, is an entirely different institution from the one developed some fourteen years ago. The change was inevitable, given the theatre's accomplishments and its expanded audience and finances. In an environment which permits the long-time survival of only few theatre organizations, the Manhattan Theatre Club, over the years, faced the choice of whether or not to serve a broader audience. The maturing Club appears to have chosen a somewhat middle ground.

The productions which the Manhattan Theatre Club offers are generally not found on Broadway, but are also not found Off-Off-Broadway. During the 1980s, in particular, seasonal production schedules invariably included at least one, but not more than two off-beat plays, such as Summer in the 1982-1983 season, Mensch Meier in the 1983-1984 season, and Messiah in the 1984-1985 season. Balancing these provocative offerings were such safe choices as Elba, Friends, and

Digby. Revivals and musicals appeared to be without risk, e.g., The Three Sisters, The Philanthropist, and also Hang On to the Good Times and In Celebration. The remainder of the seasons' offerings were intellectually intriguing and, at most, mildly provocative (Standing on My Knees, Early Warnings, Other Places, The Miss Firecracker Contest, and California Dog Fight). Maintaining this kind of balanced programming seems to be a major factor in the Manhattan Theatre Club's ability to survive as a non-commercial theatre in New York City, a survival which represents a major achievement.

Reflecting back upon his association with the Club, Artistic Associate Thomas Bullard comments that the Manhattan Theatre Club

is a success story in that we are still here and we are still providing and doing quality theatre. . . . There certainly have been productions that have not succeeded--I have directed a couple of them--and there have been productions that both from an artistic and commercial point of view have been wildly successful. And I think what the theatre has done well is to balance the artistic and commercial realities rather well and, in a very tough scene, managed to keep some grace in doing it. The only failure would be if we weren't here, or if we were no¹ longer offering plays of substance and quality.

¹ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 5.

Playwright John Guare agrees that the ability to survive is the Manhattan Theatre Club's most encompassing achievement, particularly given the range of material presented over the years.

The triumph is . . . that there is a theatre alive. One cannot point to the Manhattan Theatre Club and say a style of acting evolved there, or a philosophy of production. . . . I think its triumph is its eclecticism, . . . the fact that it's managed to take on the personality . . . without ever having the feeling of a showcase--to keep its own identity, to keep a very strong Manhattan Theatre Club identity--but to take on very much the personalities of the people who are currently playing there. This chameleon-like quality is its most remarkable achievement. It can go from Ain't Misbehavin' to a Pinter play to--you² never know quite what you're going to see there.

To Board member Gerald Freund, an important factor in the Club's survival was the fact that it "thrived on being something that matters in a contemporary society." He continues,

I think the theatre has not just lasted, but has for years gained strength and pleasure in the eyes of those who were immediately involved, and in the eyes of those who were also involved, because the ethos of the place, the direction in which it was going, had really to do, overwhelmingly, with a search--a search for values and ideas of some merit and some permanence. . . . (The) involvement of the people, (the) excitement around the place--all that was something that gave it momentum which has affected sources of funding, foundation offices--and those, to this day, find something there that they find in few other theatres today. At one

² Telephone interview with John Guare, 8/30/85, p. 2.

point, I think for a period of several years, they didn't find it anywhere else than the Manhattan Theatre Club and, perhaps, Joe Papp's Public Theatre.³

The motivating force to which Freund alludes is, unquestionably, Lynne Meadow herself. From the moment she arrived in July of 1972, Meadow began the process of transforming the Manhattan Theatre Club into a reflection of herself: her aesthetic, her values and her interests. Consequently, as Meadow matured as an individual, the Club matured as an organization. Peregrine Whittlesey notes that this maturation was reflected in

the way she treated the Board--she used to scream much more than probably it was useful for her to do. But she matured, she understood, she understood in fact almost too deftly, she really finally understood how to manipulate the Board: what to tell them and what not to tell them. In the early days she used⁴ to tell them much more than she tells them now.

Apart from her relations with the Board of Directors, Meadow was aided by the contributions of those whom she selected to assist her. Key among those individuals is Barry Grove, whose work as Managing Director Gerald Freund cites as exemplary. Freund comments,

³ Interview with Gerald Freund, 3/28/85, p. 4.

⁴ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 7.

Barry Grove is as significant an individual as Lynne Meadow, and the only other person as significant as the Artistic Director in the whole history of the Manhattan Theatre Club, since his arrival here. Its development as an artistic institution, in its solidity as an administrative unit, its place in the ranks of theatre in New York and, of course, Barry has played a very strong role in that whole Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway movement over the years that he's been at the MTC. He's an exceptionally thoughtful and intelligent person. His presentations of budgets and elucidations of them at Board meetings reflect, of course, extraordinary work at all times. In this respect, I've often thought that there is many a major corporation that would be fortunate indeed to have his services in the straight profit-making activity that such institutions engage in. I have repeatedly marvelled at the man's ability to take highly complex ideas and explain them in language that is readily understandable to all of the miscellaneous cast of characters that have comprised MTC Boards over the years, without any condescension whatsoever. He's obviously also worked closely and successfully with some highly sophisticated financial types who have been on our Board over the years. He's weathered all the storms that we've had, found solutions when no one else seemed to be able to find them, worked towards our functioning successfully . . . and worked with a great range of Board members, only a very few of whom have really been creative and capable in a leadership capacity on the same level as Barry himself.⁵

In terms of the Club's administrative hierarchy, Barry Grove has held the position next in importance to Meadow's. However, in many ways, the positions of Artistic Director and Managing Director were fused into a symbiotic unit, making the contributions of Meadow and Grove equal, but in dif-

⁵ Spoken letter from Gerald Freund, 3/28/85.

ferent areas. Together, they ensured the survival of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Freund notes of the relationship Meadow and Grove share,

The two of them have worked together with great rapport and good cheer, and have permitted one another to be highly individualistic and critical in the course of negotiations of all kinds. It is really an extraordinary kind of situation in a theatre, and I really do think . . . (that the Manhattan Theatre Club) is a case study that has all sorts of lessons to give, but the most important ones are not to be found in black and white, let alone in profit and loss statements. They have to do with the interrelationships of human individuals with a vision and a dedication, and, in that respect, Barry Grove has been as important a person to this whole enterprise as Lynne Meadow. And I might add now, and indeed I should, that he is the only person other than Lynne who has been that invaluable to the enterprise.⁶

Barry Grove, for his part, acknowledges the contributions of staff and Board members over the years which helped to ensure the vitality of the Club. Citing numerous individuals for their efforts on behalf of the organization, he reasons that the Manhattan Theatre Club while serving as a testing ground for many who passed through it, benefitted from their work. Each "laid the next stone across the stream so that the person who came after them could travel that much farther before they had to make the next effort themselves," he says, "In a lot of ways, the theatre was

⁶ Ibid.

built that way."⁷ Of his tenure with the Club, and his relationship with its Artistic Director he comments,

Probably most importantly for me was and is the person who is Lynne Meadow. . . . That relationship, more than any other aspect of the job, continues to be what is attractive about being here. In many ways, it's like a marriage that both parties have to continually work at to make viable, fresh, vibrant, whatever. But if that relationship isn't strong, . . . then there can't be any real growth. I think there has always been a climate here of self-criticism and self-evaluation, in the best sense of the word. . . . And I think that, for me more than anything, is what makes it an important place to be.⁸

Apart from the long-term contributions of Meadow and Grove, Thomas Bullard emphasizes the importance of those who assisted the theatre only briefly. Says Bullard,

There are lots of unsung people; but those people contributed enormously, and the spirit and the hard work of the technical people . . . just working ninety hours a day to make the productions happen. . . . They had no money to do anything with, and they really had to come up with it, and they began to give the theatre . . . a reputation for quality production on really no money. . . .

I think a history should include that, I really do, because those are the people who get the theatre successful. But it was not only successful because of Lynne and Barry. These are all people who gave above and beyond the call, and because they gave above and beyond the call, the theatre was able to take leaps and strides . . . forward.

⁷ Interview with Barry Grove, 8/18/82, p. 37.

⁸ Ibid.

The theatre's leaps and strides resulted from the energies of various people working at the Club as orchestrated by Lynne Meadow. Meadow, at all times, remains the central focus of Manhattan Theatre Club activities and the visible leader of the Club. The Club's achievements, post 1972, are directly or indirectly attributable to her leadership, a fact which raises two questions of considerable significance. First, would the Manhattan Theatre Club have survived had Meadow not been installed as its Artistic Director, and, second, what will happen to the Club in the event she leaves?

One can only speculate on the path the Manhattan Theatre Club would have followed had Meadow not appeared in 1972. The theatre had been relatively unsuccessful as a producing organization and had incurred a substantial deficit before Meadow's arrival. There were indications it could not continue to function. Founding member A. Joseph Tandet disagrees.

. . . without a Lynne Meadow, I think the Club would have continued, and I think maybe adhered more to its course--the original course of developing new American playwrights, and directors too. . . . While she's certainly made it successful, it may have taken a different direction but been successful in its own way.¹⁰

⁹ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 8.

Tandet notes that Meadow was not the only candidate being considered for the position of Artistic Director in 1972, adding, "presumably we would have gotten somebody."

Meadow dates the inception of the Manhattan Theatre Club with her arrival. This perspective is a source of irritation, however, to Tandet, who had been involved with the Club for nearly two years prior to Meadow's appearance. "Now this is a little touchy," says Tandet,

I had written a letter some time ago which I never sent to Lynne on that particular subject. It was not "her baby." If anyone deserved (credit)--any one single person--it's Jeffcoat, because it was his idea. Then he brought in Margaret (Kennedy) and myself. . . .

My contention with Lynne . . . and this is not in ill will, I just think it's a misconception of hers: at one Benefit that we had--it was at Rose-land--. . . she was so carried away that she said, "when Barry and I conceived of the Manhattan Theatre Club."

I was standing there with Jeff (Jeffcoat), and I saw tears come to his eyes. . . . (But) he never really came out and opposed Lynne. . . . And I wrote her a long letter, which then I thought better of sending to her, but I said there would have been nothing¹¹ for her to come to. There had to be a structure.

¹⁰ Interview with A. Joseph Tandet, 6/28/83, p. 10.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 9.

This objection aside, Tandet concedes that the Club's survival, in large part, "has to be attributed to Lynne because she has a lot of drive, and her ego . . . also is a great motivating force."¹²

Meadow had nothing to do with the creation of the Manhattan Theatre Club, but she has been responsible for cultivating and transforming it into the respected institution which it has become. Over the years she has been extremely protective of the organization which she nurtured, an attitude which remains unchanged. If anything, Meadow has become even more formidable in this regard. As Gerald Freund observes, there is a

remarkable difference between Lynne at the time of the crisis created by Mortimer Levitt, and now in terms of her power. . . . In addition now, we're talking about a Board which has very impressive sort of credentials; people who in their professions in business and whatnot are such that you would think they would commandeer an institution of this kind. Not so. Lynne has a very firm hold on it artistically, and Barry, because of his great talent really, and his close relationship with her as well as some major voices on the Board--they run¹³ the operation. No one can take that from them.

¹² Ibid., p. 13.

¹³ Interview with Gerald Freund, 2/20/85, p. 6.

At present, Meadow states that she has no immediate intention of leaving the Manhattan Theatre Club, but, if the Club continues to thrive, there will come a time when the question of a successor will arise. Is the Manhattan Theatre Club so intimately linked with Lynne Meadow that its survival is dependent upon her? Meadow thinks not. "I think this theatre would go on," she says,

. . . it would change, but I would hope that it would go on. . . . I think it would be a bad testimony to what I have done if the theatre fell apart tomorrow if I walked out the door. I would like to see it go on. That isn't to take away from the credit that I give myself for having created it, you know.¹⁴

Gerald Freund accepts the inevitability of a change of leadership, but expresses some anxiety over the theatre's future if a successor is not carefully chosen. Says Freund,

I would hope that there would be a substantial change if she leaves, because that means that someone has been attracted to (the Club who)--like Lynne from the earliest time--has a definite point of view, and would have, as I think such a person should have, the opportunity to make it manifest. . . . (But) I see no necessity for her to leave because she's getting older and, second, if she were to leave, I would hope, boy!, that the Board, which is extremely powerful, would have the wisdom to appoint an Artistic Director who'd be more powerful.¹⁵

¹⁴ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 10/18/82, p. 13.

¹⁵ Interview with Gerald Freund, 2/20/85, p. 5.

The issue of a successor to Lynne Meadow represents a long-term and not an immediate concern of the Manhattan Theatre Club. The immediate concern continues to be, as always, survival, and the direction which the Club must follow in order to ensure its continued good health and development. As a theatre which clearly operates under the guidance of an Artistic Director, rather than under the direction of an artistic Board, the responsibility for the Club's well-being continues to be that of Lynne Meadow.

The relocation to City Center truly represents a new beginning for the Club, with all the perils attendant to it. With a largely new audience, the Club was given the opportunity to redefine its identity. The new physical environment, in and of itself, provided a new image for the Club, creating different expectations as to the kind of work the theatre would produce. Gerald Freund expressed some concern over the consequences of the move to City Center, remarking,

I think that this location now is somewhat perilous. I'm talking here now not about the same identity, but about the nature of a new identity. . . . I'm not so concerned about the size or intimacy of the place. I think something else has gradually slipped away from the institution as a whole. . . . I'm very concerned about where this outfit is going. . . . I think there really is, at root, the question of what is it now? You know, what is it going to be? . . . I don't have a sense, and I know some other members of the Board, though perhaps a distinct minority, don't have a sense of where it's going, what it's all

about.¹⁶

Meadow, however, admits no confusion about the Club's future. She is as outwardly optimistic as ever about the Manhattan Theatre Club. Meadow's prediction in 1986 is that the Manhattan Theatre Club is going to grow even larger,

I see in the next five years that there's going to have to be some enormous expansion. I envision more ancillary programs for us. I envision--I'd like to create a school that's affiliated with MTC. I would like to have more touring--international touring, and touring in the U.S. I think we're out there now, and we're going to have to be a bigger institution, or not survive. It's very, very hard to keep an institutional theatre alive today. It's harder than it's ever been.¹⁷

Meadow's projections are the converse of her reflections in 1976 when she indicated that she was taking seriously a subscriber's advice not to get "too big."¹⁸ Nevertheless, plans for expansion were being discussed as early as 1978, and Barry Grove spoke openly of the need to acquire a larger auditorium and to increase the theatre's prominence in 1982.

I don't ever see us being a thousand-seat auditorium like the Beaumont, though I think the notion of spring-off plays that are successful in a smaller laboratory situation--producing them ourselves on Broadway--cable television, open-ended Off Broadway runs, is all probably in the near fu-

¹⁶ Interview with Gerald Freund, 2/20/85, p. 4.

¹⁷ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 7.

¹⁸ Mel Gussow, "The Manhattan Theatre Club," The New York Times, December 3, 1976, p. C3.

ture.¹⁹

With the exception of transfers to Broadway, Grove's predictions have yet to be realized; however, it is fairly evident that whatever might provide the Manhattan Theatre Club with the opportunity of garnering additional recognition would be welcome.

This is not to say that Lynne Meadow's fundamental goals have changed. In addition to her own declarations to that effect, numerous members of the theatre club's staff attest that the Club's artistic policy remains virtually unaltered. In large part, this is because the artistic policy of the Club is so intimately linked to Lynne Meadow. Says Peregrine Whittlesey,

Who is the artistic director of the Manhattan Theatre Club will determine the direction of the Club. If Lynne stays the artistic leader of the Manhattan Theatre Club, then I think she will continue to choose plays which she likes. Going on to commercial success is something which Lynne has most emphatically said is not what the Manhattan Theatre Club is about and cannot be about.²⁰

Jonathan Alper observes that during his tenure with the Club,

I think the interesting thing is how it's changed. I think it's emblematic of the American theatre, particularly in New York in the last fifteen

¹⁹ Interview with Barry Grove, 7/8/82, p. 16.

²⁰ Interview with Peregrine Whittlesey, 1/9/85, p. 8.

years, and, as far as I'm concerned, I hope the message is that we haven't really, fundamentally changed what we're trying to do. We've had to change, to some extent, the way we do it; but we still want to, certainly in terms of the literary side of it, do the same as we always did.²¹

What the Club has always tried to do, the trademark of the Manhattan Theatre Club, has been to present a diverse selection of plays of high quality: new American plays, international works, and revivals. Meadow's artistic policy, adds Alper,

really comes out of her initial impulse, which is to do a lot of plays. I mean, I think what you've got here is a kid out of Yale--she just wanted to do a lot of stuff and, quantitatively, we can't anymore--but there's still this impulse to present a broad range."²²

Thomas Bullard agrees that the Club's orientation has not changed.

I would define the orientation as Lynne's desire to produce the best and most interesting season possible, given what's available. And that's always been her agenda. So she harvests from abroad, and from in New York, from the country, to find plays that she responds to, and she thinks will be interesting and worthy of doing--and that's always been the case. As the climate changes, so our seasons will change. But I think we do reflect, to a large degree, what's going on in the theatre world. And when it's fallow, we tend to be fallow--because we're not committed to engendering a community of artists, or a . . . community of writers--that's not the main focus;

²¹ Interview with Jonathan Alper, 12/11/85, p. 11.

²² Ibid., p. 10.

it's ancillary. But most of the energy goes to getting those, however many productions we're doing in a particular year up, and in the best way possible.²³

By placing production standards above profit-making so close to the commercial environment of Broadway, the Manhattan Theatre Club, according to Gerald Freund, has distinguished itself.

The greatest strength, quite clearly, is the participation of the Manhattan Theatre Club in a network of highly talented people from very diverse parts of the theatre, literature; different by origin and geography, and also by intent and capacity. A lot of people--and also at different stages in their careers--(who) have a very strong passion about expressing themselves through the theatre. Mutual recognition of that . . . to my mind has been the common denominator. And one ought to recognize that such an institution that is so vital in that way--we're lucky to have for any period of time; that a thing like that is bound to level off, perhaps even go under; that our concerns should not be so much necessarily to keep it alive, as to identify the next place where that can take place.²⁴

In a broad historical perspective, Freund's comments are certainly reasonable; however, it seems very unlikely that Lynne Meadow would accept the idea that the Manhattan Theatre Club had fulfilled its mission and that a more adventurous theatre will replace it. Rather, it seems, that so long as Meadow remains the artistic head of the Club, the

²³ Interview with Thomas Bullard, 12/4/85, p. 4.

²⁴ Interview with Gerald Freund, 3/28/85, p. 5.

organization will continue to make a contribution to theatre in New York City, in some capacity, out of the sheer determination of its Artistic Director.

"What makes a theatre? What is it?," questions Meadow,

I mean it's really this ephemeral thing of somebody's spirit--one person's spirit--my spirit as the Artistic Director of the theatre--and the spirit of the people whom I've gathered around me to work with it. And the thing about me is that I've never pontificated about my artistic vision. I've never sat down and said that I believe in a theatre that does X and Y. The only thing that I think I've said is that I believe in the highest possible quality and standards--and that is subjective; it's my idea of what's good. . . .

Clearly as you look at the body of work that we've done, there are a lot of plays that have enormous intelligence attached to them, and plays that are very thoughtful. There are a lot of plays that have been very funny also, plays that are kind of silly, and musicals. And I wish I had a definition for what my artistic vision is that I could utter and say I believe in a theatre that does this. I don't. I think I believe in--somehow I feel that I make a statement of who I am in the plays that I choose, and the people that I choose to do them. And the things that I have done add up to what I believe and who I am. I'm very existential to that extent. I feel that's there's an enormous discrepancy sometimes between what one states, and what one does. And I prefer to have someone look at the body of work that I've created--both as a director and as a producer--and say this²⁵ is what the Manhattan Theatre Club stands for.

²⁵ Interview with Lynne Meadow, 11/20/85, p. 7.

At the risk of sounding tautological, it must be concluded that the Manhattan Theatre Club is a reflection of Lynne Meadow's perception of drama and theatre. The Club's programming certainly reflects this. Plays which require production styles generally considered to be "experimental" hold little appeal to Meadow, and therefore very few "experimental" plays ever appeared at the Club. By the same token, because Meadow is interested primarily in plays which intelligently address issues of contemporary significance and plays concerned with fundamental aspects of the human condition, these plays make up the main body of the Club's production history.

Lynne Meadow has placed her stamp upon the programming of the Manhattan Theatre Club, and has exerted her influence upon the Club in other ways. Because Meadow is an undeniably driven individual with a strong sense of self and a will to achieve, the Club seems to have inherited an instinct for survival. (A. Joseph Tandet's point must be acknowledged, however. Meadow certainly helped to make the Manhattan Theatre Club a viable institution, but it was in existence before her arrival).

The association between Meadow and the Club must be viewed as mutually serendipitous. The Manhattan Theatre

Club needed an effective leader and Meadow needed a place to practice her craft. Had the two not come together as they did, it is conceivable that neither might have gained the level of recognition that they have come to enjoy. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge the wisdom of those members of the Board of Directors responsible for the selection of Meadow as Artistic Director, as well as Meadow's own contributions.

The achievements of the Club are considerable, and have clearly surpassed the theatre's initial goals. Albert Jeffcoat had desired to create a organization which would produce American plays of quality, particularly new works. While the Club did produce mostly new plays, including many by Americans, many others have been the work of playwrights outside the United States, particularly from England. Meadow, in essence, broadened the initial artistic policy considerably.

At the same time, Meadow did realize the goals of the founding committee at different points in the theatre's development. While on the East Side of New York, the Club was, in fact, a kind of community theatre, its audience coming mostly from the immediate vicinity. Plays were presented which were, at least, more intellectually challenging,

more "adventuresome" than those seen in the commercial arena. And, in the early days of its history, the Manhattan Theatre Club functioned as a laboratory theatre, allowing for a good deal of audience involvement.

During the early to mid-1970s, the Club's reputation rested mainly on the quantity of work which it presented. The manic producing activity which characterized the earliest years of the Club following Meadow's arrival, had to do not only with Meadow's own enthusiasm but also with the practical necessity of having to fill numerous performance spaces. The more work the theatre produced, the more attention it attracted and the more revenue it raised. Thus, the Manhattan Theatre Club became a "supermarket of the arts."

The need to keep producing was the genesis of the Chamber Theatre controversy, which was clearly the single most important episode in the Club's history in terms of defining the Manhattan Theatre Club as an institution guided by its Artistic Director. The resolution of that conflict gained Meadow the authority to exercise complete control over Club activities, an essential pre-condition for her to manage effectively. Particularly in the earliest days of her tenure, when she was most vulnerable, any attempt to undercut her control led to confrontation, as illustrated with June Plag-

er in 1972, Mortimer Levitt in 1974, and the co-producers of The Wager in the same year.

Barry Grove's compatibility with Lynne Meadow was a vital factor in his being hired as her partner. To use Meadow's analogy, the Manhattan Theatre Club was a team in the competitive non-commercial theatre arena, and to be assured of success in the competition, Meadow, as team leader, needed to surround herself with the best supporting players, individuals whom she could implicitly trust. Those to whom she could not relate were dropped from the team.

Undoubtedly, Meadow was fortunate in her selection of teammate Barry Grove, who proved to be as protective of the Manhattan Theatre Club as Meadow herself. From the moment of his arrival in 1975, Grove fought to preserve the Club's financial interests, beginning with his involvement in the Equity Wars of the mid-1970s. Both he and Meadow played significant roles in the early, and most heated, stages of that conflict. Surely, their mutual effort in this confrontation helped to solidify the bond of trust between them, which, in turn, allowed the theatre to grow more rapidly.

Having proven his commitment to the organization, Meadow was able to surrender to Grove control of the administrative functions of the Club, while she concentrated her ef-

forts on the Club's artistic development. The best example of Meadow's degree of trust in Grove's abilities was her willingness to be persuaded by him to take the first of several survival-threatening steps for the organization, namely, the expansion into a second performance space in 1975.

Shortly after the arrival of Grove, Meadow directed Ashes, the Club's first major artistic triumph. The production of Ashes brought recognition to both Meadow and the Manhattan Theatre Club and, in large part, established the production standard against which future offerings were to be measured. The production, which moved to the Public Theatre, was the Club's first show to be transferred as produced to another theatre. The transfer brought the Club additional prestige and extended the life of the play. The move along with the attention it received, helped to ensure the viability of the Club's expansion.

In fact, the rate of growth increased dramatically following the success of Ashes. The Club enjoyed many positive critical notices the following season and was able to give its Downstage series an Off Broadway contract by the 1977-1978 season, a pivotal season in the Club's history.

Following nearly two years of negotiations, the Manhattan Theatre Club became the recipient of a five-year,

\$250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation in 1977, which alleviated much of the theatre's financial distress, and permitted planning to proceed in relation to the Club's future direction. At the start of the 1977-1978 season, Ain't Mis-behavin', which began as a low-budget cabaret offering, unexpectedly became a goldmine for the Club, and catapulted the Manhattan Theatre Club to new heights of recognition in the professional theatre community, as well as among funding agencies. There followed a \$125,000 three-year matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts which added still further to the theatre's rapidly expanding budget.

With substantially increased resources and greater prominence, the nature of the organization began to change. The Manhattan Theatre Club became more institutionalized. Staff size was increased, staff duties became more specific, and the distinction between administrative and artistic functions were sharply defined. The new funds allowed the theatre to become a full Equity operation sooner than had previously been expected, with the Upstage utilizing an Off Broadway contract by 1980.

Artistically, increased funding helped raise the production values of Club offerings. From 1978 on, the Manhattan Theatre Club was cited repeatedly for the quality of its

productions, quite apart from the substance of the plays produced. The Club was now being associated with a new standard of quality production, which also meant that the standard had to be maintained. Thus, there was a gradual shift in the Club's focus. The theatre laboratory atmosphere of the Club's early days, in which the emphasis was on the evolution of plays through various stages of development, slowly gave way to an emphasis upon creating a polished final product. While attempts have been made to provide some forum for the development of new plays, the major thrust of the Club's activity, in recent years, has been with the mounting of fully staged productions. The benefits of prominence and increased funding brought new demands upon the theatre. There were expectations to be met from critics, funding sources and subscribers, and the theatre appeared to become more conservative than it had looked in earlier years.

From the late 1970s on, the number of productions each season steadily decreased and, while the programming continued to be eclectic, seasonal themes became apparent, particularly during the 1980s. With the departure of Stephen Pascal, programming also became more mainstream than it had been previously. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of

plays produced after 1978 continued to reflect the Club's artistic policy of presenting intelligent, literary drama. The frenetic producing activity which characterized the early days of the Club was replaced by the comparatively few productions mounted being presented in the best manner possible. Quality, in effect, replaced quantity, and rather than a supermarket of the arts, the Manhattan Theatre Club was becoming more of a specialty store.

Shopping in the aisles of that store were more than subscribers and critics. Changes in the financial climate during the late 1970s was making commercial production more difficult. To minimize the risk of financial loss, producers of commercial theatre turned to Off Broadway in search of tested new properties. At the Manhattan Theatre Club, they found Broadway material in Ain't Misbehavin', as well as Mass Appeal and Crimes of the Heart, both in 1980, and Loot in 1986. Other Club productions were picked up for extended runs Off Broadway, such as Catsplay and The Miss Firecracker Contest.

While commercial transfers are always appreciated for the revenue which they bring, the policy at the Club continues to be to reap the rewards of transfers when they occur, but not to aim for them. Meadow has consistently and em-

phatically stated that the purpose of the Manhattan Theatre Club is to present works for their artistic and not their commercial value. There is no real evidence to contradict this statement and only four of the over two hundred shows produced at the Club have made the transfer to Broadway. That the Manhattan Theatre Club has been able to attract the interest of commercial producers, without losing its identity or compromising artistic policy, represents still another achievement of the theatre. The Club has succeeded in capturing the attention and the respect of the commercial sector without appearing to pander to it.

The Club does share more of the values of regional theatres in the United States than those of the commercial arena. It both receives transfers from the regional theatre circuit and contributes to it, as was the case with Strange Snow. The Club has also served as a showcase of new playwriting commissioned by regional theatres.

The Club has also introduced many plays of foreign writers. Seasons are often heavily weighted with plays from the international theatre community--the 1977-1978 Downstage season consisting only of foreign works. The Club has particularly distinguished itself with its production of plays by contemporary British writers and the South African writer, Athol Fugard.

The Club's survival is linked to its ability to satisfy the desires of its audiences. During the early 1980s, the typical Manhattan Theatre Club subscriber was a middle-aged East Sider; married, educated, wealthy, and apparently best satisfied by conventional literary works with identifiable themes. The Club proved itself capable of keeping its subscribers satisfied most of the time. It had become a kind of landmark of the Upper East Side community, and presumably could have continued producing, without any significant change in its artistic policy, and, most likely, have been assured a substantially large audience.

The need for expansion, however, was considerable and, being denied an affordable new East Side location, the Club faced the most serious threat to its survival in many years. By leaving the Upper East Side, the Manhattan Theatre Club lost nearly fifty percent of its audience. Literally, the Club was forced to begin again the task of cultivating a body of subscribers, putting to the test both the Club's artistic achievements and its management structure. The Club needed to attract a new audience based on its production history, and management had to prove its effectiveness despite having lost much of its secure underpinnings.

Preliminary evidence indicates that the Club withstood the trauma of the move exceptionally well. An effective audience development campaign increased total audience size by nearly forty-two percent within one year. The move does not appear to have harmed the Club, although it has, for the time being, reduced the number of Club productions to an all-time low. At the present time, there are plans to overcome this serious inconvenience by the 1986-1987 season.

With only a single performance space, the Club has, nevertheless, already been quite successful. Two of the three productions presented during the 1985-1986 season received very favorable reviews (It's Only A Play and Loot), and one is being moved to Broadway (Loot). This represents an auspicious beginning for the Club at its new location.

Looking ahead, the addition of a second performance space will permit the Manhattan Theatre Club greater freedom in its scheduling, and will probably allow for the presentation of a wider variety of plays. It may even make possible the resumption of the theatre laboratory practices which characterized the Club's early life.

It is unlikely that the Club will work towards the installation of a playwright-in-residence in future seasons, however. Such an arrangement proved unworkable in the past,

with the exception of the commission that Stephen Metcalfe received, which resulted in Strange Snow. The Playwrights' Unit may serve some future role in establishing a more permanent connection between the theatre club and the writers whose work it produces, but, at present, the direction of the Playwrights' Unit is unclear.

It is probably likely that every effort will be made to expand the Club in the ways that Lynne Meadow envisions. Attempts will be made to increase ancillary programs of the nature of the In-the-Works series and the Writers in Performance series. The creation of an acting school affiliated with the Club is a possibility, and surely steps will be taken to attract attention to the Club and increase its prominence as a non-commercial theatre in New York City.

The Manhattan Theatre Club has truly been forced to begin anew, and while this, quite understandably, has generated some anxiety over the theatre's future direction and its ability to continue to survive, the Club has the benefit of a sixteen year history, a powerful Board of Directors, a strong and workable management structure, and the same committed Artistic Director that it had in 1972. Despite the obstacles which it may face in the days to come, so long as Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove head the organization, precau-

tions will be taken to help ensure the soundness and vitality of the Manhattan Theatre Club.

The Club's future programming, the effects of further expansion, planned attempts to revitalize the theatre club as a center for the evolution of the work of new playwrights, and the potential development of the Playwright's Unit, are all aspects of the Manhattan Theatre Club which will merit future analysis.

APPENDIX A

Chronology of Productions. (First column represents the season or actual opening date of the show).

71-72	<u>A Sandburg Odyssey</u> Director: David O. Glazer	Author: David O. Glazer
71-72	<u>All Through The House</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Anthony Scully
71-72	<u>John Brown's Body</u> Director: Ted Tiller	Author: Stephen Vincent Benet
71-72	<u>Let Me Make One Thing Perfectly Clear</u> Director: Michael Lentsch	Author: Michael Kortchmar
71-72	<u>Mildred</u> Director: Richard Jordan	Author: Joe Ponce
71-72	<u>Sleeping Dogs</u> Director: Nancy Rubin	Author: David Libman
71-72	<u>Soon Jack November</u> Director: Donald Kvares	Author: Sharon Thie
71-72	<u>The Bald Soprano</u> Director: Mary Tiffany	Author: Eugene Ionesco
71-72	<u>The Diary Of Anne Frank</u> Director: June Plager	Author: F. Goodrich & A. Hackett
71-72	<u>The Elephant Calf</u> Director: Mary Tiffany	Author: Bertolt Brecht
71-72	<u>The Field</u> Director: Terry Walker	Author: Michael Parriott
71-72	<u>The Postman</u> Director: Nancy Rubin	Author: Ed Gold
71-72	<u>The Roommates</u> Director: Ken Golden	Author: M. J. Bevans
71-72	<u>The Return</u> Director: Sara Van Horn	Author: Guy Parker

1/4/72	<u>22 Years</u> Director: Robert Sickinger	Author: Robert Sickinger
7/20/72	<u>The Best Is Yet To Be</u> Director: Roger H. Simon	Author: Margie Appelman
9/27/72	<u>Well. . . Fair</u> Director: David Schweizer	Author: Anne Roby
10/19/72	<u>The Revue</u> Director: John Pleshette	Author: Avery Corman
11/16/72	<u>Canadian Gothic/American Modern</u> Director: Austin Pendleton	Author: Johanna Glass
12/7/72	<u>Off The Wall</u> Director: Michael McGuire	Author: Not on record.
12/14/72	<u>I Dont Generally Like Poetry But . . .</u> Director: Yale Cabaret	Author: A. Innaurato & C. Durang
72-73	<u>Bad Habits</u> Director: Robert Drivas	Author: Terrence McNally
72-73	<u>Boccaccio</u> Director: David Ackroyd	Author: Kenneth Cavander
72-73	<u>Charlie The Chicken</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Jonathan Levy
72-73	<u>Eddie And Susanna In Love</u> Director: Robert Burgos	Author: Leonard Melfi
72-73	<u>Happy Days Are Here Again</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Cecil P. Taylor
72-73	<u>Kitchenette</u> Director: Harvey Tavel	Author: Ronald Tavel
72-73	<u>Mary Jane</u> Director: Kenneth Bernard	Author: Kenneth Bernard
72-73	<u>Older People</u> Director: John Ford Noonan	Author: John Ford Noonan
72-73	<u>Susan Peretz at the MIT</u> Director: Joanne Schmidman	Author: Megan Terry
72-73	<u>The Family Joke</u> Director: David Starkweather	Author: David Starkweather

72-73	<u>The Hawk</u> Director: Tony Barsha	Author: Murray Mednick
72-73	<u>The Little Mahagonny</u> Director: Michael Posnick	Author: Bertolt Brecht
72-73	<u>The White Whore & The Bit Player</u> Director: Tom Eyen	Author: Tom Eyen
2/1/73	<u>Crunch</u> Director: Alfred L. Gingold	Author: John Buskin
3/1/73	<u>Big Broadcast on East 53rd Street</u> Director: David Villaire	Author: Dick Brukenfeld
3/22/73	<u>Jesus As Seen By His Friends</u> Director: Sergei Retitov/Lynne Meadow	Author: Amos Kenan
4/5/73	<u>Auto Destruct</u> Director: John Lion	Author: Jeff Wanshel
4/12/73	<u>The Complaint Department Closes at Five</u> Director: Roger Hendricks Simon	Author: Edward M. Cohen
4/19/73	<u>A Little Singing, A Little Dancing</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Robert K. Smith
4/19/73	<u>The Petition</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Donald Flynn
5/30/73	<u>Softly & Consider the Nearness</u> Director: Maxine Klein	Author: Rosalyn Drexler
10/2/73	<u>Yucca Flats</u> Director: J. Ranelli	Author: Adam Le Fevre
73-74	<u>A Circle Of Sound</u> Director: Christopher Alden	Author: Christopher Alden
73-74	<u>Birdbath</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Leonard Melfi
73-74	<u>By Mutual Consent</u> Director: Paul Schneider	Author: Jeff Kindley
73-74	<u>Gershwin!</u> Director: Christopher Alden	Author: Christopher Alden
73-74	<u>Hocus, Pocus, Dominocus</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Jim Doyle
73-74	<u>Hopscotch, Spared</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Israel Horovitz

73-74	<u>Les Mamelles De Tiresias</u> Director: Christopher Alden	Author: Francis Poulenc
73-74	<u>Markheim</u> Director: David Shookoff	Author: Carlisle Floyd
73-74	<u>Marouf</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Kenneth Cavander
73-74	<u>Masha</u> Director: Paul Schneider	Author: Tim Kelly
73-74	<u>Our Father's Failing</u> Director: Israel Horovitz	Author: Israel Horovitz
73-74	<u>The Questioning Of Nick</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Arthur Kopit
1/6/74	<u>Miracle Play</u> Director: Dan Freudenberger	Author: Joyce Carol Oates
1/17/74	<u>The Wager</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Mark Medoff
1/20/74	<u>The Removalists</u> Director: Michael Montel	Author: David Williamson
2/1/74	<u>Allergy</u> Director: Ronald Roston	Author: Cecil Taylor
2/1/74	<u>The Cretan Bull</u> Director: Ronald Roston	Author: Kenneth H. Brown
2/9/74	<u>Little Eyolf</u> Director: Austin Pendleton	Author: Henrik Ibsen
5/5/74	<u>Tonight At 7:30</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Noel Coward
5/10/74	<u>Morning After Optimism</u> Director: Bob Mandel	Author: Thomas Murphy
6/74	<u>Naomi Court</u> Director: Ira Cirker	Author: Michael Sawyer
74-75	<u>An Evening With Cole Porter</u> Director: Norman L. Berman	Author: Cole Porter
74-75	<u>Autumn Ladies & Their Lovers</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Susan Nanus

74-75	<u>Bread And Roses</u> Director: Carol Kastendle	Author: Maria Gioffre
74-75	<u>Operetta!</u> Director: Christopher Alden	Author: Christopher Alden
74-75	<u>Portrait Of A Madonna</u> Director: Delores Ferraro	Author: Tennessee Williams
74-75	<u>Signo Di Luso</u> Director: David Shookoff	Author: Thomas Pasatieri
74-75	<u>Some People, Some Other People</u> Director: Charles Aidman	Author: Jordan Crittendon
74-75	<u>The Breakout</u> Director: Hal Scott	Author: Oyamo
74-75	<u>The Morning After Optimism</u> Director: Bob Mandel	Author: Thomas Murphy
74-75	<u>This Property Is Condemned</u> Director: Delores Ferraro	Author: Tennessee Williams
10/74	<u>An Evening Of Cole Porter</u> Director: Norman Berman	Author: Norman Berman
11/13/74	<u>Bits And Pieces</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Corinne Jacker
11/13/74	<u>Blessing</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Joseph Landon
12/6/74	<u>Savitri</u> Director: David Shookoff	Author: Gustav Holst
12/6/74	<u>Signor Deluso</u> Director: David Shookoff	Author: Thomas Pasatieri
12/10/74	<u>The Runner Stumbles</u> Director: Austin Pendleton	Author: Milan Stitt
1/75	<u>Look Homeward, Angel</u> Director: Jeff Bricmont	Author: Ketti Frings
1/23/75	<u>Bus Stop</u> Director: Jeff Bricmont	Author: William Inge
1/29/75	<u>The Seagull</u> Director: Joseph Chaikin	Author: Anton Chekhov

2/75	<u>Valentine's Day</u> Director: Ron Cowen	Author: Ron Cowen
2/11/75	<u>The Best Is Yet To Be</u> Director: Delores Ferraro	Author: Margie Appleman
2/16/75	<u>The Pornographer's Daughter</u> Director: John Pleshette	Author: Jonathan Levy
2/27/75	<u>2 Fishermen & Marriage By Lanternlight</u> Director: Michael Feingold	Author: Jacques Offenbach
3/12/75	<u>The Sea</u> Director: Robert Mandel	Author: Edward Bond
3/18/75	<u>Death Story</u> Director: Carole Rothman	Author: David Edgar
4/3/75	<u>Staircase</u> Director: Tom Bullard	Author: Charles Dyer
4/22/75	<u>Battering Ram</u> Director: Stephen Pascal	Author: David E. Freeman
4/27/75	<u>The Past Is The Past</u> Director: Harold Scott	Author: Richard Wesley
5/8/75	<u>East Lynne</u> Director: David Chambers	Author: David Chambers
5/29/75	<u>Valentines Day</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Ron Cowen
75-76	<u>Life Is Like A Musical Comedy</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: George M. Cohan
10/16/75	<u>Golden Boy</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Clifford Odets
10/23/75	<u>Songs From Ruby's Place</u> Director: Andre de Shields	Author: Not on record.
11/1/75	<u>Sea Marks</u> Director: Steven Robman	Author: Gardner McKay
11/13/75	<u>A Slight Ache/The Basement</u> Director: David Kerry Heefne	Author: Harold Pinter
11/13/75	<u>Marvin's Garden</u> Director: David Chambers	Author: Mel Marvin

12/4/75	<u>Geography Of A Horse Dreamer</u> Director: Jacques Levy	Author: Sam Shepard
12/4/75	<u>Life Class</u> Director: Robert Mandel	Author: David Storey
2/4/76	<u>Patrick Henry Lake Liquors</u> Director: Ronald Roston	Author: Larry Ketron
2/5/76	<u>Kander And Ebb Cabaret</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Not on record.
2/11/76	<u>The Blood Knot</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Athol Fugard
2/26/76	<u>Pins And Needles</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Harold Rome
3/76	<u>An Evening With Sholom Aleichem</u> Director: Richard Maltby Jr.	Author: Sholem Aleichem
3/76	<u>Peoples Songs</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Not on record.
3/3/76	<u>Voice Of The Turtle</u> Director: Julianne Boyd	Author: John Van Druten
3/18/76	<u>The Son</u> Director: Stephen Pascal	Author: Gert Hofman
3/31/76	<u>Dearly Beloved</u> Director: Paul Schneider	Author: John Raymond Hart
4/8/76	<u>Devils And Diamonds</u> Director: Christopher Alden	Author: Stephanie Cotsirilos
4/21/76	<u>Cracked Tokens</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Improvisations
4/21/76	<u>In The Wine Time</u> Director: Robert Macbeth	Author: Ed Bullins
5/76	<u>The Pokey</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Stephen Black
5/13/76	<u>Jazz Babies</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Not on record.
5/18/76	<u>Transformations</u> Director: David Shookoff	Author: Ann Sexton & Conrad Susa

6/2/76	<u>A Salute to George M. Cohan</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: George M. Cohan
76-77	<u>The Wise Woman & The King</u> Director: David Shookoff	Author: Carl Orff
10/20/76	<u>Children</u> Director: Melvin Bernhardt	Author: A.R. Gurney
10/27/76	<u>Two On The Town/Comden & Green</u> Director: Norman L. Berman	Author: Norman L. Berman
10/29/76	<u>Cracked Tokens</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Improvisational group.
11/4/76	<u>Claw</u> Director: Stephen Pascal	Author: Howard Barker
11/24/76	<u>Starting Here, Starting Now</u> Director: Maltby & Shire	Author: Richard Maltby and David Shire
11/26/76	<u>Pendleton Brown & Jake Holmes</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Not on record.
12/2/76	<u>Ballymurphy</u> Director: Ronald Roston	Author: Michael Neville
12/8/76	<u>Ashes</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: David Rudkin
1/12/77	<u>Because We're Decadent</u> Director: Dan Goggin	Author: Goggin & Lorick
1/14/77	<u>Just Me</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Nancy Deering
1/19/77	<u>Boesman And Lena</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Athol Fugard
1/23/77	<u>C. C. Pryor & Friends</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: C. C. Pryor
1/26/77	<u>Songs From Nell</u> Director: Diane Lampert	Author: Peter Schickele
1/27/77	<u>Billy Irish</u> Director: Barry Marshall	Author: Thomas Babe
1/28/77	<u>Notes: Songs</u> Director: Bill Gile	Author: Craig Carnelia

2/24/77	<u>Quail Southwest</u> Director: Andy Wolk	Author: Larry Ketron
2/25/77	<u>Kinky Disco</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: C. C. Pryor
3/2/77	<u>The Gathering</u> Director: Austin Pendelton	Author: Edna O'Brien
3/9/77	<u>Donald Siegel & Robert Joseph</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Siegel & Joseph
3/11/77	<u>Margery Cohen</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Margery Cohen
4/6/77	<u>Songs From The Confidence Man</u> Director: Ray Errol Fox	Author: Jim Steinman
4/7/77	<u>Statues, Exhibition</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Janet Neipris
4/7/77	<u>The Bridge At Belharbour</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Janet Neipris
4/8/77	<u>Songs</u> Director: Victor Garber	Author: Don Scardino
5/4/77	<u>In The Summer House</u> Director: Stephen Hollis	Author: Jane Bowles
5/4/77	<u>4 Years After The Revolution</u> Director: Adrienne Mitchell	Author: Richard Peaslee
5/12/77	<u>The Last Street Play</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Richard Wesley
5/25/77	<u>Salute To New Composers</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Jack Allison
5/31/77	<u>Clamma Dale In Concert</u> Director: Grover Dale	Author: Clamma Dale
10/26/77	<u>Chez Nous</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Peter Nichols
11/2/77	<u>The Wayside Motor Inn</u> Director: Tony Giordano	Author: A. R. Gurney
11/9/77	<u>By Strouse</u> Director: Charles Strouse	Author: Charles Strouse

11/18/77	<u>Martin Charnin</u> Director: Martin Charnin	Author: Martin Charnin
12/14/77	<u>Play, That Time, Footfalls</u> Director: Alan Schneider	Author: Samuel Beckett
12/28/77	<u>Dory Previn: Lady With A Braid</u> Director: Caymichael Patten	Author: Dory Previn
12/28/77	<u>Frankie And Annie</u> Director: Paul Schneider	Author: Diane Simkin
2/1/78	<u>Scenes From Soweto</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Steve Wilmer
2/1/78	<u>Statements After Arrest . . .</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Athol Fugard
2/8/78	<u>Ain't Misbehavin'</u> Director: Richard Maltby Jr.	Author: Fats Waller
3/1/78	<u>Red Fox/Second Hanging</u> Director: Michael Posnick	Author: Don Baker, Dudley Cocke
3/8/78	<u>Has Anybody Here Found Love?</u> Director: Miriam Fond	Author: Lois Wyse/Carol Frankel
4/5/78	<u>Catsplay</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Istvan Orkeny
4/5/78	<u>Jim Wann's Country Cabaret</u> Director: John Haber	Author: Jim Wann
4/5/78	<u>Safe House</u> Director: Jonathan Alper	Author: Nicholas Kazan
5/3/78	<u>Happy With The Blues</u> Director: Julianne Boyd	Author: Harold Arlen
5/17/78	<u>Rib Cage</u> Director: Andy Wolk	Author: Larry Ketron
5/24/78	<u>Strawberry Fields</u> Director: Stephen Pascal	Author: Stephen Poliakoff
78-79	<u>The Arbor</u> Director: Kenneth Frankel	Author: Brother Jonathan
11/7/78	<u>The Rear Column</u> Director: James Hammerstein	Author: Simon Gray

11/15/78 <u>A Lady Needs A Change</u> Director: Bill Giles	Author: Bill Giles
11/15/78 <u>Nongogo</u> Director: Oz Scott	Author: Athol Fugard
12/26/78 <u>Grand Magic</u> Director: Michael Kahn	Author: Eduardo De Filippo
1/3/79 <u>Beethoven/Karl</u> Director: Paul Schneider	Author: David Rush
1/3/79 <u>Dancing In The Dark</u> Director: Christopher Chadman	Author: Arthur Schwartz
2/7/79 <u>Give My Heart An Even Break</u> Director: Jim Kramer	Author: George Quincy and Thayer Burc
2/7/79 <u>Stevie</u> Director: Brian Murray	Author: Hugh Whitemore
2/13/79 <u>Artichoke</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Joanna McClelland Glass
3/28/79 <u>Losing Time</u> Director: Edwin Sherin	Author: John Hopkins
3/28/79 <u>Songs From City Streets</u> Director: Gui Andrisano	Author: Jake Holmes
4/3/79 <u>Don Juan Comes Back From The War</u> Director: Stephen Pascal	Author: Odon Von Horvath
5/9/79 <u>At Home With Margery Cohen</u> Director: Jose Fernandez	Author: Margery Cohen
5/9/79 <u>Just A Little Bit Less Than Normal</u> Director: Paul Schneider	Author: Nigel Baldwin
9/11/79 <u>Losing Time</u> Director: Ed Sherin	Author: John Hopkins
10/9/79 <u>Ice</u> Director: Robert Woodruff	Author: Michael Cristofer
11/6/79 <u>Jail Diary Of Albie Sachs</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: David Edgar
11/20/79 <u>Nacha Guevara/Alberto Favero</u> Director: Nacha Guevara	Author: Guevara/Favaro

12/4/79	<u>Weeden, Finkle & Fay</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Not on record.
12/18/79	<u>A Christmas Garland</u> Director: John Tillinger	Author: Eileen Atkins and Helen Dawson
1/1/80	<u>Endgame</u> Director: Joseph Chaikin	Author: Samuel Beckett
1/8/80	<u>One Wedding Two Rooms Three Friends</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: John Gwilym Jones
2/19/80	<u>Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi</u> Director: Nancy Meckler	Author: Pam Gems
2/26/80	<u>Biography</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: S. N. Behrman
2/28/80	<u>Evening With Margery Cohen</u> Director: Margery Cohen	Author: Margery Cohen
3/11/80	<u>My Mother, My Son</u> Director: Paul Austin	Author: Viveca Lindfors and Kristoffer Tabori
4/8/80	<u>Sidewalkin'</u> Director: Patricia Birch	Author: Jake Holmes
4/22/80	<u>Mass Appeal</u> Director: Geraldine Fitzgerald	Author: Bill C. Davis
5/13/80	<u>Styne After Styne</u> Director: Fritz Holt	Author: Jule Styne and Jonathan Reyno
80-81	<u>Harry Ruby's Songs My Mother Never Sang</u> Director: Paul Lazarus	Author: Michael S. Roth
80-81	<u>Hunting Scenes From Lower Bavaria</u> Director: Ulrich Heising	Author: Martin Sperr
80-81	<u>One Tiger To A Hill</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Sharon Pollock
80-81	<u>Real Life Funnies</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Alan Menken and Howard Ashman
80-81	<u>Scenes From La Vie De Boheme</u> Director: Douglas Hughes	Author: Anthony Giardina
80-81	<u>The Chisolm Trail Went Through Here</u> Director: Stephen Schachter	Author: Brady Sewell

80-81	<u>Translations</u> Director: Joe Dowling	Author: Brian Friel
80-81	<u>Vikings</u> Director: George Mead	Author: Stephen Metcalfe
12/9/80	<u>Crimes Of The Heart</u> Director: Melvin Bernhardt	Author: Beth Henley
12/16/80	<u>American Days</u> Director: Jacques Levy	Author: Stephen Poliakoff
3/17/81	<u>After All</u> Director: Douglas Hughes	Author: Vincent Canby
4/14/81	<u>A Call From The East</u> Director: John Tillinger	Author: Ruth Praver Jhabvala
81-82	<u>And I Ain't Finished Yet</u> Director: Sheldon Epps	Author: Eve Merriam
81-82	<u>Livin' Dolls</u> Director: Richard Maltby Jr.	Author: Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman
81-82	<u>Resurrection Of Lady Lester</u> Director: Andre Mtumi	Author: Oyamo
10/20/81	<u>Crossing Niagara</u> Director: Andre Ernotte	Author: Alonso Alegria
12/15/81	<u>No End Of Blame</u> Director: Walton Jones	Author: Howard Barker
1/28/82	<u>Strange Snow</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Stephen Metcalfe
2/9/82	<u>Sally And Marsha</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Sybille Pearson
4/13/82	<u>Gardenia</u> Director: Karel Reisz	Author: John Guare
6/17/82	<u>The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs</u> Director: Simone Benmussa	Author: Simone Benmussa
9/21/82	<u>Talking With</u> Director: Jon Jory	Author: Jane Martin
10/12/82	<u>Standing On My Knees</u> Director: Robert Falls	Author: John Olive

11/30/82	<u>The Three Sisters</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Anton Chekhov
12/21/82	<u>Skirmishes</u> Director: Sharon Ott	Author: Catherine Hayes
1/25/83	<u>Summer</u> Director: Douglas Hughes	Author: Edward Bond
3/8/83	<u>The Groves of Academe</u> Director: Steven Schacter	Author: Mark Stein
3/8/83	<u>Half a Lifetime</u> Director: Dann Florek	Author: Stephen Metcalfe
3/8/83	<u>Slacks and Tops</u> Director: Douglas Hughes	Author: Harry Kondoleon
3/22/83	<u>Elba</u> Director: Thomas Bullard	Author: Vaughn McBride
4/26/83	<u>Early Warnings</u> Director: Steven Kent	Author: Jean-Claude Van Itallie
9/27/83	<u>The Philanthropist</u> Director: Andre Ernotte	Author: Christopher Hampton
10/18/83	<u>Blue Plate Special</u> Director: Art Wolff	Author: Tom Edwards and Harris Wheeler
12/13/83	<u>Friends</u> Director: Barnet Kellman	Author: Lee Kalcheim
2/11/84	<u>Mensch Meier</u> Director: Jacques Levy	Author: Franz Xaver Kroetz
3/6/84	<u>Park Your Car in Harvard Yard</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Israel Horovitz
4/10/84	<u>Other Places</u> Director: Alan Schneider	Author: Harold Pinter
5/1/84	<u>The Miss Firecracker Contest</u> Director: Stephen Tobolowsky	Author: Beth Henley
4/24/84	<u>Americans Abroad</u> Director: Michael Bloom	Author: Andrew Foster
5/15/84	<u>Warning Signals</u> Director: Not on record.	Author: Nancy Donohue

10/30/84	<u>In Celebration</u> Director: Lindsay Anderson	Author: David Storey
11/27/84	<u>Husbandry</u> Director: Jon Jory	Author: Patrick Tovatt
12/11/84	<u>Messiah</u> Director: David Leveaux	Author: Martin Sherman
1/22/85	<u>Hang On to the Good Times</u> Director: Richard Maltby Jr.	Author: Maltby, Cryer & Ford
3/8/85	<u>Digby</u> Director: Ron Lagomarsino	Author: Joseph Dougherty
4/16/85	<u>California Dog Fight</u> Director: Bill Bryden	Author: Mark Lee
4/24/85	<u>Secrets of the Lava Lamp</u> Director: Stuart Ross	Author: Adriana Trigiani
11/12/85	<u>Oliver Oliver</u> Director: Vivian Matalon	Author: Paul Osborn
1/11/86	<u>It's Only A Play</u> Director: John Tillinger	Author: Terrence McNally
2/18/86	<u>Loot</u> Director: John Tillinger	Author: Joe Orton
4/86	<u>Principia Scriptoriae</u> Director: Lynne Meadow	Author: Richard Nelson
5/86	<u>Women of Manhattan</u> Director: Ron Lagomarsino	Author: John Patrick Shanley

APPENDIX B

Manhattan Theatre Club, Inc.

Balance Sheets, 1972-1984

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.: Statement of Financial Condition
(unaudited)

September 30, 1972
(prepared by Henry Magid and Company)

ASSETS

Cash in bank	10,252.00	
Prepaid expenses	804.00	
Lease; leasehold improvements; equipment -net	47,912.00	
Security deposits	<u>4,562.00</u>	
		63,530.00

LIABILITIES & FUND BALANCES

Liabilities:

Amounts due to seller of lease; leasehold improvements and equipment	44,850.00	
Note payable- bank	5,000.00	
Accounts payable	9,100.00	
Taxes withheld from employees	6,490.00	
Notes and loans payable to directors and contributors	<u>10,954.00</u>	
		76,394.00
Fund Balance - Deficit		(12,864.00)
		<u>63,530.00</u>

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETAS AT SEPTEMBER 30, 1973ASSETS

Cash in bank	\$ 5,796.00	
Prepaid expenses	2,031.00	
Lease, leasehold improvements and equipment -		
Net (Original cost \$59,470.00)	21,869.00	
Security Deposits	<u>4,562.00</u>	
Total		<u>\$34,258.</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

Notes payable - bank	\$ 5,000.00	
Accounts payable	15,453.00	
Taxes withheld from employees	1,576.00	
Notes and loans payable to Directors and		
Contributors	<u>20,153.00</u>	
Total Liabilities		\$42,182.
Fund Balance - Deficit		(<u>7,924.</u>)
Total		<u>\$34,258.</u>

The accompanying notes are an integral part of this report.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB INC.BALANCE SHEETAS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 1974ASSETSCURRENT ASSETS

Cash in banks

\$ 23,803

Prepaid expenses

1,912

TOTAL

\$ 25,715

OTHER ASSETS

Lease, leasehold improvements, and equipment

- net (original cost \$60,467) - Note 1

9,193

Security deposits

4,562

TOTAL

13,755

TOTAL ASSETS

\$ 39,470LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCECURRENT LIABILITIES

Notes payable - bank

\$ 5,000

Accounts payable

9,499

Taxes withheld from employees

2,196

TOTAL

\$ 16,695

Notes and loans payable to directors and
contributors16,153

TOTAL LIABILITIES

32,848

Fund Balance

6,622

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE

\$ 39,470

The accompanying notes are an integral part of this report.

HENRY MAGID
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT
NEW YORK, N. Y.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETAS AT SEPTEMBER 30, 1975ASSETS

Cash in Banks	\$ 45,898
Prepaid Expenses	1,303
Lease, Leasehold Improvements, and Equipment - Net (Original Cost - \$62,323) - Note 1	2,466
Security Deposits	<u>5,592</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>\$ 55,259</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

Note Payable - Bank	\$ 5,000
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	9,412
Taxes Withheld from Employees	2,505
Unearned Membership Fees - Note 2	9,459
Notes and Loans Payable to Directors and Contributors	<u>16,153</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES	42,529
Fund Balance	<u>12,730</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	<u>\$ 55,259</u>

The accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

HENRY MAGID

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETAS AT SEPTEMBER 30, 1976ASSETS

Cash in Banks - Note 1	\$ 67,656
Prepaid Expenses	1,046
Lease, Leasehold Improvements, and Equipment - Net	
Note 2 -	2,159
Security Deposits	<u>5,592</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>\$ 76,453</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

Note Payable - Bank	\$ 4,550
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	10,925
Taxes Withheld from Employees	2,445
Unearned Membership Fees - Note 3	20,231
Security Deposits	1,000
Notes and Loans Payable to Directors	
and Contributors - Note 4	<u>15,203</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES	54,354
Fund Balance - Note 3	<u>22,099</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	<u>\$ 76,453</u>

The accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

HENRY MAGID

Certified Public Accountant

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETAS AT SEPTEMBER 30, 1977ASSETS

Cash	\$ 96,382
Miscellaneous receivables	786
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges	9,019
Lease, leasehold improvements, and equipment - net	
Note 1 -	20,622
Security deposits	5,392
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>\$132,201</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

130.54	Note payable - Bank	1567 -	\$ 4,440
	Accounts payable and accrued expenses		19,948
	Taxes withheld from employees		3,876
257	Loan payable - Note 4	3444	16,918
	Deferred income - Note 2		56,781
	Security deposits		1,200
	Notes and loans payable to directors and contributors - Note 3		15,203
	TOTAL LIABILITIES		118,366
	Fund balance		13,835
	TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE		<u>\$132,201</u>

The accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

HENRY MAGID
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT
NEW YORK, N. Y.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETAS AT SEPTEMBER 30, 1978ASSETSCURRENT ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$221,191
Cash - restricted funds - Note 1	30,685
Miscellaneous receivables - Note 2	32,799
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges - current	<u>8,760</u>

TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS

\$293,435

FIXED AND OTHER ASSETS

Lease, leasehold improvements and equipment - Net - Note 3	23,321
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges - non-current	3,070
Security deposits	<u>5,392</u>

TOTAL FIXED AND OTHER ASSETS

31,783TOTAL ASSETS\$325,218LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCECURRENT LIABILITIES

Note payable - bank - current	\$ 1,567
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	22,609
Payroll taxes withheld	7,679
Loan payable - current - Note 4	3,441
Security deposits	1,085
Deferred income - Note 6	175,986
Reserve fund - Note 1	30,685
Amounts owed to former directors - Note 5	<u>15,203</u>

TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES

\$258,255

Note payable - bank - non-current

1,306

Loan payable - non-current - Note 4

10,036

TOTAL LIABILITIES

269,597

Fund balance

55,621TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE\$325,218

The accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

MAGID & COHEN
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS
NEW YORK, N. Y.

BALANCE SHEETSASSETS

	As At September 30, 1979	As At June 30, 1979
Current assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$368,205	\$315,007
Cash - restricted fund - note 3	51,141	51,141
Receivables - note 4	111,662	100,762
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges - current	27,257	23,116
Total current assets	558,265	490,026
Fixed and other assets:		
Lease, leasehold improvements and equipment - net - note 5	54,244	24,187
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges - non-current	1,842	2,082
Security deposits and bonds	19,448	10,110
Total fixed and other assets	75,534	36,379
Total assets	\$633,799	\$526,405

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE

Current liabilities:		
Note payable - bank - current	\$ 1,306	\$ 1,698
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	38,431	16,341
Payroll taxes withheld	1,193	1,475
Loan payable - current - note 6	3,441	3,444
Security deposits	-0-	510
Deferred income - note 7	213,612	108,189
Reserve fund - note 3	51,141	51,141
Amounts owed to former directors - note 8	10,203	15,203
Total current liabilities	319,327	198,001
Loan payable - non-current - note 6	6,595	7,452
Total liabilities	325,922	205,453
Fund balance - restricted - note 2	257,877	-0-
Fund balance - unrestricted - note 2	50,000	320,952
Total liabilities and fund balance	\$633,799	\$526,405

The accompanying notes are an integral part of this report.

MAGID & COHEN
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS
NEW YORK, N. Y.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CORP., INC.

BALANCE SHEET

JUNE 30, 1980

526

ASSETS

	<u>Total Funds</u>	<u>Operating Fund</u>	<u>Restricted Cash Reserve Fund</u>	<u>Restricted Development & Expansion Fund</u>
Current assets:				
Cash and equivalents - notes 1&2	\$751,225	\$247,527	\$ 71,597	\$432,101
Receivables	44,576	44,576		
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges, current	30,011	30,011		
Total current assets	825,812	322,114	71,597	432,101
Non-current assets:				
Lease, leasehold improvements and equipment, net - note 3	49,894	49,894		
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges, non-current	1,121	1,121		
Security deposits and bonds	5,152	5,152		
	<u>\$881,979</u>	<u>\$378,281</u>	<u>\$ 71,597</u>	<u>\$432,101</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE

Current liabilities:				
Accounts payable, accrued expenses and taxes	\$ 68,883	\$ 68,883		
Loan payable, current - note 4	3,444	3,444		
Security deposits	1,500	1,500		
Deferred income - note 5	173,700	173,700		
Reserve fund - note 1	71,597		71,597	
Total current liabilities	319,124	247,527	71,597	
Loan payable, non-current - note 4	4,011	4,011		
Total liabilities	323,135	251,538	71,597	
Fund balances - note 2	558,844	126,743		432,101
	<u>\$881,979</u>	<u>\$378,281</u>	<u>\$ 71,597</u>	<u>\$432,101</u>

The accompanying notes are an integral part of this report.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.

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BALANCE SHEET

AS AT JUNE 30

ASSETS

	1981			1980	
	Operating Fund	Restricted Cash Reserve Fund	Restricted Development/ Expansion Fund	Total Funds	Total Funds
<u>Current assets</u>					
Cash and equivalents - Notes 1 and 2	\$331,149	\$92,053	\$366,997	\$790,199	\$751,225
Receivables	38,778			38,778	44,576
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges, current	29,250			29,250	30,011
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	399,177	92,053	366,997	858,227	825,812
<u>Non-current assets</u>					
Lease, leasehold improvements and equipment - net - Note 3	45,480			45,480	49,894
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges, non-current	160			160	1,121
Security deposits and bonds	10,304			10,304	5,152
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>\$455,121</u>	<u>\$92,053</u>	<u>\$366,997</u>	<u>\$914,171</u>	<u>\$881,979</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

<u>Current liabilities</u>					
Accounts payable, accrued expenses and taxes	\$ 88,459			\$ 88,459	\$ 68,883
Loan payable - current	3,441			3,441	3,444
Security deposits					1,500
Deferred income - Note 4	239,249			239,249	173,700
Reserve fund - Note 1		92,053		92,053	71,597
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	331,149	92,053		423,202	319,124
Loan payable, non-current	573			573	4,011
TOTAL LIABILITIES	331,722	92,053		423,775	323,135
FUND BALANCES - Note 2	123,399		366,997	490,396	558,844
TOTAL FUND BALANCES AND LIABILITIES	<u>\$455,121</u>	<u>\$92,053</u>	<u>\$366,997</u>	<u>\$914,171</u>	<u>\$881,979</u>

The accompanying notes are an integral part of this report.

MAGID & COHEN
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS
NEW YORK, N. Y.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.

528

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT JUNE 30

ASSETS

	1982			1981	
	<u>Operating Fund</u>	<u>Restricted Cash Reserve Fund</u>	<u>Restricted Development/ Expansion Fund</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
<u>Current assets</u>					
Cash and cash equivalents					
Notes 1,2,3	\$329,442	\$92,053	\$245,880	\$667,375	\$790,199
Receivables	141,729			141,729	38,778
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges, current	32,295			32,295	29,250
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	503,466	92,053	245,880	841,399	858,227
<u>Non-current assets</u>					
Fixed assets - net - Note 4	74,079			74,079	45,480
Prepaid expenses and deferred charges, non-current	-			-	160
Security deposits and bonds	39,062			39,062	10,304
TOTAL ASSETS	\$616,607	\$92,053	\$245,880	\$954,540	\$914,171

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

<u>Current liabilities</u>					
Accounts payable, accrued expenses and taxes	\$110,453			\$110,453	\$ 88,459
Loan payable, current	573			573	3,441
Deferred income - Note 6	368,416			368,416	239,249
Reserve fund - Note 2		92,053		92,053	92,053
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	479,442	92,053		571,495	423,202
Loan payable, non-current					573
TOTAL LIABILITIES	479,442	92,053		571,495	423,775
FUND BALANCES - Note 3	137,165		245,880	383,045	490,396
TOTAL FUND BALANCES AND LIABILITIES	\$616,607	\$92,053	\$245,880	\$954,540	\$914,171

Accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

MAGID & COHEN

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETSAS AT JUNE 30ASSETS

	<u>1983</u>			<u>1982</u>
	<u>Operating</u>	<u>Board</u>	<u>Board</u>	
	<u>Fund</u>	<u>Designated</u>	<u>Designated</u>	
		<u>Expansion</u>	<u>Plant</u>	<u>Total</u>
		<u>Fund</u>	<u>Fund</u>	<u>Funds</u>
				<u>Total</u>
				<u>Funds</u>
<u>Current assets</u>				
Cash and cash equivalents				
Note 1	\$156,000	\$238,611		\$394,611
Receivables	117,094			117,094
Prepaid expenses and other				
current assets	73,165			73,165
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	346,259	238,611		584,870
<u>Non-current assets</u>				
Fixed assets - Net - Notes 3,4			51,520	51,520
Security deposits and bonds	80,558			80,558
TOTAL ASSETS	\$426,817	\$238,611	\$51,520	\$716,948

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

<u>Current liabilities</u>				
Accounts payable, accrued				
expenses and taxes	\$110,802			\$110,802
Loan payable				57
Deferred income - Note 6	316,015			316,015
Reserve fund				92,05
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	426,817			571,49
FUND BALANCES - Notes 2,3		238,611	51,520	290,131
TOTAL FUND BALANCES AND				
LIABILITIES	\$426,817	\$238,611	\$51,520	\$716,948

The accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB, INC.BALANCE SHEETSAS AT JUNE 30ASSETS

	<u>1984</u>			<u>1983</u>	
	<u>Operating Fund</u>	<u>Board Designated Expansion and Development Fund</u>	<u>Board Designated Plant Fund</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
<u>Current assets</u>					
Cash and equivalents					
- Note 1	\$237,509	\$101,695		\$339,204	\$394,611
Receivables	83,748			83,748	117,094
Prepaid expenses and other current assets	117,084			117,084	73,165
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	438,341	101,695		540,036	584,870
<u>Non-current assets</u>					
Fixed assets - Net - Notes 3, 4			53,250	53,250	51,520
Security deposits and bonds	83,798			83,798	80,558
TOTAL ASSETS	\$522,139	\$101,695	\$53,250	\$677,084	\$716,948

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

<u>Current liabilities</u>					
Accounts payable, accrued expenses and taxes	\$115,472			\$115,472	\$110,802
Loan payable	40,000			40,000	
Deferred income - Note 6	366,667			366,667	316,015
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	522,139			522,139	426,817
FUND BALANCES - Notes 2, 3		101,695	53,250	154,945	290,131
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES	\$522,139	\$101,695	\$53,250	\$677,084	\$716,948

The accompanying notes are an integral
part of this report.

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