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ALBARWILD'S NEXUS OF NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT:
THE PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT, 1963 TO 1971

by

David A. Crespy

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.

1998

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Abstract

ALBARWILD'S NEXUS OF NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT:
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by

David A. Crespy

Advisor: Professor Judith Milhous

On 29 September 1963, Edward Albee, Richard Barr, and Clinton Wilder established the Playwrights Unit, an off-off Broadway play development workshop, using \$25,000 of Albee's profits from his Broadway hit, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Over a period of ten years, the Unit produced the first or early plays of Louis Auchincloss, Mart Crowley, Charles Dizenzo, Gene Feist, Paul Foster, Frank Gagliano, John Guare, A.R. Gurney, LeRoi Jones, Lee Kalcheim, Adrienne Kennedy, Terrence McNally, Leonard Melfi, Howard Moss, James Prideaux, Sam Shepard, Megan Terry, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Lanford Wilson, Doric Wilson, and Paul Zindel.

The Playwrights Unit represented a special paradigm of new play development, since it tested plays by the fire of full production, rather than by the readings, staged readings, and workshop productions of the new play development process as it is practiced the United States in the 1990s. The

Unit's process of new play development was based on producer Richard Barr's belief that the play and the playwright are the epicenter of play production—a philosophy to which Barr adhered in his successful productions of Albee's plays. Albee has expressed his dislike of the current model of play development on several occasions, a process which he believes is destructive to new work.

Many of the playwrights produced at the Playwrights Unit went on to receive prestigious awards for playwriting including the Pulitzer prize. Two of the Unit's most important plays, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* (1964), and Mart Crowley's *The Boys In the Band* (1968), have become seminal works of American theatre. Most of the Unit's plays were later published and produced off and on Broadway in full Equity productions. New York's finest professional directors, actors, and designers worked at the Unit, including directors like Michael Kahn and Joseph Chaikin, as well as actors James Coco, Viveca Lindfors, Frank Langella, and Nancy Marchand. While the production process at the Playwrights Unit reflected both the explosion of new plays and the low off-Broadway production costs of the New York theatre of the 1960s, it resonates as a model for new play development today.

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I acknowledge and thank the many playwrights, actors, directors, designers, stage managers, house managers, and other theatre professionals who worked at the Playwrights Unit and with the Albee/Barr/Wilder producing partnership and who generously provided interviews regarding their experiences for the purpose of my dissertation. These interviewees include Joseph Cali, Edward M. Cohen, Mart Crowley, Alice Drummond, Page Johnson, Gene Feist, Richard Foltz, Frank Gagliano, Judith Granite, John Guare, Stephanie Gordon, A. R. Gurney, Stephen Jacobsen, Richard Lipsett, Ursule Molinaro, Bob Moss, Bruce Hoover, Kenneth Pressman, Edward

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INTRODUCTION

During the four years prior to my matriculation in the Ph.D. Program in Theatre at the CUNY Graduate Center, I was the artistic director of the Waterfront Ensemble Inc., a small, not for profit, play development group in Hoboken, New Jersey. We developed and produced new plays in Hoboken and New York as an outgrowth of a Tuesday night playwrights' workshop. During my tenure we produced two Equity showcases in Manhattan, as well as countless readings, staged readings, and mini-productions. In 1991, I stepped down from my role with the group, partly because of family responsibilities, but more importantly, because after four years I was dissatisfied with the process I had promulgated. I wasn't sure if it really helped the playwrights or their plays. My feelings regarding play development were not unfounded, as I discovered through my research, and I was certainly not alone in my questioning of this process.¹ I decided that during my tenure at the CUNY Graduate School, I would investigate this process as it is practiced in the non-commercial theatre of the United States. In the course of my studies (and the evolution of my own play, *Men Dancing*), I discovered and researched a playwright's workshop, the Playwrights Unit of the New York theatrical producing partnership of Edward Albee, Richard Barr, and Clinton Wilder, which I have come to consider a prototype and a paradigm for new play production. It is this Playwrights Unit that I will attempt to examine not only in terms of its historical significance, but more importantly, in terms of a play development process that proved to be remarkably successful in the launching of many playwriting careers.

The following is a brief chapter by chapter outline of this dissertation.

The first chapter offers an overview of the off-off Broadway theatre in New York from 1959 to 1971, the period during which the Albee/Barr/Wilder partnership was most active. This includes a discussion regarding the production of new plays at Caffè Cino, La Mama E.T.C., Judson Poets' Theatre, Theatre Genesis, the Open Theatre, the New York Shakespeare Festival, and the American Place Theatre. Also discussed are the playwrights' workshops of the New Dramatists Committee, the Actors Studio, HB Playwrights Foundation, the National Playwrights Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, Circle In The Square Theatre, and the Negro Ensemble Company. The Playwrights Unit is discussed within this historical context in terms of its importance as a stepping stone for playwrights from the relative obscurity of off-off Broadway to professional recognition.

The second chapter discusses the significance of the Playwrights Unit with regard to the phenomenon of new play development as it is practiced today. It offers a definition and history of play development in the United States over the last thirty years and explains how the Playwrights Unit fit within this context. A brief history of the Playwrights Unit is offered as well as an overview of its processes and brief biographies of its producers and managers.

The third chapter chronicles the events of the Playwrights Unit's ten years of existence, including a brief discussion of its major productions, funding strategies, and management. This begins with the history of the Albee/Barr/Wilder organization at the Provincetown and Cherry Lane Theatres and its initial productions of new plays at the Cherry Lane. The chapter continues with an examination of the first official year of the Unit under Edward Parone's management at the Village South Theatre and the next seven years of production under the management of Charles Gnys. The

Unit's move to East Fourth Street is discussed in addition to Robert Moss's and Bruce Hoover's management of the Unit's last year of existence. There is a parallel discussion of the Broadway and off-Broadway productions of the Albee/Barr/Wilder partnership as it affected the Unit's activities.

The fourth chapter examines the play development process at the Playwrights Unit in detail. This process includes the choosing of plays by Barr, Albee, and Wilder (and later, Charles Woodward) with the help of the managers, Parone, Gnys, and Moss; the involvement of the producers and managers of the Unit in the production process; an examination of the types and production values of various productions, the characteristics and response of the audiences, and a discussion of the steps taken beyond the Unit, both in terms of the professional productions at the Cherry Lane and in other New York and regional theatres.

Chapter five offers both an overall discussion of the Playwrights Unit's new play development process and a focus on the productions of specific plays which illustrate that process. The discussion is framed by how the Unit helped to move the playwrights along in their professional careers. The structure of several Unit plays is examined, both in terms of how these early plays compare to Albee's work as well as how they compare to the playwrights' own later work. It examines the Unit's two most famous productions, Leroi Jones's *Dutchman* and Mart Crowley's *Boys In The Band*, as well as other lesser-known plays which came out of the Unit, including, but not limited to, Terrence McNally's *This Side of the Door*, Megan Terry's *Ex-Miss Copper Queen on a Set of Pills*, Lanford Wilson's *No Trespassing*, Lee Kalcheim's *Match Play*, John Guare's *To Wally Pantoni We Leave a Credenza*, Jean Claude van Itallie's *War*, Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little*, and Sam Shepard's early plays *Up To Thursday* and *4-H Club*.

The concluding chapter offers an evaluation of the Unit's development process as compared to current play development strategies. The discussion is partially framed around the author's own experiences working within the current development model on his play, *Men Dancing*. The chapter also examines how some of the Unit's specific play development policies could be translated into current methods, offering a spectrum of developmental techniques and priorities.

In the discussion of playwrights and playwriting which follows, the noun "playwright" is primarily referred to with male pronouns. This is a stylistic choice not meant to exclude the many important and talented women who have contributed to the field of playwriting in the United States. In point of fact, the Playwrights Unit membership did not include many women, with the important exceptions of Adrienne Kennedy, Megan Terry, and Ursule Molinaro and several other writers.

The Playwrights Unit provides an historical paradigm for new play development at its most ideal and a testimonial to the visionary producing in which Richard Barr, Edward Albee, and Clinton Wilder were engaged. If the development of new plays has changed for the worse since the Playwrights Unit, perhaps the seeds of play development's reinvigoration may be found in the investigation of the Unit's remarkable history.

Chapter I

The Milieu:

Play Development Off-Off Broadway in New York from 1959 to 1971

The Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit was an organization that thrived in the off-off Broadway theatre movement of New York City's Greenwich Village in the 1960s. Many of the Unit's playwrights were produced either at Caffe Cino, Cafe La Mama, or other off-off Broadway theatres. In this chapter, the milieu of off-off Broadway is examined from the perspective of new play development. The function of the ABW Playwrights Unit is defined within this theatrical community.

Because of the sheer number of off-off Broadway producing concerns during this period, the discussion of play development activities is limited to the following theatres: Caffe Cino, Cafe La Mama (La Mama, E.T.C.), Judson Poets' Theatre, Theatre Genesis, the Open Theatre, the New York Shakespeare Festival, and the American Place Theatre. In addition, the following playwrights' workshops will be examined: New Dramatists Committee, the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio, the HB Playwrights Foundation, the National Playwrights Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, Circle In the Square Theatre, and the Negro Ensemble Company.

In trying to define the role of the ABW Playwrights Unit within this milieu, it is necessary to find differentiating points which may seem niggling considering how similar the functions of each of these theatres were. Particularly in the case of Caffe Cino, Cafe La Mama, Judson Poets' Theatre, and Theatre Genesis, all were dedicated, at least initially, to the playwright.

While there were certainly writers associated with particular venues, the off-off Broadway playwrights of the 1960s worked in several spaces, sometimes simultaneously. The limitations of one theatre served to complement and augment another theatre's mission. It is important to examine off-off Broadway as a community to understand the opportunities available to playwrights.

Robert Pasolli, in his 1969 *Tulane Drama Review* article "The New Playwrights' Scene of the Sixties: Jerome Max is Alive and Well and Living in Rome...," argued that off-off Broadway institutions producing new American plays in the 1960s could be divided into two groups in terms of function. On the one hand were the playwrights' units and workshops geared toward commercial theatre, on the other hand were the noncommercial off-off Broadway cafes and theatres that focused on experiments of form and content.

While Pasolli's point is well-taken, there should be a clarification made that not every 1960s theatre group was producing theatre solely for the purposes of aesthetic experimentation. And it can hardly be said that there was no experimentation taking place within such workshops as New Dramatists, which were geared toward the professional playwright. Many of New Dramatist's members in the 1960s included important, non-commercially-oriented playwrights. In the case of the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit, most of the plays produced there were experimental works which had been done previously in other off-off Broadway venues.

The off-off Broadway theatre of the 1960s was a complementary mix of non-commercial and commercial entities that supported each other—as it remains today. Most not-for-profit operations are supported by the one or two plays which become commercial successes. Edward Albee's commercial success with his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* funded the not-for-

profit Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit. The Unit was able to assure professional level productions of experimental work that were protected from, yet stimulated by, the possibility of commercial consideration.

New plays were the *raison d'être* of the off-off Broadway theatre in the early 1960s. The reason for this explosion of new work was a combination of economics and aesthetics—the costs of production driving creative forces to seek out less expensive, less restrictive means to inventive ends. Richard Kostelanetz offers three aesthetic reasons for what he called the New American Theatre:

The first was the post-war emergence of a new European theatre led by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet. . . In the eyes of the budding American playwrights, the Europeans demonstrated that revolt could succeed both in creating brilliant art and in vitally communicating it to receptive audiences. The second force was the emergence of off-Broadway theatre. . . . What finally made the new theatre possible was a wide spread dissatisfaction with what the older playwrights were doing.²

The “older playwrights” had made a living writing for Broadway, which by 1959 had long ceased to be an arena for important new writing, becoming instead a venue for musicals, light comedies, and star-vehicles geared toward tourists, a state in which it lingers to this day. While this was, in part, a result of the economic force of film and television and steadily increasing theatrical production costs,³ Robert Brustein suggested there was an aesthetic crisis as well—the waning of the great Broadway playwrights of the 1940s and 50s: “Miller was still silent, Inge was no longer considered a serious contender, and Williams was repeating himself from year to year.”⁴

This deterioration of artistic values was the reason that Richard Barr, producer of Edward Albee’s plays and the Playwrights Unit, left the Broadway producing firm of Bowden, Barr & Bullock:

That's when I got fed up with it all and went Off Broadway. . . . I wanted to do that which was and is not possible to do on Broadway. Give authority to the playwright. Turn the theatre back to the playwright.⁵

Yet the dissatisfaction which brought Barr to the off-Broadway theatre was met with a not-very-different set of problems. The same commercial pressures of low-brow tastes, high budgets, and reliance on light or frothy material quickly beset the off-Broadway theatre of the 1960s. Howard Greenburger discusses this in his book *The Off-Broadway Experience*:

After less than a score of years, OB's Golden Era became tarnished. Its public was like an old lover grown tired and restless. Critics expressed disappointment that, except for Albee, no writer of any real stature had emerged. . . . As OB approached sixty-five, it looked as though paralysis was setting in. Producers became immobilized by the growing OB costs and by anxiety to anticipate, rather than initiate, public preferences.⁶

In a very real way, the economic and aesthetic paralysis of off-Broadway was brought on by its own success.

After a banner year of productions in 1959, off-Broadway was glutted with productions. The work off-Broadway increased from fifty-three productions in 1959 to seventy-five productions in 1964. Judith Marechal, producer of *Call Me by My Rightful Name* and *In White America*, in an interview with Charles Mee, Jr., discussed the economics of off-Broadway in these terms:

The sense of off-Broadway is dissipated because of so many plays being done. They have been merchandised just like Broadway plays. The audiences don't know what to trust—they've been misled so often. And the costs have gone up, which means you have to appeal to more people; your set's got to be a little bit better; you have to have a little class.⁷

And while there were many productions, according to Marechal, new plays

were the most expensive and therefore the least logical to produce.⁸ Even Richard Barr, who had substantial success off-Broadway, was barely able to maintain solvency, particularly before his success with Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Marechal comments on Barr's producing strategy:

I think he's gone between breaking even at the box-office weekly and breaking even on the total. He is using off-Broadway in exactly the way it can be used—to give production to people who may be able to make it in the commercial world of Broadway. That's not the only reason Dick produces there; he believes in what he's doing, but he's also got the possibility of finding a playwright who will make sense on Broadway. He does go back to *American Dream*, *Death of Bessie Smith*, and the other two or three plays that can make him more money than breaking even. I don't know Dick's financial situation that well, but I am sure he has not made money.⁹

Though Barr was using off-Broadway "exactly the way it can be used", the challenge was to mitigate the costs of production and eliminate commercial pressures. It was a challenge that off-off Broadway welcomed, and one which Richard Barr and his Playwrights Unit would wholeheartedly embrace.

Yet, the most direct influence on the sudden profusion of new and experimental American plays off-off Broadway in the 1960s was Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre. Sally Banes, author of *Greenwich Village 1963*, states it directly:

When the Living Theater, with its stated threefold commitment to poet's theater, actor's theater, and community theater, finally moved into its last "permanent" quarters on Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue in 1959. . . it served as an inspiration and a mother lode for the new Off-Off Broadway movement—an alternative to the alternative now grown stale.¹⁰

Banes suggests that the Living Theater was "a town hall" where actors, playwrights, and directors, and in fact, the community of Greenwich Village at large, were invited to share and participate in a common and open forum

of poetry, theatre, music, and dance.

Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman of the *Off-Off Broadway Book*, corroborate Bane's point of view:

It was not until . . . the Living Theatre moved to Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue to mount a production of a new American playwright that a new movement began to focus. *The Connection*, the second production of the Living Theatre under the Becks, presented the audience with a kind of theatre it had not seen before. Its form was indigenous to their life-style and its language was completely contemporary.¹¹

Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, which opened in 1959, while initially disparaged by the critics, developed a popular and eventually critical following. This play, according to Robert Brustein, theatre critic of *The New Republic*, presaged a revelation in American playwriting that was certain to be influential:

Constantly tripping over the boundary between life and art, stripped of significant form, antagonistic to all theory or morality which does not accord with practice, *The Connection* is probably not a "good" play by any standard we now possess to judge such things; but it forms the basis for a brilliant theatrical occasion, and it lives in that pure, bright, thin air of reality which few of our "good" playwrights have ever dared to breathe. The first hipster drama to be seen in New York, it offers the promise that the language of "cool" might soon become a pulsing stage rhetoric similar to Odets' language of the blues.¹²

Much to Brustein's chagrin, the return of Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre in 1968 (after five years of exile in Europe) signaled a change in the nature of off-off Broadway theatre, a movement away from the playwright and toward the director and actor as a creative force.

While the stunning achievements of the Living Theatre's new plays certainly heralded the new importance of American dramaturgy, off-off Broadway, as a phenomenon of the 1960s, is often said to have started with

Joe Cino's tiny Caffè Cino on Cornelia Street in Greenwich Village. The Cino is considered by Banes, Poland and Mailman, Michael Smith (reviewer for the *Village Voice*) and many others, to be the seminal influence on the other experimental theatres which sprang up in Greenwich Village. The guiding principle to its production strategy was Joe Cino's oft-repeated phrase: "Do what you have to do." Starting with poetry readings, acting scenes, and short works by rarely performed European playwrights, the Cino eventually came to be known for the presentation of new plays.

Of all the chroniclers of the Caffè Cino, perhaps the most eloquent is the off-off Broadway playwright and director Robert Patrick:

The Caffè Cino (1959-1968) was the first permanent theatre of the Off Off Broadway movement. It was the source of what is interesting in Western Theatre in this half of the century. It was unique in history in that it presented plays without concern for profit, publicity, propaganda, posterity, propriety, *prana*, or particular esthetic principles. It was an asylum for rejects. It was a model for tribal communalism. It pioneered in "Pop." It was a training-ground for artists.¹³

While Patrick's effusive remarks might suggest otherwise, the work at the Cino varied from sublime to horrendous. Joe Cino rarely read the plays which were submitted. He was able to determine which work he wanted to produce based upon his brief initial meeting with the playwright.

Doric Wilson, author of such seminal works for the gay theatre as *Street Wars* and *A Perfect Relationship*, offers this memory of his first meeting with Joe Cino:

Joe was busy behind the counter. He smiled, asked me my birth sign, again smiled (with marked patience) when I answered Pisces, made an incomprehensible comment to someone (Charles Loubier) in an impossible language (Simuloto), gave me a cup of cappuccino (my first) and a performance date, and politely refused to read my offered script.¹⁴

Other playwrights whose work was first performed at the Caffè Cino have similar stories of Joe Cino's irregular process of play selection. Off-off Broadway Playwright Robert Heide, whose work *Moon* was a Caffè Cino success, offers this simple explanation for Cino's eccentricity: "He liked and trusted certain people; and that was it. There was no closed door policy and no reading of scripts."¹⁵

Plays were short in length, required a minuscule setting, and a minimum of characters. These restrictions were necessitated by the limited performance/audience space of the Cino—the stage was eight feet by eight feet. The plays had to be brief because shows were often played back to back with two to three performances in a single evening. Performances took place with simple furnishings: a ladder, a few chairs or the ubiquitous sofa or bed.¹⁶ "Aesthetic choices," according to Sally Banes, "were motivated by the need to make the actors stand out from the audience."¹⁷ The actors had to do everything they could to distinguish themselves from the audience, which itself dressed up for the occasion.

The budgets for production at the Caffè Cino were "small or nonexistent" and for that reason there was "a focus on language over physical movement or production values." The playwrights were in direct control of their productions; they often gathered their own sets, directed the productions themselves, and in the case of Robert Patrick, acted in their own plays as well.¹⁸

The nature of the play's dramaturgy was also dictated to a degree by the kind of audience that Joe Cino attracted, that is, the outlandish, the underground, a mixture of village types, gay and straight, out-of-towners, and occasional dabblers in the avant-garde. The Cino is often considered to be the source of gay theatre as it is known today, although its productions, according

to Doric Wilson, were certainly not exclusively gay.¹⁹

Much of the experimentation of the playwrights at the Cino was through the subversive elements of camp.²⁰ Robert Patrick describes the work of H. M. Koutoukas, the "Cino playwright assoluto":

who enshrined such Cino cult-objects as mirror-balls, cheap glitter, dyed feathers ("cobra feathers"), rhinestones, toy pianos, sequins, shattered mirrors, valentines, and all other forms of tacky glamour. . . . In his finest play, *Turtles Don't Dream*, presented in Carnegie Recital Hall as a gesture of divine daring, the Cino becomes the crumbling temple of a 'Cobra Cult' in Brooklyn, whose goal is to guard the glamour of the world from encroaching 'mongooses,' and whose tenet is that its members must never sleep. In one memorable moment, the Priestess-Princess commands one subject: 'Go, Cobra Librarian, and see if it is true that the Holy Cobra Altar supply of the Sacred White Amphetamine Powder is indeed running low. But hurry back—being alone ain't what it used to be.'

In this nurturing campy cauldron brewed the work of such playwrights as Doric Wilson, Robert Patrick, Lanford Wilson, Lee Kalcheim, David Starkweather, Paul Foster, Yvonne Rainer, H.M. Koutoukas, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Robert Heide, William M. Hoffman, Sam Shepard, Al Carmines, Tom Eyen, John Guare, and such directors as Marshall Mason and Tom O'Horgan.

The off-off Broadway playwrights were able to craft their art with this radicalized tabula rasa of subversion and humor. Camp offered writers, gay or straight, a technique of alienation and satire that simultaneously subverted and objectified American culture. The writer's freedom to test the limits of culture was at the heart of what the Cino was about. It was this theatre that Albee was speaking of when he wrote in an article to the *New York Times Magazine*:

If you had gone to the Caffè Cino, on Cornelia Street, for example, in the past few months, you would have seen plays by Landford [sic] Wilson and Paul Foster. You've probably never

heard of them. You will. For the price of a cup of espresso and—if you cared to—a contribution to the actors, who work for free, you might have stopped wondering where all the vital new theater is these days. Now that the bars are opening in the theaters uptown, you can get scotch with your dross. Cappuccino [sic] with gold is better.²¹

Albee's support of the Cino is no surprise. While other off-off Broadway theatres became increasingly more involved with the director's and actor's creation of a performance, including La Mama E.T.C. and the Open Theatre, the Cino remained supportive of, and focused upon, the playwright's art.

If the Caffè Cino offered playwrights an opportunity to see their work within a nurturing, but perhaps hermetic environment, Ellen Stewart's Café La Mama was a place where playwrights took the next step, to be seen and criticized by the public at large. Since La Mama was consciously modeled on the Cino, it had the same atmosphere of experimentation and exploration, but Stewart, from La Mama's earliest incarnations, was intent on her productions being reviewed and recognized by the larger New York critical audience. In contrast, it is well documented that Joe Cino fought, albeit unsuccessfully, against "the bitch goddess fame". In Cino's view success would spoil the writers, play to their egos, and thus damage their art.

In addition, while Ellen Stewart opened countless plays with the statement, "Welcome to La Mama, dedicated to the playwright and all aspects of the theatre," it became evident that the other "aspects of the theatre" were as important to Stewart, if not more so. La Mama, E.T.C. became famous as a home for international theatre troupes, for performance-oriented groups such as the Open Theatre and the Mabou Mines, and for its support of directors like Tom O'Horgan, Andre Serban, and Joseph Chaikin.

In particular it was Tom O'Horgan's direction which became synonymous with the La Mama Style. While the attractive quality of his

direction was its utter freshness and individuality, it tended to overwhelm or even replace the structure of the written play. A review by Charles Marowitz in the *New York Times* of the London production of Paul Foster's *Tom Paine* is typical:

there is a glaring disparity between what the play is doing and what the actors are doing. In most cases, what the actors are doing is more impressive than what the play is doing, but when La Mama comes up against a piece of material that makes conventional demands (and "Tom Paine" does, to a large extent), the inappropriateness of its style is clearly revealed.²²

This "glaring disparity" between text and performance was noticed also by Robert Brustein who voiced his own fears that both the Living Theatre and O'Horgan are to blame for the abandonment of the written word.

Plot, language, and character recede as the playwright becomes a minor collaborator in a fundamentally visual enterprise; style replaces theme as the primary motivation of the drama; political and social commentary, psychology, morality are absorbed into the central issue of erotic exhibitionism. . . . Theatrical effects are substituted for dramatic line; gesture swamps words; the stage is a frenzy of chaotic excitation. . . . Under these circumstances, a playwright should reflect carefully before placing himself into Mr. O'Horgan's overly capable hands.²³

Clearly the early rumblings of discontent for authorial control of the text had their beginnings under the aegis of Cafe La Mama.

The other aspect of La Mama which differentiates it from the Cino was (and is) its remarkable and important focus on international theatre rather than American playwrights. In fact at one point, La Mama was turned down for a federal grant from the National Endowment for the Arts because of this international focus. Stewart was encouraged to visit the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles to emulate its process and style. Ms. Stewart's response: "Anyone can do that. That's not La Mama."²⁴

Perhaps most importantly for American playwriting, the primary asset to La Mama E.T.C. during the 1960s and at present, is Ellen Stewart herself, who has housed, fed, and encouraged many of the theatrical artists who make her theatre their artistic home. In comparison to the Playwrights Unit, in which Richard Barr, Edward Albee, and Clinton Wilder, were essentially silent partners who delegated the day-to-day activities of their workshop to a hired manager, Stewart has long maintained a hands-on approach in the operations of her theatre.

The Judson Poets' Theatre offered a communal approach to the development of new plays. Being directly influenced by the Living Theatre, and as a result of existing physically within Judson Memorial Church, the Judson sought out an almost ritualistic and perhaps cultish experience in new works for the theatre. According to Sally Banes, who was a member of the Judson Dance Project, the church decided very early on "a policy of non-interference and freedom from censorship."²⁵

The operative term in the name of this theatre was "poet" and the poet at the helm was Al Carmines, the young assistant minister who founded the theatre as a mission of the church. The Judson has the distinction of having produced some of the largest and most sophisticated off-off Broadway plays and musicals of this period. Mel Gussow, theatre reviewer for the *New York Times*, in his 1967 article in *Newsweek* described the Judson this way:

In its five and one-half years the Judson Poets' Theater has staged some 70 dazzlingly varied productions, from "The Pelican," a powerful, rarely performed play by Strindberg, to "What Happened," an enchanting dance-piece to a text by Gertrude Stein, to "San Francisco's Burning," a musical by Helen Adam about the San Francisco earthquake, with 68 songs and a cast of 28. According the Michael Smith, drama critic of *The Village Voice*, and himself the most listened-to voice on off-off Broadway, 'Judson has, on the whole, produced the best work yet

seen off-off Broadway.'²⁶

Carmines' influence on the material presented at the Judson was all-encompassing: he was producer, director, playwright, composer, musician, musical director, and performer. He collaborated with the such off-off Broadway playwrights as Roslyn Drexler, Marie Irene Fornes, H.M. Koutoukas, Theo Barnes, and David Epstein. Sally Banes describes the communal nature of the work at the Judson:

the Judson Poets' Theatre was a community theater in the sense that it was an outlet for local writers, it sought a neighborhood audience, it charged no admission fees, and its casts were a mix of professionals and local amateurs. The actors for *The Great American Desert* were poets, journalists, and blue-collar workers recruited, according to Kornfeld, from the Cedar Tavern, where Oppenheimer had first proposed that the director get involved in the project. The result was "a very nice, warm, sweet-tough tone," a direct, unpolished folk quality, stemming partly from the actor's lack of training but also from Kornfeld's precise direction that appealed to both audiences and critics.²⁷

While this "folk" quality was important to the mission of the church, it was also a quality best appreciated by the Judson's "self-contained and esoteric" community.

The use of non-professional actors is particularly troublesome to the development of new material. If the point to a play development process is to make the play script itself the primary variable, then the actors, directors, and or scenic designers, need to be competent enough not to take away or add other complications to the work. In fact, the Judson's mission was not the development of new plays, but the creation of artworks which would provide a source of ritual and self-understanding within its specific community.

Theatre Genesis was founded by Rev. Michael Allen under the directorship of lay minister Ralph Cook at St. Mark's Episcopal Church-in-

the-Bouwerie, with a mission of engaging its community in a form of cultural healing, similar to the mission of Judson Poets' Theatre.²⁸ Its peculiar blend of the sacred and the profane made Theatre Genesis authentically religious and simultaneously contemptuous of organized religion.

The socio-political aim of Theatre Genesis was to "discover authentic theatre voices and develop them toward a kind of subjective realism."²⁹ In keeping with this particular mission, it was Cook's and Allen's belief that the playwright was "a 'witness' to life and . . . no one has a right to tamper with his testimony."³⁰ Mailman and Poland describe what this became in practice:

The Genesis experience during its first six years was closely tied with politics and drugs, and its metamorphosis is an interesting parallel to that of the subculture from which it was born. It began with an easy one-to-one relationship which was often metaphysical, many times expressed in the language of the street and combined humor with a contained violence. As it evolved the violence began to be openly expressed on the stage. Finally it erupted in the work process.³¹

Playwrights Sam Shepard, Leonard Melfi, and Murray Mednick, closely associated with Theatre Genesis, developed in their dramaturgy a kind of heady, poetic, and violent machismo. The choice of playwrights was based on those playwrights' passionate need for self-expression.³² Jack Kroll described the Theatre Genesis sensibility as:

a mix of counterculture ingredients: a coolness that can explode like liquid oxygen, a dropout hipsterism, a polymorphous perversity of language and feeling, a Zap Comix mocking of straight heads. . . At its worst, the Genesis play is like a freaked-out kid showing off in a shooting gallery.³³

The essence of Theatre Genesis process was an attempt toward spontaneous, unmediated ritual, an experience which sought by its very

spontaneity to bring about a sense of presence with both the actors and audience participating in a common reality.³⁴ This presence was brought about through the creative and rehearsal process itself. Cook encouraged the playwrights to:

work closely with the actors during rehearsals, to shape and reshape their material on the wing. A script at Theater Genesis is regarded less as a finished product than as a work-in-process. . . Mr. [Sam] Shepard's 'Forensic and The Navigators,' which closes Sunday night, illustrates the process. Mr. Shepard came to rehearsal with a five-page scenario which he expanded night by night as he saw what the cast could do with it.³⁵

While this constant experimentation provided Genesis playwrights an important stimulus, playwrights must rework and structure their plays as works of art, rather than spontaneous exercises of energy and emotion. Sam Shepard, at this early point in his career, rarely edited his work or reworked it for professional presentation—a process that he later abandoned for more traditional editing in his later plays, *The Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child*, and *A Lie of the Mind*.³⁶

The process at Theatre Genesis, while clearly dedicated to the playwright's vision, was also perhaps co-opted by St. Mark's mission. Playwrights who were not necessarily writhing with self-loathing, drug problems, etc., had to conform to a formula of enforced spontaneity. The pressure to conform to a "house style," even if never articulated per se, becomes yet another dramaturgical pressure for a playwright. If the ideal model of new play development is one in which the playwright is unfettered by a particular social, moral, or political viewpoint, whether left, right, or center, then Theatre Genesis left something to be desired as a developmental theatre.

What the off-off Broadway theatres of 1960s had to offer the beginning

playwright was the experience of production. While each small theatre had its own strength and weakness, their synergies combined provided an extraordinarily rich environment for working playwrights honing their craft. What was lacking in each was a level of professionalism; production standards, practical assistance in moving scripts to producers, constructive criticism based on experience and knowledge of the professional theatre.

In addition, while a supportive and sympathetic audience stimulated the initial works of off-off Broadway playwrights, a coterie audience was not helpful for the playwrights who wanted to be heard outside the confines of Greenwich Village. In these areas, the professional workshops of off-off Broadway were able to assist playwrights, and among these workshops the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit stood out. Before moving on to the workshops it is important to note several other off-off Broadway theatre groups which produced new plays: the Open Theatre, the New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public Theatre, and the American Place Theatre.

The Open Theatre, begun as an outgrowth of the Living Theatre by Joseph Chaikin, developed, from its earliest beginnings, a tenuous yet fascinating relationship with its playwrights. Focusing on the creation of theatrical projects through a workshop improvisatory process, the Open Theatre was a creative theatre rather than an interpretative one. Even though the playwright did not play a central role in the Open Theatre, the contribution made by playwrights was important to the productions, and important to the development of the playwrights who participated in its projects.

In terms of his working relationship with this group, Jean Claude van Itallie was one of the Open Theatre's more successful playwrights. In an interview with this author, van Itallie spoke of his relationship with Open

Theatre as the beginning of his career, though his first play, *War*, had been first produced by the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit. Van Itallie described the Unit as having had “a nursery school atmosphere” for playwrights, and while grateful for the success of his plays there (he also produced his “Doris” play, “It’s Almost Like Being,” at the Unit), he ultimately learned more about his craft at the Open Theatre.³⁷

Of the various critics who have studied Joseph Chaikin and the Open Theatre, one of the best is Eileen Blumenthal, who offers this summation to how the playwrights made their contribution to the projects performed there:

the writers’ position in the Open Theater remained, in [Susan] Yankowitz’s words, “ambiguous and insecure”—in an awkward middle ground where one was “neither an integral part of the group nor an independent outsider providing a finished script.” The playwrights, she says, were “made to feel that they’re only allowed to go this far and not that far, and that it’s an intrusion if they step out of place.” While Chaikin originally intended the Winter Project to have writers as full, active members, in fact none ever became a long-term or central participant.³⁸

This “ambiguous and insecure” position that Yankowitz felt was partly due to the fact that playwrights were brought into the process after a good deal of the work of the ensemble had been done.

The playwrights took from the ensemble’s improvisations and creations and added a structure and a form to what had previously been open-ended experimentation. Robert Pasolli describes this in detail in his monograph, *A Book on the Open Theatre*:

The writer is defined not by the fact that he has written a script on which the work is based, as in the case of traditional production, but on the fact that he *will* write a script related to the work which the troupe is improvising. When the work is done and read to be shown publicly, one can look back and say that the writer structured the workshop investigation to make it understandable to outsiders. In doing so, he asserted his own

personality and vision, to the extent sometimes of radically altering the actors' private investigation.³⁹

While Pasolli describes a fairly holistic and fully participatory role for the writer, in reality the operating relationship between writer and actors and Chaikin was more complicated and in a word, thornier.

Eileen Blumenthal describes the tension between writer and ensemble:

Each [playwright] has handled the collaborative process differently: some have participated actively in the group or observed sessions; others have just communicated with Chaikin about scenes or speeches that might be useful, in some cases contributing new or preexisting texts before workshops began. But all, one way or another, have faced the problem that van Itallie described as "two primary creators trying to squeeze into the same space," a situation that, he said, was "mighty uncomfortable" at times.⁴⁰

Most importantly there was a conflict over the ownership of material. Megan Terry, author of *Viet Rock* and *Calm Down Mother* left the Open Theatre partly for this reason. Pasolli describes her thoughts regarding the conflict of creation over *Viet Rock*:

Miss Terry has described the evolution of *Viet Rock* as follows: 'The playwright experiments with the actors on movement and visual images, but then he goes home and writes the play, including the words.' This is a simplification: in the case of a workshop-created play it is really not possible objectively to separate the writer's contributions from those of the actors. Most of the *Viet Rock* cast considered themselves authors also.⁴¹

Nor was Terry's experience the only instance of a conflict of artistic ownership. In fact many Open Theatre members regarded van Itallie's claim of authorship for their production of *The Serpent* as unfair. While there has always been friction between playwrights and directors in the theatre over the control of creative activities, the added creative voices of the actors made it

nearly impossible for a playwright to function. In fact, with their production of *The Mutation Show* the Open Theatre did not, for all intents and purposes, use a playwright at all.⁴²

Yet the Open Theatre did originate one of the most interesting director/performer/playwright collaborations in contemporary American theatre, that is, the work done between Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard which culminated in Chaikin's performance of Shepard's *Tongues/Savage Love*, as well as several other works. Eileen Blumenthal defined their collaborations as "ensemble creation without an ensemble."⁴³ She describes their extraordinary partnership:

Chaikin and Shepard never found themselves at odds over the basic nature of their work together. Indeed, on some level, their deepest theatrical concerns had long followed parallel tracks. Each had been trying to express inner territory. And each had been exploring the relationships between language and music: how language can produce different voices and modes; how musical elements, including structure, can be adapted to the theater. The collaborations were rooted in this shared ground.⁴⁴

Shepard and Chaikin, not restricted by demands of additional performers, could work quickly and were motivated to do so because of a difference in geographical preference; Chaikin lived in New York and Shepard detested both New York and flying. Their time together was precious and they used it imaginatively, with an eye toward creating a mutual artistic haven.⁴⁵

While the Open Theatre is known for the primacy of its performance over text, Chaikin always sought to "work closely and integrally with a writer."⁴⁶ It is interesting to note the Open Theatre's de facto rejection of the author ultimately ended with Chaikin's significant collaboration with Sam Shepard—with work which celebrates performance and text in equal measure.

The New York Shakespeare Festival, started in 1953 as a project to bring free productions of Shakespeare to the boroughs of New York City, quickly expanded to become, in 1967, under artistic director Joseph Papp's direction and at his Public Theatre, one of the foremost producers of important new American plays in the United States. Papp truly enjoyed the dramaturgical process and while not always successful as a director, was an inspired and inspiring dramaturg for new plays.⁴⁷ Papp fostered a workshop atmosphere that was enormously supportive for the writers he admired. In Susan Epstein's biography, *Joseph Papp: An American Life*, John Guare describes the working atmosphere at the Public Theatre:

It's difficult to convey the sheer vitality of the place then. . . . I loved it. It was a silent movie studio of the twenties where every door was open, every project was exciting, where you could have an idea and Joe would just say, 'Do it!'⁴⁸

At one point Papp's stable of writers included David Rabe, David Mamet, Dennis Reardon, Ed Bullins, John Ford Noonan, Michael Weller, John Guare, Wallace Shawn, Ntozake Shange, Robert Montgomery, and Thomas Babe. He was willing, for example, to allow Michael Bennett to workshop a full production (*Chorus Line*) for well over a year, without demanding a public showing of that work.⁴⁹

Papp was deeply involved in the development process; he was a quasi-father figure his playwrights both desired and abhorred.⁵⁰ At one point in his career at the Public Theatre, John Guare received a registered letter from Papp to the effect that Guare should consider himself "fired from whatever project he was working on." Guare offers this memory of the incident:

I went over to his office with the letter. He explained, quite casually, that it was to let me know I could be cut off at any time. He didn't like my way of working—that I wrote in my room and brought him the product rather than including him in the

process. 'In this theater, I'm the creative impulse,' he said. Now that I understood this, I should get back to work. Guare told Papp that he would "consider himself fired" and went to Nantucket, where he helped establish a theater.⁵¹

Guare's experience defined how closely Papp aligned himself with the development process; in a sense Papp *was* the NYSF development process.

Papp's sometimes arbitrary and often infuriating leadership was not terribly conducive to the creative freedom most writers need. Yet he made good use of his off-off Broadway workshop setting to develop the talents of his writers, as Epstein describes here:

Papp continued to insist that those playwrights working at his theater have the freedom to experiment and fail even though his institution was now in the national spotlight and coming under increasing pressure to produce consistently excellent work. His taste still ran to raw rather than finished productions, to unclear, unfamiliar, and nebulous forms rather than to traditional, well-made plays.⁵²

Combined with this remarkable atmosphere, Papp with his remarkable skills of money-raising, arm-twisting, and sheer will, was able to bring his writers to national attention. Importantly, Papp developed the talents of minority playwrights and theatre artists, such as Ntozake Shange, George C. Wolfe, Oyamo, Miguel Piñero, Charles Gordone, Adrienne Kennedy, Ed Bullins, Ron Milner, and Roscoe Lee Browne.

In direct contrast to Papp's championing of unknown and untried talents, Wynn Handman and the American Place Theatre (APT) established a reputation for developing plays by writers successful in other fields such as poetry or fiction. Established in 1964 at St. Clement's church in New York's Hell's Kitchen, the American Place Theatre produced the plays of Robert Lowell, Robert Penn Warren, Joyce Carol Oates, Ann Sexton, Philip Roth, William Alfred, as well as such playwrights as Ronald Ribman, Ronald

Milner, Ed Bullins, and Sam Shepard. APT defined its mission on a 1967 letter to subscribers the following way:

We will carry out a policy of working with writers of talent and consequence from other areas who wish to write for the theatre as well as serious new playwrights who, in our opinion, have a meaningful potential. The selection of writers is not confined to any group, style or point of view; the choice is eclectic, the primary factor being: is the voice worth hearing on the stage?⁵³

In line with this statement, the programs at APT were designed to train already professional writers to write for the theatre.

Central to the process of developing new work at APT were programs such as "theatre pieces" and "dramatic dialogues." The former was defined as a "literary collage. . . composed of material not originally intended for the theatre which can be shaped to a new dimension with dramatic validity," the latter form was "a theatrical examination of an idea, a relationship, or an experience." The end result was to stimulate writers to work within the dramatic mode who had never done so previously.

APT developed a four-step process to play development. This process began with financial aid to the writers, "so that the writer's energy and attention can be focused on his work." Then, with the writer now focused on his dramatic endeavor, consultation was provided with theatre professionals, and a relationship was established between the writer and a professional director. Thirdly, a workshop or "exploratory" production was provided as described below:

The writer sees a run-through of a scene, an act, or a draft. This can be as casual as a reading or as complete as a "work-in-progress" production for our membership audience. This provides practical training for the author in the problems of dramatic writing and helps him solve his problems as they occur.⁵⁴

This process culminated in a full professional production, with a run of two to six weeks. The plays which merited further production were moved rather quickly to off-Broadway or regional productions.

Of course, there is a downside to this sort of workshop atmosphere and it is the same problem that has plagued the modern play development process: an inordinate amount of workshopping as opposed to the test of full production. Weales, in his 1968 review of the 1967 season of APT, describes various productions as “not fully effective as drama or comment,” and “an inadequate attempt to give dramatic vitality and validity.” Weales describes *Endecott and the Red Cross*, Robert Lowell’s revision of the first play of *The Old Glory*, as “a static one, its movement verbal rather than visual.”

Richard Schickel, *Time Magazine* culture critic, expressed his doubts about the American Place Theatre in a more profound way, wondering if any theatre that takes on the perennial problem of the American playwright can have much success, given the lack of support for any project that does not conform to the vagaries of the Broadway theatre:

The confident idealism of The Place’s people, the feeling that they are the right men at the right place at the right time with the right idea evaporates quickly under the harsh lights of a Broadway that last year offered not one interesting, let alone distinguished, American play. In a climate of paltry ambition and small hope, can something like The American Place really expect to take root and flourish?⁵⁵

The idealism American Place Theatre promulgated in the 1960s has run into the painful economic reality of the 1990s; the hit or flop mentality which it tried to avoid, has relegated it to becoming one more off-Broadway house to lease, rather than a continuing resource for American Playwrights.

Of all the workshops for playwrights, the oldest and most influential was the New Dramatists Committee, founded in 1949 by Michaela O’Harra. A

frustrated playwright, O'Harra joined with playwrights Howard Lindsay, Theodore Apstein, Arnold Sundgaard, and Robert Anderson to test a five-part plan for an organization that would bridge the gap between the working playwright and the professional world of the theatre. The concept behind the creation and ongoing processes of New Dramatists is that the playwright is "the central element of the theatre." Without playwrights, the theatre ceases to exist; there would be no need for actors, directors, lighting designers, etc. without the playwright's script.

The initial organizational framework for New Dramatists' support and training of playwrights was the following: 1) free tickets to Broadway and other professional productions; 2) discussions of craft with professional playwrights, directors, producers, actors, and designers; 3) production observance, meaning that the playwright would watch another playwright's play develop through rehearsals, and experience the complex relationships between playwright and director, actors, producers, designers, and audience; 4) "sounding panels," that is, critical review (uncompromising and difficult at times) of one's work-in-progress by those who have already experienced the fire of professional reviewers; and 5) rehearsed readings by Equity performers under the watchful eye of a professional director.

Though it was criticized by Sam Shepard and several off-off Broadway theatre practitioners for its rather narrow orientation toward the commercial Broadway theatre and for its lack of a political agenda,⁵⁶ its membership included many off-off Broadway playwrights. Howard Burman, author of a dissertation regarding New Dramatists, states:

There is . . . no pressure placed on a member of the New Dramatists committee to disassociate himself with any of the experimental production groups while he is active with the New Dramatists. Many of the Committee writers belong to several of

the other organizations.⁵⁷

In fact, the New Dramatists Committee of the 1960s was a necessary bridge for off-off Broadway playwrights between professional and non-commercial stages. ABW Playwrights Unit playwrights who were members of New Dramatists included Charles Dizenzo, Frank Gagliano, Lee Kalcheim, Jerome Max, Mary Mercier, Paul Foster, and Lanford Wilson. Other off-off Broadway playwrights from the 1960s who were members include Jack Gelber, Israel Horovitz, Ron Cowen, Rochelle Owens, Ed Bullins, Roslyn Drexler, and Richard Foreman.⁵⁸

The flaw of the New Dramatists organization has been, and remains, its inability to produce new plays in full production. Given the opportunity to spend its resources to produce (which it did briefly in the 1960s at the East Fourth Street theatre which the ABW Playwrights Unit eventually occupied), New Dramatists has generally opted to focus on previously established programs of theatre-going, sounding panels, and workshop productions. In fact, the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit offered exactly the opposite developmental strategy, as Burman discusses:

Unlike the New Dramatists, however, the Theatre 70 Unit did and does function as a producing theatre rather than as a workshop, and their shows are essentially professional showcases where finished works by unestablished writers can be seen by the members of the commercial establishment. The end result is geared to aid the producers who operate the Unit. 'Essentially,' says Richard Barr, 'we're giving them [new writers] something of the taste of how a play is put together from a physical point of view.'⁵⁹

In effect, while the ABW Playwrights Unit existed, it provided a perfect synergistic fit with New Dramatists, providing the necessary professional productions to complement New Dramatists' workshop environment.

The second oldest play development workshop of 1960s off-off Broadway was the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio which was founded in 1956 and run by Molly Kazan. It included such important playwrights as Edward Albee, William Inge, Clifford Odets, William Saroyan, James Baldwin, Robert Anderson, Israel Horovitz, Arthur Kopit, Norman Mailer, Tennessee Williams, and Paul Zindel. The Actors Studio, a theatrical workshop founded by Elia Kazan, Robert Lewis, and Cheryl Crawford, whose programs and classes were free to its membership, was dedicated to the continued training of working theatre professionals.

The Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio first produced Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* and was initially involved with his *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Tennessee Williams developed his plays, *Night of the Iguana* and *Camino Real* at the Actors Studio Playwrights Unit, and many off-off Broadway playwrights were members including Israel Horovitz, Maria Irene Fornes, and ABW Playwrights Unit members Richard Townsend, Lanford Wilson, Jerome Max, Adrienne Kennedy, and Paul Zindel. Adrienne Kennedy's first production of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* took place at the Studio's Playwrights Unit (directed by Michael Kahn), as did Paul Zindel's *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs*. Its executive committee in the early 1960s included several of the most important playwrights of this period, Edward Albee, Jack Richardson, and Arthur Kopit, among others.

The Actors Studio Playwrights Unit was also tied to the Actors Studio Theatre which was founded "to provide its artists with the necessary production outlet and to afford them the same collaborative harmony and integrity in public stage production which they enjoy in the privacy of the Studio's explorative work." Several plays moved from the Unit into

production at the Actors Studio Theatre including James Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie* and June Havoc's *Marathon '33*. In 1963, The Actors Studio received a \$56,400 grant, the largest share of which was specifically geared for its Playwrights Unit. This was the Studio's first major grant since its founding in the 1947.⁶⁰

In program remarks for a fundraising function for the Actors Studio Theatre, which was founded shortly after its Playwrights Unit, Lee Strasberg emphasized the importance of the playwright in his vision of the theatre:

The first responsibility of our theatre is therefore to the playwright—the living playwright. While our work has dealt with the actor, our fight has been for the author. The actor can find his material not only in the present but in the drama of the past. But the living playwright must depend on the living actor. It is therefore our responsibility and our intention and our hope to create a place for the playwright, where the highest demands will be made upon him, where he will be encouraged to seek the fullest embodiment of his vision, where nothing but our own flaws and the natural lapses of our talent will stop us from lending the fullest measure of our understanding and our devotion to bring his play to life. In the union of actor and playwright lies the magic of the theatre.⁶¹

This statement was somewhat disingenuous, as the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio was ultimately under the strong leadership of Lee Strasberg, who was primarily a teacher of actors.

The fact that actors and directors eventually took the control of the Studio's Playwrights Unit (after a reorganization in May of 1964)⁶² was another indication that the Actors Studio was not entirely married to the concept of the "playwright-as-center-of-the-theatre" model. The control of the playwrights' prerogatives by actors and directors, and particularly Strasberg's influence had a deadly effect on the writer's artistic activities, as Edward Albee relates:

We had a playwrights unit there [at the Actors Studio] and one evening a whole bunch of us got together, Geraldine Page, Rip Torn, me, Arthur Kopit, Jack Richardson, Arthur Penn, and five or six other people and we had one of those brainstorm: "Hey, we've got a barn, let's do a musical!" We have a playwrights unit, we've got great directors and great actors—why don't we make a theatre group? Why don't we do a producing theatre, using the playwrights, actors and directors, and if we do this we'll change the theatre world. Strasberg was in Europe when we were putting this all together, [he] flew back from Europe and allowed that he might tolerate this as long as he ran it and had absolute control over what was done. And also that his friend, a producer, had to be hired at \$75,000 a year. And so we pulled it and no one was left.⁶³

It should be noted, however, regardless of his dissatisfaction with Studio's Playwrights Unit, Albee and Richard Barr seem to have styled their own Playwrights Unit at least partly on the model created by the Actors Studio.

The Actors Studio Playwrights Unit, in order to draw a high level of writing talent and to be taken seriously by the professional theatre community, provided extraordinary actors and directors to work with the fledgling playwrights. This point was not lost on Albee and Barr in attracting such performers as Frank Langella, Nancy Marchand, Ruth White, and directors such as Michael Kahn to their own Playwrights Unit. However, the non-interference in the ABW Unit's daily management could be seen as a direct reaction to Strasberg's micromanagement, and the focus of the ABW Playwrights Unit was on production rather than workshops or classes.

Another influential 1960s play development workshop was the National Playwrights Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, founded by George C. White in 1964. The O'Neill, as it has come to be known, has become the single most imitated play development organization in the United States. Despite its enormous influence today, the O'Neill's beginnings were shaky.

White gathered the playwrights and other theatre professionals of the off-off Broadway theatre of the 1960s, and for four days wrangled over what exactly the O'Neill should be. William Kozinski, author of "The Play Looks Good on Paper—but Will It Fly?," an article on the O'Neill, offers this description of what happened:

It was a tumultuous four days. 'A lot of angry playwrights wanted to be heard, wanted in,' recalls one of them, Frank Gagliano, who drove up from Manhattan with unknowns Lanford Wilson and Sam Shepard. Discussions under the trees turned into shouting matches; the 22-year-old Shepard made an impassioned speech and stormed off. But others (including John Guare and Israel Horowitz) began talking about what they could do, and giving new plays a start was the consensus.⁶⁴

The dissension by Shepard was perhaps the early rumbling of what was to be the O'Neill's ongoing problem, its inability to insulate its playwrights from the commercial pressures of Broadway.

Over the next two summers the O'Neill developed its reputation for showcasing some of the most important playwriting talent in the United States then to be seen, yet at the same time because of logistical errors, almost ended its existence. The productions of the plays became increasingly more elaborate, and thereby, more difficult to produce. The *New York Times* dubbed it "Tryout Town, USA," and the integrity of the playwrights workshop was compromised.

In 1968, Lloyd Richards, a talented director (later the director of the Yale School of Drama), stepped in and changed the O'Neill into its present form. Douglass Anderson offers this description of the changes Richards made:

He instituted the script-in-hand performance. Memorization is not allowed, so revision is possible, even encouraged, throughout the process. Sets are composed of a stock collection of blocks and doors; actors select appropriate clothing from their own wardrobe. By clearing away the usual production fuss,

Richards and his company are free to focus on text. . . . The schedule is eccentric, and much-discussed. Although the conference spans a three-week period, each script is in production for a mere three days.⁶⁵

While Richards' changes, as described above, improved the process and saved the O'Neill, it changed its focus from producing plays, to tinkering with them. In a sense the playwright at the O'Neill does a lot of "hanging around," listening to a lot of talk about his script before and after the actual production process, which is incredibly intense, overwhelming, and, perhaps, not necessarily helpful.

Douglass Anderson says that at the O'Neill "everything is designed to induce chat; everyone is encouraged to formulate an opinion." Eventually, the play is so talked up that everyone at the conference feels like a kind of play expert, and the play itself is at the mercy of this intense criticism. Anderson discusses the downside of the O'Neill as a play development model:

Implicit in the O'Neill system are several debatable ideas: (a) that massive input is helpful, perhaps necessary, to the development of new work; (b) that massive on-the-spot rewriting improves a text; (c) that directors can be randomly assigned to texts and respond to them with creativity and insight; and (d) that a public debate with audiences and a wide array of conference members is valuable.⁶⁶

More darkly, Anderson offers this final analysis:

A play, having run the gauntlet of nonstop discussion, tends to become more obvious, more easily accessible, as the conference wears on. Choices are made to please everyone; things become linear, contributing more logically to an obvious central thesis. That this passes for playwriting may come as no surprise; that this passes for play development is shocking. A play with a unique viewpoint—i.e., one which could *not* be easily digested and appreciated by 150 people—doesn't stand a chance in this environment.⁶⁷

The other problems of the O'Neill have become part of the general malaise of poor play development in the United States; the "poor" staging of the plays, i.e. with unit sets and minimal or no scenery, has focused the plays on talk rather than on dramatic action and visual elements: important parts of stageable playwriting.

Actors in this kind of play development process tend to force plays to become more "realistic," since most actors in the United States continue to be trained in the "method" style of acting. Anderson quoted Robert Falls, the former artistic director of the Goodman Theatre as stating, that "anything that's wildly original or wildly unrealistic is thrown out. . . if plays did not come in to the festival as realistic works, they *left* as realistic works."⁶⁸ Anderson calls the type of plays that come out of O'Neill-style play development "workshop plays," that is, plays which are centered around talk and a reader's theatre rather than a theatre of both language and visual elements.

One of the lesser known, though influential, workshops of this period was the HB Playwrights Foundation, Inc. founded in 1964 by Herbert Berghof, Boris Aronson, Saul Bellow, Leonard Bernstein, Hume Cronyn, Uta Hagen, Washington attorney Paul A. Porter, and author-critic Glenway Wescott. Its permanent Playwrights Workshop was located at 124 Bank Street in Greenwich Village. The Foundation was a separate but affiliated organization of HB Studio, the acting studio founded by Herbert Berghof in 1945.

The program at the HB Playwrights Foundation consisted of weekly seminars, where the playwrights' work could be "read by actors, and discussed with professional guidance." Financial awards were made to playwrights to defray living expenses while their plays were in workshop production, and in order that they might "devote full time and energy to the preparation of their

work." Playwrights had special sessions working with professional directors, and workshop readings were offered before public audiences. Workshop productions of plays were given limited runs of public performances and full productions, on and off Broadway, were financed by HB Playwrights Foundation as well.⁶⁹

Playwrights involved at HB Playwrights Foundation included Saul Bellow, whose piece, *Seize The Day* was developed there, Romulus Linney, Eric Bentley, Albert Bermel, William Saroyan, Tennessee Williams, Louis Auchincloss, Mark Medoff, and Horton Foote. HB Playwrights Foundation was more oriented toward the classroom teaching of playwriting than either New Dramatists, the ABW Playwrights Unit, or the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio.⁷⁰

The Foundation came the closest to a combination of the workshop support of the New Dramatists Committee and the ABW Playwrights Unit, with their common policies of non-interference in artistic process and exposure to the professional directors and actors. HB's ability to mount a play on Broadway fully, as in the case of Saul Bellow's *Seize The Day*, made it a very attractive option for new play development in the 1960s.

Two other workshops deserve mention as important contributors to the development of new plays in New York Theatre of the 1960s, those of Circle in the Square Theatre and the Negro Ensemble Company. Circle in the Square, founded in 1951, and most famous for its off-Broadway production of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*, became important in the 1960s as a training center for young theatre professionals. In particular, the playwrights workshop of Circle in the Square, with Edward Albee as one of the instructors, was a viable alternative the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio. Harvey Perr, one of the early members of the ABW Playwrights

Unit, recalls Edward Albee's playwriting seminar at Circle In the Square:

I've taught playwriting myself and I've always made my class be exactly like Edward's class. The prerequisite for Edward's class was that you had to have written a play. He was not teaching how to write a play. He said couldn't teach anyone how to write a play. What he could teach you to do is be a critic—and to constantly be aware of talking about your peers' work and of seeing your work up there on a stage. He would help you get a director who would help you get actors and they would put up a kind of staged reading in his class every week. What he would do afterwards is have a long discussion with all involved. He had this wonderful way of pulling it all together, so that you felt the criticism was objective rather than subjective. Edward was wonderful about getting it all together and being very objective.⁷¹

Harvey Perr, Adrienne Kennedy, and Paul Foster were chosen from Albee's workshop at Circle in the Square to join the ABW Playwrights Unit as founding members. Other playwrights who did initiatory work at Circle in the Square were Terrence McNally, Jean Claude Van Itallie, Sam Shepard, Leonard Melfi, Paul Foster, and Jules Feiffer.⁷²

The workshops of the Negro Ensemble Company at its St. Marks Playhouse in the 1960s were particularly important in the flowering of plays of African American playwrights. Founded by Douglass Turner Ward, Gerald Krone, and Robert Hooks, the Negro Ensemble Company developed such programs as the Group Theatre Workshop, a tuition-free acting school for "youngsters lacking money but hardly deprived of spirit."⁷³

The Playwrights Workshop at NEC under Elder's direction was very active and its importance rested primarily on its accessibility. Elder, quoted in a *New York Times* article, discusses type of workshop he runs:

There is such a waiting line to get in here. When the kids first come to class, some of them can't even pronounce a vowel—they walk into the theater with their heads bowed and their hands in their pockets. In 6 months, they're jabbering away, full

of pride because they're suddenly starting to become aware of their identity. We work straight here. We work with care and with delicacy and attention to what has to be done. We are extremely well organized and well budgeted. We have to be. We are the only all-Negro company in the world.⁷⁴

While NEC has suffered the vicissitudes of time and its relevance today has diminished, (indeed, it has come close to folding several times because of lack of proper funding or management), it shouldered the important responsibility of guiding a body of important new plays of the African-American experience and of fostering a new generation of theatre artists—and was successful on both counts.

Within the milieu of 1960s off-off Broadway, the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit functioned as a component of a rapidly expanding market of play development opportunities, both competitive with and complementary to each other. Its central selling point was that the ABW Unit offered a more sophisticated, professional production than its competition off-off Broadway. In fact, as the workshop of an off-Broadway producing organization, the ABW Unit was not really an off-off Broadway theatre—yet it attracted many off-off Broadway playwrights; it occupied the middle ground between New York City's commercial and non-commercial theatre.

Unlike the loft and cafe theatres of off-off Broadway, the Unit's productions were done in a real theatre space (the 199-seat Village South Theatre) with nearly all the values of an off-Broadway Equity production: professional (and well-known) actors, directors, and full sets, costumes, and lighting. Yet at the same time, the freedom to experiment, to "do what you have to do," was at the heart of the Unit activities. Neither Barr, Albee, or Wilder tried to control the content or form of the material presented, with the exception that they selected the plays. The actual day to day management

of the Unit was left to its manager. All the eccentricities of the play text were left to the playwright's discretion; there was no attempt to "workshop" the play with "sounding panels" or other classroom strategies.

Barr felt that once he had chosen a script, after reading hundreds and hundreds of scripts, that script was worthy of production as it was, warts and all. Whatever necessary changes to the play would be those decided upon solely by the playwright in production, working with a competent director. Barr's implicit logic was that if the play worked—fine, it would have a life beyond the Unit production. If it did not, it was probably not a good play, and the playwright should move on to the next one.

The endless fussing and adjusting of individual plays, as was the case in the development work of most of the other professional workshops, was not a part of the ABW Playwrights Unit. The point was to improve upon the playwright rather than the play; each successive production of a new script would improve the playwright's talents, rather than dwelling upon the inadequacies of an individual work.

While the Caffè Cino perhaps inspired the openness of ABW Playwrights Unit, the structure of the Unit within the activities of the ABW producing partnership was comparable to the workshop/production process at Joseph Papp's Public Theatre. Papp, like Barr, had tremendous trust in and commitment to his playwrights, and offered them a terrific place to either fly or fail, try again, and thereby learn the craft of writing for the theatre. In a similar light, Barr continued to allow Edward Albee a nearly free hand in deciding upon the content and form of his plays, often in the face of dismal critical reception and/or box office losses, a policy he extended to the playwrights of his Unit, with remarkable success.

The critical difference between Papp and Barr seems to have been Barr's

inability to navigate the New York not-for-profit world with its endless rounds of fundraising, arm-twisting, and wrangling with New York City officials. The ABW Playwrights Unit was not a large operation, and neither was Barr's management of Theatre 1960-71 at the Cherry Lane and on Broadway. Barr worked within a small world of close-knit professionals and was not an aggressive public figure as was Papp.

Papp was also a much more realistic and perhaps opportunistic promoter of his playwrights and his theatre. Stuart Little, in his book *Enter Joseph Papp: In Search of the New American Theater*, describes the savvy reasoning to Papp's choices of writers:

These were all what Papp called middle-ground or middle-class writers. Middle class because they believed in fine writing, not in radical experimentation; because there was a literary quality to their writing. And yet they were enough of their own time to be considered writers of the 1970s and to break new ground when people were still talking of the 1950s and 1960s, about Miller and Williams and Albee. 'We want to follow a policy that is neither the extreme left nor the extreme right. The left says put on the plays and 'fuck the audience.' The right says 'classics.' We want to do neither.'⁷⁵

Barr, on the other hand, though very much a traditional independent commercial producer, had a very idealistic outlook on the importance of plays as literature. He produced some of the first American productions of Beckett, Ionesco, and Arrabal; these absurdist were not playwrights who would appeal to the average, middle-class theatre goer.

Doric Wilson, Barr's first Unit playwright and his personal friend, made an additional and perhaps more important point—that despite his support of absurdist playwrights, Barr was a very cautious producer when it came to political theatre. He was unhappy when he found out some of his playwrights were protesting the Vietnam War; Barr had lived through the

McCarthy blacklists and was dismayed to see his writers leaving themselves politically vulnerable.⁷⁶ Papp, on the other hand, understood the nature of the 1960s and was vocal in his support of radical causes; he knew that audiences were changing, and that they were ready for the explosive theatre of *Hair* and *Streamers* and other plays that questioned "the establishment."

Finally, the ABW Playwrights Unit had the imprimatur of Edward Albee upon it, and with that, a kind of built-in significance for each playwright who was produced there. Albee was, as one writer puts it, "the only new voice in a generation to break Broadway's stranglehold on American theatre."⁷⁷ John Guare in a recent article in *New Theater Review*, talks about Albee's importance:

A whole generation of American playwrights including this one had their first work done here [the ABW Playwrights Unit] and become part of a theatrical movement that would spread over the world. At the hub of this new Off-Off-Broadway fringe, dominating it all, indeed personally sponsoring it, was Albee, who was one of us, yet apart from us, who only wanted to create a world where new playwrights could function and develop with the near-sacred trust that language could joyously carry the truth's wriggling burden. The entire Off-Off-Broadway movement, which has become the mainstream of today, can trace its roots back to Albee's generosity of the sixties.⁷⁸

The Unit was Barr's laboratory for producing another Edward Albee—by his own admission. This fact must have made the Unit a very attractive next step for the playwrights working off-off Broadway. The combination of this sort of prestige, the professionalism and competence of the Unit staff, and the freedom to continue one's particular playwriting technique without commercial or aesthetic pressures made the ABW Unit in one playwright's words, "a very hot place to work."⁷⁹

The Unit was, as Doric Wilson put it, "the Playwrights Horizons of off-

off Broadway, before there was a Playwrights Horizons.” In point of fact, the Unit’s last manager was Bob Moss, the founder of Playwrights Horizons. What is most important about the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit was that it set up an almost ideal play development situation, a paradigm for new play development. It is this model of play development that will be examined in the next chapter, and with that, a discussion of how current play development has strayed from the ABW Playwrights Unit’s more idealistic prototype.

Notes

¹For a discussion of play development and its discontents see the following: Michael Bloom, "The Post-Play Discussion Fallacy," *American Theatre* 5, no. 9 (December 1988): 31; Edward Clinton, "The Literary Manager: Vanguard of a Frustrating System," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 17-19; Amy Davis, "Development of New Play Often a Rocky Road," *Variety* 330, no. 8 (March 16, 1988): 105; Shelly Frome, "Fault-finding Can be Fun for All Except the Paranoid Playwright," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 27-28; Marsha Norman and Jeffrey Sweet, "The Plight of the Playwright in Regional Theater, 1986-87," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 18-33; Louis Phillips, "Why Shakespeare Might Not Succeed In Today's Theater," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 31-33; Dale Ramsey and Thomas G. Dunn, "Speaking of Dramaturgs and Literary Managers," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 12-17; Peregrine Whittlessey, "Developed to Death? Here's a Possible Antidote," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 21-22; Peregrine Whittlessey, "Is There Life After Literary Management?" *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²Richard Kostelanetz, "The New American Theatre," in *The New American Arts* (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), 51.

³Thomas Gale Moore, *The Economics of the American Theater* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), 3-21; Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, *The Off Off Broadway Book* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), xiii-xv.

⁴Robert Brustein, *Seasons of Discontent: Dramatic Opinions 1959-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 18.

⁵Mervyn Rothstein, "Richard Barr, 71, Stage Producer and Theater League Head, Dies," *New York Times*, 10 January 1989, B 7.

⁶Howard Greenburger, *The Off-Broadway Experience* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 19.

⁷Charles L. Mee, Jr., "Off-Broadway: A Limited Engagement: An Interview with Judith R. Marechal," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1965): 78-87.

⁸*Ibid.*, 78.

⁹*Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁰Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance*

and the *Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 40.

¹¹Poland and Mailman, xi.

¹²Brustein, 26.

¹³Robert Patrick, "The Other Brick Road," *Other Stages* 1, no. 10, (February 1979): 9.

¹⁴Doric Wilson, "Everything But The Dates," *Other Stages* 1, no. 12 (March 1979): 7.

¹⁵Robert Heide, "Cockroaches In The Baubles," *Other Stages* 1, no. 11, (February 1979): 8-9.

¹⁶Patrick, 10.

¹⁷Banes, 40.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Doric Wilson, interview by author, New York City, NY, 28 August 1996.

²⁰Poland and Mailman, xii-xiii, also see Susan Sontag, "Notes On Camp," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell, 1966), 279, and David Bergman, "Strategic Camp," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 107.

²¹Edward Albee, "Where the Action Is, or, Notes on the Future," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 December 1964.

²²Charles Marowitz, "La Mama 'Alienates' London," *New York Times*, 12 November 1967, 20.

²³Robert Brustein, *The Third Theatre* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969), 69-70.

²⁴Harvey Fierstein, "La Mama's My Mama," *Soho News*, 20 October 1981, s5.

²⁵Banes, 46.

²⁶Mel Gussow, "Off-Off-Broadway: It's In," *Newsweek*, 1 May 1967, 89.

²⁷Banes, 46.

²⁸Dan Sullivan, "Religion and Drama Meet Off-Off Broadway," *New York Times*, 20 January 1968.

²⁹Poland and Mailman, xli.

³⁰Sullivan.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Poland and Mailman, xli.

³³Jack Kroll, "Touching Bases," *Newsweek* 5 June 1972, 109.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Sullivan.

³⁶David J. DeRose, *Sam Shepard* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 10-15.

³⁷Jean-Claude van Itallie, interview with author, New York City, 16 February 1995.

³⁸Eileen Blumenthal, *Joseph Chaikin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 146.

³⁹Robert Pasolli, *A Book on the Open Theatre* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970.), 36.

⁴⁰Blumenthal, 145.

⁴¹Pasolli, 77.

⁴²Blumenthal, 148-170.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁵Barry Daniels, ed., *Joseph Chaikin & Sam Shepard: Letters and Texts, 1972-1984* (Markham, Ontario: New American Library, 1989), 74.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁷Edward M. Cohen, interview by author, New York City, NY, 3 May 1995.

⁴⁸Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), 314-15.

⁴⁹Epstein, 318-323.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 314.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 315.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 317.

⁵³American Place Theatre, letter to subscribers, 10 March 1967, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Richard Schickel, "New York's Best New Theater Group?" *Harper's magazine*, November, 1966, 99.

⁵⁶Howard Vincent Burman, "A History and Evaluation of The New Dramatists Committee," (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1971), 112.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 146-156.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁰Press release, "The Rockefeller Foundation Awards Grant of \$56,400 to the Actors Studio," Actors Studio, March 1963, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

⁶¹Fund raising flyer, Actors Studio, March 29, 1963, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

⁶²Newsletter from the Actors Studio, May 1964, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

⁶³Edward Albee, interview by author, New York City, NY, 19 June 1996.

⁶⁴William Severini Kowinski, "The play looks good on paper—but

will it fly?" *Smithsonian* 22, no. 12 (March 1992), 80.

⁶⁵Anderson, 63.

⁶⁶Anderson, 64.

⁶⁷Anderson, 65.

⁶⁸Anderson, 65.

⁶⁹Brochure, The HB Playwrights Foundation, Inc., 1965, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

⁷⁰Burman, 118-119.

⁷¹Harvey Perr, interview with author, New York City, 8 April 1996.

⁷²Brochure, Circle In the Square Theatre Company, 1971, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

⁷³Nat Hentoff, "The Negro Celebrates The Negro," *New York Times*, 17 December 1967, 6-7.

⁷⁴Patricia Bosworth, "'Life Is Dangerous But Beautiful, Too'," *New York Times*, 16 February 1969, D3.

⁷⁵Stuart Little, *Enter Joseph Papp: In Search of the New American Theater* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1974), 296.

⁷⁶Doric Wilson, interview.

⁷⁷Kowinski, 79-80.

⁷⁸John Guare, "Guare on Albee: A Figurehead for a Generation of Playwrights," *New Theater Review* 15 (Fall/Winter 1996), 24.

⁷⁹Harvey Perr, interview with author, New York City, 8 April 1996.

Please note that any newspaper citations without page numbers may be found in the "Playwrights Unit" or "Theater 1960-1971" clippings folder in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Chapter II

The Playwrights Unit: A Paradigm of New Play Development

The chapter which follows begins with a discussion of play development, its history in the recent American theatre, its competing methodologies, and its relevance to the developmental policies of Albarwild, Inc.'s The Playwrights Unit. Play development is examined through a presentation of the issues and controversies which have been raised in several major books and articles. This initial discussion serves as a point of departure for a brief history of the Playwrights Unit, a discussion of its processes and brief biographies of its producers Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Edward Albee, and managers Edward Parone, Charles (Chuck) Gnys, Robert Moss and Bruce Hoover.

Albarwild Inc.'s The Playwrights Unit would have never existed without the unique partnership of the off-Broadway producers Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, and the playwright Edward Albee. The Unit was financially dependent on income from Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and the Unit's fortunes were directly tied to Albee's success as a new American playwright and his own explorations of dramaturgical form and content. From 1962 through 1971, Albee had the rare opportunity to serve as a coproducer of his works on Broadway. This fact, coupled with Albee's remarkable early success as a young new playwright on Broadway, supported and justified to Richard Barr his own central notion regarding the theatre—that the playwright and the play are the unifying element of any theatrical production.¹ Because of the initiatory nature of much of Albee's work, and

because Albee did this experimentation in full public view on Broadway with little or no apology, the idea that playwriting deserved a forum in which to learn and take risks was also central to the ABW producing partnership. Add to that Barr's interest in the new absurdist work of European authors including Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, and Arrabal, and it becomes increasingly clear that the ABW producing partnership evolved a remarkably fertile environment for new playwrights and their experimentation.

Albee's guiding instruction, when it comes to the training of playwrights in the theatre, now and during the tenure of the Playwrights Unit, is "every time you write a play, try to fail . . . do what you don't know you can do."² Given the free hand Albee experienced as a producing partner to Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, and the significance of Albee's work (regardless of its cool critical reception), Albee's initial success, in particular with his plays *Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, captured the imagination of the New York theatre community and stimulated an atmosphere in which new plays and new playwrights were encouraged. The Playwrights Unit was a significant manifestation of Albee's influence, and as may be seen later in this dissertation, contributed to the much larger not-for-profit business of new play development.

The Playwrights Unit, a project of Albarwild Theatre Arts, Inc. (Albee, Barr, and Wilder's not-for-profit organization), was just such a theatrical laboratory. It provided a meeting place in the 1960s between the professional but somewhat moribund off-Broadway theatre of this period (i.e., the Phoenix Theatre and Circle In the Square) and the free-wheeling experimentation of the off-off-Broadway scene. For a period of nearly ten years it provided a professional workshop situation for playwrights from whose ranks came Louis Auchincloss, Mart Crowley, Charles Dizenzo, Gene Feist, Paul Foster,

Frank Gagliano, John Guare, A.R. Gurney, LeRoi Jones, Lee Kalcheim, Adrienne Kennedy, Terrence McNally, Leonard Melfi, Howard Moss, James Prideaux, Sam Shepard, Megan Terry, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Lanford Wilson, Doric Wilson, and Paul Zindel. The significance of this group extends far beyond its brief existence as a producing entity. The Playwrights Unit, as a playwrights' workshop, served as an early model for such organizations as Playwrights Horizons and the Center Theatre Group at the Mark Taper Forum (both organizations were founded by Playwrights Unit managers) and to a certain extent, the playwrights' laboratories of organizations such as Circle Repertory Theatre and the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Albee's point of view regarding play development implies that the new play, if it is going to work, will work. This view also offers some insight into the reasoning behind Richard Barr's and Clinton Wilder's production of new plays. They tested plays at the Playwrights Unit, at the Cherry Lane, and on Broadway by the fire of production. Their production budgets were tightly managed.³ If the play worked and the critics were receptive, they kept it open. If it did not and was losing money, they closed it as quickly as possible and went on to the next play (Albee later complained that Barr was perhaps too eager to close a play because of poor audiences).⁴ The scripts were, in Albee's, Barr's, and Wilder's opinion, as finished as they needed to be for production. Barr insisted on this when interviewed for an article in *Theatre Arts* in 1961.

That's the first thing we've learned, or relearned: We are not going into rehearsal until the script we plan to open with, on Broadway, is in our hands. There will be changes made in that script, of course, but they'll be minor changes, not the terrible, frightening business of trying to create a whole new second or third act between New Haven and New York. Which brings us right up to the second point. If you start out with a finished play, there is no need for the week in Wilmington or wherever, and

the two weeks in Philadelphia or Boston, where you're bound to lose a substantial amount of money.⁵

Barr and Wilder were certainly interested in the experimentation of the off-off Broadway but, as consummate professionals, their focus was always on the development of scripts for the commercial theatre. In that sense, they "invented" play development as it is practiced today, moving scripts from workshop to professional production—although their form of development was focused on full (albeit inexpensive) productions rather than on a series of incrementally more sophisticated readings. However, given the recent years of cutbacks in arts funding, full experimental productions of new work are simply not financially feasible—the "out-of-town-tryout" of Broadway productions died a long time ago. The decentralized non-profit play development process is here to stay.

Before discussing the Playwrights Unit per se, it is important to define exactly what is currently meant by the term "play development." In its most basic sense, within the framework of modern American theatre, it has come to mean the experimenting and testing of a script in incrementally more elaborate productions—closed and open readings, staged readings, and workshop productions—until it is ready for full production. There are several problems with producing new work this way. Plays which seem to work on paper and in readings often fall apart in production and, on the other hand, plays which seem terrible in readings, even staged readings, may prove successful when given full production values. The concept of reading a new work out loud to test it for the stage is not particularly new; throughout the history of the theatre plays have always been tested this way for production. The very literary-minded nineteenth-century English actor-manager, William Charles Macready, pursued new plays and playwrights

relentlessly—encouraging everyone from Dickens to Disraeli to write for the theatre.⁶ This dramaturgical pursuit was perhaps one of his more important contributions to the English theatre of his time. In the case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's historical romances, Macready not only made suggestions in terms of dramatic structure but spent a great deal of time researching historical evidence for the play.

That play development can be a frustrating process for both playwright and director is documented in this brief description of an unfortunate incident which arose during the course of Macready's development of Bulwer-Lytton's *Richelieu*. On 25 November 1839, after dinner, Macready read *Richelieu* to his wife, his daughter Letitia, John Forster (a mutual friend of both Bulwer-Lytton and Macready and a sort of literary advisor), and Bulwer-Lytton. J. C. Trewin's biography of Macready gives a reenactment of the evening's enterprise based on Macready's diaries:

John Forster, settled in a deep chair, listened attentively. It was an evening he enjoyed. There were the two friends he had brought together, the country's first actor and her most popular dramatist. . . . The chair was deep, the room warm. Mac's voice boomed on. Presently Forster, good honest man, found his eyelids wavering. Another few minutes, and he was asleep. He could not have been more tactless, for Macready had reached the famous fifth act. Bulwer was deeply hurt, coldly dignified. . . . The note that came from Bulwer next day was peevish, chagrined; Forster had made a fool of himself, and Macready could hardly explain: he felt glumly that, for all the man's warmth, Forster lacked judgment, tact, breeding.⁷

Notwithstanding this disastrous reading (never trust readings!), Macready's production of Bulwer-Lytton's *Richelieu* was a resounding success. Even then the development process had its downs and ups.

In American theatre during the first half of the twentieth-century, plays of importance made their way to Broadway in a form of trial by fire.

This process of testing came to be known as the out-of-town tryout. Plays were tested for critical reception in places like Hartford, Washington, or New Haven to determine what additional changes needed to be made to the script before the all important New York production. The importance of a Broadway production in New York dates from well before the twentieth century with producers of the Syndicate such as Charles Frohman, Marc Klaw, and Abraham Erlanger controlling and testing the types of plays which would be seen in New York.⁸ In his book *The Economics of the American Theatre*, Thomas Gale Moore offers this analysis of New York's importance, particularly in terms of the touring of successful productions:

As the road replaced the stock system, the importance of New York grew. At first, shows were organized in Chicago, but the public preferred productions that had first met the challenge of a New York audience. By World War I, producers were launching shows on Broadway, hoping only to cover their production costs. Their profits they expected, would come from the road.⁹

Even as the New York production of a new work determined its success on the road, the production in New York gained such economic importance that it became imperative to test the play before it ever reached New York. Moore comments on this phenomenon:

With the further advancement of motion pictures and of high-powered automobiles, the road, so lately flourishing, also began to wither. No longer were plays opened in New York with the expectation of earning profits by touring. Now they were tried out in Hartford, Boston, or Washington to insure the perfection demanded by critical New Yorkers. Only if productions were successful in Manhattan were they sent on tour. While continuing to shrink slowly, the road still remains an important element in the theatre.¹⁰

Following this logic, a play would be sent on the road so that it might be successful in New York in order for it to be more successful back out on the

road.

The idea behind this strategy, while certainly based on economic necessity, did not always pan out. If the point was to hone the work for Manhattan, did it make sense to test the play with the less sophisticated audiences outside of New York? On the other hand, if the ultimate economic incentive is productions of the play outside of New York, why not just tour the plays outside of New York? By the late 1950s and the early 1960s the out-of-town tryout seemed to be a moot point. Before the advent of the regional theatres, the economic centralization of theatre in New York was at its most extreme. The audiences which were to be pleased were the New York audiences, if the play was to have any life at all.

Two excellent books that touch on eccentricities of the out-of-town tryout are William Gibson's *Seesaw Log*, regarding the trials and tribulations of Gibson bringing his play *Two for the Seesaw* to Broadway, and William Goldman's *The Season*. Gibson's reaction to the premiere of the play in Washington was this:

We had lived in the nation's capital for three weeks, packed in on all sides by world-famous monuments and edificial wombs of current history, and seen the inside of nothing but our hotel rooms and the theatre. And of ourselves. When Joey [Joseph Harris, the company manager] brought me my ticket I said it would be a very different trainride out of town from that coming in, we all knew each other much better now; Joey said impassively, "It was more pleasant the other way."¹¹

Gibson's dour impression of his Washington tryout was corroborated by others familiar with the process. William Goldman offer this analysis:

More than anything else, the situation is bewildering. A playwright once likened the problems of being in trouble on the road with those of an inventor, but an inventor with a very specific set of difficulties:

1. The inventor has already made his invention and has discovered in front of God and everybody that it doesn't work.
2. Since what he invented doesn't work, and since he knew (or thought he knew) just what it was he was inventing, he now finds himself in this situation: he is an inventor, and he hasn't a clue anymore as to what it is he is trying to invent.
3. Not only does he not know what he's trying to invent, but even if he did know, he wouldn't know how to make it work.
4. Even if he knew exactly how to make it work, he still wouldn't know if anybody wanted the damn thing or not.¹²

Goldman emphasizes that "work on the road is exhausting and requires experience" and then goes on to describe, in a chapter entitled "In Trouble on the Road," the disaster that befell Carl Reiner's play *Something Different* which, while sending audiences on the road into paroxysms of laughter, left New York audiences cold, particularly on opening night. Goldman describes the situation:

Now, suddenly and horribly, on opening night, the laughs disappeared. No one knew why. No one knows why yet. But for some cockamamie reason, after weeks of funny rehearsal and weeks of funny performing, the show wasn't funny. It had been funny all week in previews, so it wasn't that the show was too clutzy for the sophisticated New York audience. But whatever the reason—tonight, the night, the only night, the night it was all done for—it was done for. Titters they had. Mild amusements. Some laughter. But the blockbuster moments were gone.¹³

According to Broadway producers Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, the out-of-town tryout also seems not to have been terribly useful as a means of developing a finished script:

And so you go into production and suffer through the ridiculous

agony of having the author—and the director and the actors and various friends, enemies and people you meet in hotel lobbies—rewrite a three-act play in New Haven or Boston or Philadelphia. It's absolutely insane—and it's not really necessary.¹⁴

For Barr, the place to test new plays was off-Broadway at his Cherry Lane Theatre and at the Playwrights Unit. A successful off-Broadway production provided a far better indication of what New York audiences would accept and support. Barr was convinced that if he liked a script enough to produce it in New York, it was as finished as it needed to be.

The out-of-town tryout however has not died entirely. The process of play development has replaced it; plays are tested and given their premieres at non-for-profit regional or New York theatres and then brought to Broadway. Plays in the 1996 Broadway season, including *Bring in 'Da Funk*, *Bring in 'Da Noise*, *Master Class*, and *Seven Guitars* have all been tested in the not-for-profit arena, much to the ire of such producers as David Merrick (whose *State Fair* did not receive such not-for-profit coddling), and the backers of the Broadway musicals *Big* and *Victor/Victoria*.

On the other hand, play development outside of New York does not guarantee a success in New York, as Robert Schenkkan's Pulitzer-Prize-winning *The Kentucky Cycle* proved in 1993; the eight-hour epic was roundly panned by the New York critics (as if punishing the play for having won the Pulitzer outside of the purview of New York). Other plays such as David Feldshuh's *Miss Ever's Boys* have never been brought into New York. In Feldshuh's case this was a result of economics and political correctness; a play about African-Americans written by a white author was seen as a possible liability in a New York production. If the New York production failed, all hopes for income from regional productions would be lost. *Miss Ever's Boys*

has had, however, a healthy economic life outside of New York, as has had Jane Martin's *Keely and Du* which sprung into existence at Actor's Theatre of Louisville in Kentucky, never arrived in New York, and continued to be produced across the country. Both plays never came much closer than Hartford, Connecticut in their American production peregrinations.¹⁵

Two recent books have examined the process of play development with a degree of depth and knowledge. These books, David Kahn and Donna Breed's *Scriptwork: A Director's Approach to New Play Development* and Edward Cohen's *Working on a New Play*, both suggest a certain pattern which can be gathered simply by looking at the chapter headings. Cohen offers a brief description of this process:

It involves the theories and techniques of taking the script from the writer's typewriter and working on it so that it connects solidly with an audience, so that the play that emerges is as close as possible to the playwright's vision, and so that the script expands and improves as it incorporates the talents of every artist associated with the production.¹⁶

The pattern is one which not only tests the script, but also the temperaments of the director and playwright and the workability of their relationship. Kahn and Breed comment on the fragility of this partnership in the theatre; the process they promulgate takes into consideration one of three responses at each step: 1) the play will go into full production, 2) there will be further development of the script, or 3) the project will be abandoned. The tentativeness of the process and lack of commitment to production can be maddening to playwrights, but Edward Cohen believes that play development not only nurtures the growth of the playscript, but also invigorates the talents of the actors, directors, and designers who bring it to life.

As the literary manager and former associate artistic director of Jewish

Repertory Theatre, Cohen opines that a new script fairly begs to be heard and communicated—although most new playwrights do not readily understand or acknowledge this need. Cohen believes that most young writers need the experienced hand of a dramaturg to help them understand the nature of their own work.¹⁷ That said, Cohen acknowledges that there can be problems with this process:

Of course, there are play development horror stories. If a dramaturg or director gets his hands on a play and completely misreads it, the writer can be pushed in the wrong direction. Every draft gets worse, and years of work go down the drain.¹⁸

While Cohen acknowledges some of the pitfalls of play development, his book offers a more sanguine view than the authors of *Scriptwork* of its usefulness.

Less interested in the role of the dramaturg, Kahn and Breed are acutely aware of the possibility for failed communications between director and playwright, citing Douglass Anderson's article mentioned above. Their book is geared toward the director's perspective and offers this warning at the outset:

Beware the most significant of several pitfalls in new script work: forcing the play to meet the expectations of the developmental process rather than letting the script and writer determine the nature of support.¹⁹

Kahn and Breed describe a series of steps which at each point provide an escape hatch for the director and playwright to separate while they are still speaking. The relationship between the playwright and director is based upon a fundamental question—does the play continue to need development? While the focus of the book is certainly on the director, the playwright is never far from their discourse. Kahn and Breed offer this playwright's

perspective to development:

Playwrights talk about scripts being “developed to death,” either subjected to a purgatory of endless readings with no specific goal in mind and no genuine movement toward production, or a series of workshops that see alterations in the script simply for the sake of “development,” unnecessarily tinkering with a play that does not need it or does not benefit from it.²⁰

Most playwrights enter into the development process with a certain amount of trepidation and rightfully so, given the above cited problems. It is therefore incumbent upon the director to address these fears—primarily by a thorough understanding of the script, a mutually acceptable slate of changes and rewrites, and an agreement on where the script should be going.

Play development has at its base the notion that in order for a new play to make its way into the theatre, it must be thoroughly investigated and commented upon by the director, actors, and designers involved in its production. This concept is discussed very early in Cohen’s *Working on a New Play* in a passage when Cohen reflects on his experience developing his own script at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center’s National Playwrights Conference:

Colleagues investigate not only the words but the intent, the impulses, the echoes of past mistakes. They discover signals the writer had not meant to include; signals, perhaps, he had not known were there. Each collaborator analyzes the script according to the needs of his individual function, and if the writer does not listen and does not respond, the flaws in the play mar the work of everyone connected to it.²¹

While it is clear, within the context of Cohen’s above remarks, that the playwright may disregard the questions and concerns of his fellow theatre collaborators at his peril, it is equally clear that the playwright must keep in mind that the same scenic, directorial, acting or even box office concerns are

often at conflict with each other and often serve to dissipate those aspects of the play which, while perhaps intellectually challenging, controversial, or technically difficult, are essential to the artistic integrity of the play. It is true that the playwright's art does not occur in isolation as does that of a novelist or sculptor; a play is created with collaborators in mind. Still, as Edward Albee has often noted, when there is something wrong with a production, regardless of which element is at fault, the playwright, like the novelist or sculptor, often bears the brunt of the criticism.²²

Cohen's book moves from the written play through a process of readings into production. It begins with a description of the psychological self-preservation that every writer must develop in order to survive the nearly constant rejection. Cohen encourages playwrights to send out the scripts on a strict submission schedule, hardly even reading the rejection notice before the same script is sent off to the next contest or theatre. Cohen then defines what he calls the "living room stage" of development, that is, the point at which the playwright and director come together privately to discuss the script. It is at this point that the initial draft of the play begins to lose some of its "fat" or redundant material. Cohen elaborates the concept behind this initial discussion:

Eventually what happens in the living room is that the director climbs into the playwright's head, unearths subconscious sources of the material, and associates to these with his own. He merges his images with the writer's so that he understands the play on an intuitive level, and the play stretches to incorporate the director's impulses.²³

Cohen certainly practices what he preaches. During our initial (and very intense) discussions regarding my play *Men Dancing*, Cohen performed cuts on my script which can only be described as surgically precise. He displayed

an uncanny knowledge of the play and a wonderful ability to trim the script of unnecessary repetitions, echoes, and redundancies on a microscopic level. The result was nearly an hour's worth of script trimmed from the play, without the usual and often horrifying cuts that directors have demanded of me in the past.

Kahn and Breed offer the sensible advice that whatever the developmental roles of playwright and director are to be, the details should be worked out in advance of the actual work done in production. Even in the process of delineating duties there may come a point when director and playwright may discreetly choose not to work on the project together. Each meeting between playwright and director, whether after the director's initial reading of the script, following the first unrehearsed reading, or at the end of the play's first rehearsed workshop, offers both a point of continuance or of departure for either party. Cohen offers this advice:

One of values of this living room stage is that it gives the writer and director time to establish a trust—or for the writer to escape early. Every writer, no matter how young, no matter how inviting the career opportunity, has that option. Getting involved with a director with whom there is no chemistry is not going to pay off for anyone. Whatever hints of conflict emerge in the living room will break out in rehearsal.²⁴

Cohen is in agreement with Kahn and Breed on this point. Ninety-eight percent of successful directing is sometimes said to be the casting of the play. In the development of a new work, ninety percent of whether the play works in production is the marriage of playwright to director. Discussion of the play development process at the Playwrights Unit will show that the choice of directors was one of the more successful tools that Richard Barr and his managers used to insure the extraordinary productions at the Unit.

Central to these books and to the play development process as it is

discussed here is the phenomenon of play readings. As has been demonstrated, the nature of readings within the model of new play development is controversial. Theatre history shows that the closed reading of the play, whether by a figure such as the Russian director Stanislavski reading Chekhov's *The Seagull* to the company of the Moscow Art Theatre or the unfortunate reading by Macready mentioned above, has long been a part of new play development. Play readings remain a necessary part of the development process. Cohen and Kahn and Breed base the vast majority of their interpretive comments regarding new plays upon the initial "closed" or unrehearsed reading for company members and the "open" or rehearsed workshop for an audience. The primary difference between how plays have been developed in the past and how they are developed now is the difference between these two types of readings. While it is certainly clear that there have long been closed readings of plays under consideration for production, reading new plays for public comment and dissection seems to be a relatively new phenomenon. The open reading or workshop production is not terribly popular amongst playwrights, and Kahn and Breed elaborate why:

Any playwright, director, actor, designer, or audience member will prefer a full production to a workshop. Workshops are a means to that end, or at least they should be. Too often, workshops or other development "processes" are excuses to avoid the difficult and risky business of producing new plays. Consequently, there is frequently cited backlash against play development workshops conducted without the prospect of future production, or workshopping a play unnecessarily so that it becomes "developed to death."²⁵

Play readings often involve post-reading discussions with the audience, a process which many playwrights abhor. In addition, the actors and other participants in the reading are also encouraged to contribute criticism in this public forum. While Kahn and Breed offer sensible advice to the playwright

on how to receive this criticism (write down everything said, don't argue with the audience, "make interesting and interested noises"), the truth is that it is the rare playwright who makes much use of such discussions.²⁶ More often, the playwright has gotten all he or she needs from the public reading by watching the audience's reaction to the play and gauging from that the stronger or weaker moments of the script.

In contrast to this current model of play development as elucidated by Edward Cohen, David Kahn, and Donna Breed, Albarwild's the Playwrights Unit was run, as later chapters will show, more as a miniature of the producer's other venue, the Cherry Lane Theatre, than as a workshop per se. While there were certainly readings at the Unit (they occurred primarily towards the end of its existence), the focus was on production. Each play received a full production on a minimal budget with professional directors and actors. While the production values were certainly not at the level of plays produced in Albee/Barr/Wilder's off-Broadway venue, the plays received very nearly full scenic values, including lighting, sound cues, properties, costuming and scenic elements. There was little interference from either the producers or the managers of the Unit. As many of the playwrights who were interviewed for this dissertation attest, the primary relationship was one between playwright and director. While there is evidence of mimeographed hand-outs for discussion purposes, there were rarely the post-production discussions that have since become familiar.

The Unit was the brainchild of Richard Barr, and it was Barr's skill as a producer and his fundamental belief in the playwright which provided the impetus for the Unit's creation. Barr was born in Washington, D. C. on September 6, 1917 to David and Ruth (Israel) Baer. His father was a builder of hotels and apartment buildings.²⁷ Barr graduated from Princeton University

(1938) where he acted in college productions and, incidentally, met Clinton Wilder, although their partnership did not begin until much later.²⁸ John Houseman, co-director of the Mercury Theatre with Orson Welles, saw him at Princeton in the role of Falstaff, and hired him at no salary. He began his professional acting career in New York with the Mercury Theatre as a "convention attendant" in *Danton's Death*. "I used to carry Orson's lunch from Longchamps up to the theatre," He once recalled. Barr also took part in Welles' radio broadcast, "The War of the Worlds." He went with Welles to Hollywood where he was executive assistant on the filming of *Citizen Kane*.²⁹ Barr actually appeared in *Citizen Kane* and caused a continuity problem; in the film he played a reporter but was caught in separate frames with and without his hat (perhaps ending an important career in film).³⁰

During World War II, Barr served as a captain in the Air Force, 1941 to 1946, heading its Motion Picture Unit in California.³¹ After the war Barr served as dialogue director on several films. Thereafter, he decided to give up an acting career, and went into directing and producing. From 1946-1948 he staged various summer stock productions. He directed José Ferrer in *Volpone*, Richard Whorf in *Richard III*, and Francis Lederer in *Arms and the Man*. In the 1950s his Broadway productions, none particularly successful, included *Hotel Paradiso*, starring Bert Lahr; *Fallen Angels* starring Nancy Walker, and a triple bill call *All In One* that consisted of Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, a Paul Draper dance program, and Tennessee Williams's *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*.

Barr left the Broadway theatrical firm of Bowden, Barr, and Bullock in 1959 to found Theatre 1960 off-Broadway with H. B. Lutz and Harry Joe Brown, Jr.³² Their first production was two one-act plays, Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and Edward Albee's first play, *The Zoo Story* at the

Provincetown Playhouse on 14 January 1960. The choice of one-act plays, particularly those of new writers, was calculated. Barr elaborates:

Take men like Williams and Inge . . . they wrote dozens of one-act plays. We want to capture the possibilities of such men while they are still in the one-act stage, to speed the gestation period to Broadway.³³

The decision to premiere Albee's first play was Barr's most inspired. In it he confirmed to himself and the critics that it was indeed possible to use off-Broadway as a springing board for important new playwrights. Several times over the years, he stated that his continued support of new plays was part of a search for another Edward Albee. Barr's Theatre 1960 season continued with Ionesco's *The Killer* at the Seven Arts Theatre. In October of that year Barr directed three one-act plays, Beckett's *Nekros*, *Embers*, and Albee's *Fam and Yam*, as part of the ANTA Matinee Series. As part of Theatre 1961, Barr produced Richard Hepburn's *The Sudden End of Anne Cinquefoil* at the East End Theatre and at the York, with Clinton Wilder, *The American Dream* and *Bartleby* both by Edward Albee (the second with William Flanagan, composer). *Bartleby* was replaced by *The Valerie Bettis Dance Theatre*, which was itself replaced by *The Death of Bessie Smith* by Edward Albee. In April of 1961, Barr and Wilder produced Jack Richardson's *Gallows Humor* at the Grammercy Arts Theatre. Also in April of that year was the beginning of Barr and Wilder's initial forays into producing off-off Broadway workshop productions. In this case, the evening was entitled "Way Out At The York" and included short works by Roberts Blossom, Ursule Molinaro, and Stephen Tropp on a single Monday evening.³⁴

Under the aegis of Theatre 1962, Barr and Wilder produced *Happy Days* at the Cherry Lane Theatre in September of 1961 and, in February of 1962, a series of works under the mast, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, including Samuel

Beckett's *Endgame*, Kenneth Koch's *Bertha*, Jack Richardson's *Gallows Humor*, Edward Albee's *The Sandbox*, Jean Genet's *Deathwatch*, Fernando Arrabal's *Picnic on the Battlefield*, Albee's *The American Dream*, Albee's *The Zoo Story* and Ionesco's *The Killer*. Barr directed both *The Zoo Story* and *The Killer*. In addition, Barr and Wilder continued their new playwrights series on Monday evenings at the Cherry Lane, including Gene Feist's *A Toy for the Clowns*, *Chit Chat on a Rat* by C. Skrivanek Atherton, and *Prometheus Bound* by Lawrence Wunderlich, directed by Richard Barr in December of 1961. As Theatre 1963, the season before the Playwrights Unit was officially founded, Barr produced, on 1 October 1962, William Hanley's *Mrs. Dally Has a Lover* and *Whisper in my Good Ear* at the Cherry Lane, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at the Billy Rose, Jack Owen's *Like Other People* at the Village South Theatre, and Albee's *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story* at the Cherry Lane.

In the fall of 1963, Barr, Wilder and Albee decided to lease the Cherry Lane, a contract which lasted until June of 1967.³⁵ Simultaneously, Barr and Wilder founded the Playwrights Unit at the Vandam Street [Village South] Theatre. According to Barry Plaxen, Barr lived in the village and was very much part of the village culture of painters, musicians, and poets.³⁶ He was a great frequenter of the theatre cafés like Caffè Cino and Café La Mama and therefore had a great familiarity with these playwrights. Barry Plaxen, business administrator of the Cherry Lane Theatre during the ABW producing partnership, and James Prideau, a playwright and reader for ABW, mentioned Barr's drinking problem; there were certain mornings when Barr was unapproachable.³⁷ His drinking may have contributed to the dissipation of his career as a producer.

Barr served as President of the League of New York [American]

Theatres (February 1967 to 1989), and director of ANTA 1969-1971. In May of 1961, Barr and Wilder won the Vernon Rice Award for their Theatre 1961 productions and "for excellence in their productions and for devotion to new American playwrights and new ideas."³⁸

Clinton Wilder, Barr's partner for much of his producing career, was, according to Edward Albee, "a dilettante, in the very best sense of the word." While certainly the financial heavy weight in the ABW partnership, Wilder was also an experienced Broadway producer. He was born Clinton Eugene Wilder, Jr. on July 7, 1920, the son of Clinton Eugene and Frances (Kornreich) Wilder. Wilder's father was a successful engineer and manufacturer. Wilder attended Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, and spent three years at Princeton. Serving in the U.S. Army, he manned anti-aircraft artillery from 1942-43, and served in the USAAF from 1943-45, appearing in the AAF production of *Winged Victory* (1943-44) during World War II. Wilder served as a member of the Actor's Equity Association, the League of New York Theatres, the League of Off-Broadway Theatres, and the Theatre Development Fund (he was both a founder and director of the Fund).³⁹

Wilder began his career in the theatre as the stage manager for the 1947 tour of *Heartsong*, as well as serving as the stage manager for *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway (3 December 1947). He then became associated with Cheryl Crawford in the production of *Regina* (Marc Blitzstein's musical adaptation of Lillian Hellman's *Little Foxes*, produced at the 46th Street Theatre in 1949).⁴⁰ He then produced Max Shulman and Robert Paul Smith's *The Tender Trap* at the Longacre Theatre, and (with George Axelrod as co-producer) Gore Vidal's *Visit to a Small Planet* at the Booth Theatre. He produced, with Norris Houghton and T. Edward Hambleton, their Phoenix Theatre production of Luigi Pirandello's *Six*

Characters In Search of An Author in 1955. In 1957 Mr. Wilder, in concert with Donald Albery, presented *The World of Suzie Wong* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London. In 1961, Wilder joined with Richard Barr to found Theatre 1961 and thereafter, until the founding of the Playwrights Unit, co-produced with Barr as will be detailed in chapter three.⁴¹

The third partner in the producing partnership of Albee/Barr/Wilder was, of course, Edward Albee. The inclusion of a playwright in a major producing team was and remains very rare. One of Albee's more famous predecessors in this regard was Eugene O'Neill, who contributed greatly to the producing decisions made at the Provincetown Playhouse in the 1920s.⁴² Edward Franklin Albee III was born March 12, 1928 and adopted by Reed and Frances (Cotter) Albee.⁴³ Growing up in Rye, New York, Albee attended the Lawrenceville School, Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania, and graduated from Choate in 1946. He attended Trinity College from 1946 to 1947. Albee's grandfather was Edward F. Albee, a vaudeville theatre manager. Albee has been a long-standing member of P.E.N. and the Dramatist's Guild. His first play, *The Zoo Story*, was produced in Berlin at the Schiller Theatre Werkstatt on 28 September 1959. Shortly thereafter, Richard Barr produced the play at the Provincetown Playhouse on 14 January 1960 and in London at the Arts Theatre on 25 August 1960. Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith* also had its premiere in Berlin at the Schlosspark Theatre and was later produced by Barr at the York Playhouse. His play, *The Sandbox* premiered with four one-act plays entitled *4 in 1* at the Jazz Gallery. Albee's *Fam and Yam* was produced at the White Barn at Westport, Connecticut that summer. Albee's *The American Dream* was paired with William Flanagan's musical *Bartleby* at the York Playhouse in 1961.

Albee's first full-length work was the three-act *Who's Afraid of*

Virginia Woolf, which was produced on Broadway at the Billy Rose Theatre on 13 October 1962 and subsequently on tour in the United States and in London. Albee began his producing career with Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder with Ugo Betti's *Corruption in the Palace of Justice* at the Cherry Lane Theatre under the aegis of Barr and Wilder's Theatre 1964. Albee shortly thereafter participated in the organization of the Playwrights Unit.⁴⁴

The Unit was founded on 29 September 1963, the year when the Ford Foundation established its funding program for playwrights. Albee, Barr, and Wilder had been producing new works at the Cherry Lane Theatre before this time, but in 1963 the Village South Theatre on Vandam Street became the home of the Playwrights Unit and was leased exclusively for the development of new plays. The initial funding did not come from a foundation, but rather from the profits of Albee's Broadway production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Later Albee and Barr did seek and receive funding from the Rockefeller Foundation,⁴⁵ but initially the Playwrights Unit was funded privately through the generosity of Edward Albee, in 1963 a relative newcomer to the New York theatre, who had set Broadway on its ear. Free of the financial constraints which plague such workshops today, the Unit represented a unique playwrights' laboratory, reflecting the idealism and genuine support for writers at the outset of what could be considered a "golden age" of American drama from the early 1960s through the late 1980s.

Of the dramatists mentioned above whose first plays were produced by the Unit, more than fifteen have sustained important careers writing in the theatre and have garnered the highest accolades and critical acclaim the American theatre has to offer. While not every play that came out of the Unit was significant, it certainly provided fertile ground for the stimulation of playwriting talent. If the measure of success for a play development group

is the sustained and significant careers of the writers it develops, then the Playwrights Unit was an unmitigated success. If one adds to that achievement the production of two of America's seminal works of alternative theatre, LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman* and Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, then the Playwrights Unit and the producing philosophy of Richard Barr, Edward Albee, and Clinton Wilder remain unparalleled in recent theatrical history. For not only was the Albarwild producing team providing a laboratory for new work, they were producing that work professionally at the Cherry Lane Theatre and other theatre spaces—work, it must be added, which could only be termed explosively experimental for its time.

The Playwrights Unit had its beginnings well before the initial meeting of playwrights on Sunday, September 29, 1963. The producing organization, Theatre 1960-1971 (the name changed each year) began with Barr's production of Albee's *Zoo Story* in 1959, which he paired with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Provincetown Playhouse. Later, in addition to producing new plays by lesser known playwrights, Barr, Wilder, and Albee underwrote a series of Monday evening productions. This enterprise is described by John Keating in his 1963 *New York Times* article "Action Speaks Louder . . .":

Broadening their search for the avant-garde playwrights they felt the theatre was ignoring, Barr and Wilder also put on occasional, admission-free Monday night performances of works by unknowns whose talents they admired but felt were not yet ready for regular production before a paying audience. Over the last two seasons, they have underwritten four of these "Monday Nights." The Playwrights Unit is a direct outgrowth of this project. Last month, they issued invitations to 35 young playwrights. Twenty-three writers answered the call, bringing a total of 20 scripts with them.⁴⁶

Plays produced in this early period include *A Toy for the Clowns* by Gene Feist (founder of the Roundabout Theatre in New York City), *Chit Chat on a*

Rat by C. Skrivaneck Atherton, *Prometheus Rebound* by Lawrence Wunderlich, *Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set of Pills* by Megan Terry, *This Side Of The Door* by Terrence McNally, and *Like Other People* by Jack Owen. However, as Theatre 1964, the triumvirate of Albee, Barr, and Wilder procured the Village South Theatre at 15 Vandam Street, a small 199-seat off-off Broadway house which still exists in 1998 as a theatre space (most recently for *Grandma Silvia's Funeral*), and with the managerial skills of director/literary agent Edward Parone they began the first season of the Playwrights Unit. Young playwrights, culled from Barr's enormous script collection and from his visits to the off-off Broadway theatres and cafés, were invited to participate. Twenty-four plays were performed in the Unit's initial year. Its first successful production, LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman* directed by Parone, transferred off Broadway to the Cherry Lane Theatre with phenomenal success. The Playwrights Unit produced Jean-Claude van Itallie's first play *War*, also with great success, although the play did not move immediately to another production. Other plays of the Unit's 1963-1964 season that were later produced by Albee, Barr, and Wilder included Lee Kalcheim's *A Party For Divorce* and *Match Play* (produced at the Provincetown Playhouse 11 October 1966), *Pigeons* by Lawrence Osgood, and *Conerico Was Here To Stay* by Frank Gagliano (produced as part of a series of 10 New American Plays at the Cherry Lane Theatre on March 3, 1965).

Running underneath the producing decisions made by Barr, Albee, and Wilder was the conviction that the playwright was the most important single artist in the theatre and the corollary that the production of plays ought to revolve around the playwright's vision. In her 1968 *New York Times Magazine* article "Triple Threat On, Off and Off-Off Broadway," Barbara La Fontaine quotes Richard Barr on this subject:

Barr says crisply, "A play needs a firm hand. Sometimes it is in the wrong place." —i.e., when the playwright's is tentative, being new or perhaps spectacularly poor, the hand may be that of a famous director, a star or a backer's wife. But isn't a production a cooperative effort? "Indeed it is," Barr says, "but so is war, and I would like to see the individual in a war speak up and say, 'I'm going to go *this* way.' There is a hierarchy of command, and it should stem from the playwright's intention."⁴⁷

The guidance of the Playwrights Unit was then, not surprisingly, hands off. The day to day management of the Unit was left to its Managing Directors: Edward Parone, Charles (Chuck) Gnys, Robert Moss, and Bruce Hoover. All four managers of the Unit were energetic theatre practitioners, primarily directors, who shared with the Albee/Barr/Wilder producing team the conviction that the playwright provided the guiding vision in producing the play.

Edward Parone was the first manager of the Unit, guiding its first season from September of 1963 to May of 1964. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Trinity College.⁴⁸ Parone served as a book review editor of the *Courant*. His Hartford reviews led to an appointment as editor at Dell Publications, where he was responsible for several anthologies including *Six Great Modern Short Novels*, *Six Great Modern Plays*, *The Kipling Reader*, *The New American Theatre*, *New Theatre for Now* and *Collision Course*. Parone also contributed poetry to the *New Yorker Magazine* and book reviews to the *Saturday Review* and the *New York Times*. He served as production supervisor of special projects at the Phoenix Theatre and as an assistant to the producers, T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton, for their production of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and *The Stronger*. Parone then joined the staff of William Liebling and Audrey Wood as a play reader, and later became an agent at the William Morris Agency. While at William Morris, Parone

brought Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* to the attention of Richard Barr and started Barr off on his cycle of Albee productions. Thereafter, Parone joined Frank E. Taylor, his former editor-in-chief at Dell Publications, as an assistant producer on the film *The Misfits* and the New York partner of the production company set up by Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe. Parone then moved to California, where he directed all of Albee's short plays. Following his west coast productions of Albee's work, he was invited by Barr and Albee to serve as Managing Director for the Playwrights Unit. Parone was the original director of Leroi Jone's *Dutchman* at the Playwrights Unit and at the Cherry Lane.⁴⁹ Parone also directed Lawrence Osgood's *Pigeons* at the Playwrights Unit. After Parone left the Unit, he founded the playwrights workshop of Mark Taper Forum, initially producing an evening of plays from the Playwrights Unit entitled *Collision Course*, like the anthology of plays he had edited.

Chuck Gnys, the manager of the Playwrights Unit from September of 1964 through May of 1970, was its longest and most important influence, outside of the Albee, Barr, and Wilder. A native of Central Falls, Rhode Island, Gnys received his Bachelor of Arts in English from Providence College in Rhode Island.⁵⁰ Gnys went on to receive his Master of Arts in Drama from the Catholic University of America. On Broadway, Gnys served as the company manager of *Camelot* and *Kwamina* and was a production assistant for three shows, *The Perfect Setup*, *Viva Madison Avenue*, and *The Poker Game*. He taught acting and stage movement at Catholic University and was a director at Boston University's theatre workshop in Tanglewood. Gnys was the production manager of a season of summer stock at the University of Connecticut, and taught scene study at the Lawrenceville-Rutgers summer study (through a grant from the Ford Foundation). He directed Ann Jellicoe's

The Knack at Dinner Theatres of America and served as the administrative producer of Jerome Robbins' American Theatre Laboratory. Gnys directed the following productions at the Playwrights Unit: *Up To Thursday* and *4-H Club* by Sam Shepard, *Hunting the Jingo Bird* by Kenneth Pressman, *The Rape of Bunny Stuntz* by A.R. Gurney, Jr., *A Great Career* by Charles Dizenzo, *A Song for All Saints* and *The Survival of St. Joan* by James Lineberger, *The Club Bedroom* by Louis Auchincloss, *Little Fears* by Emanuel Peluso, *Afternoon Is a Sugar Cube* and *Salt Flowers* by Tom Oliver, *The Undertaking* by David Trainer, *The Palace at 4 AM* by Howard Moss, and Philip Magdalany's *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing*. Gnys also staged both *Up To Thursday* and *Hunting the Jingo Bird* off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre for Theatre 1965's New Playwrights Series. He produced Emanuel Peluso's *Good Day* and *The Exhaustion of Our Son's Love* in a double bill off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane. In 1970 Gnys directed Philip Magdalany's *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing* on Broadway at the ANTA Theatre as a production of the Playwright's Unit.

Actress Judith Granite, playwrights Emanuel Peluso, John Guare, James Prideaux, and many others who worked with Gnys have described him as a consummate professional with a mercurial spirit. According to his many collaborators, Gnys had an extraordinary skill for coordinating the demands of playwrights, directors and actors. In this sense, Gnys defined the spirit and energy which made the Unit as successful as it was.

Following Gnys, in 1970, was Robert Moss, the indefatigable director and producer, who ran the Unit to its end in 1971 with Bruce Hoover, a director and professional stage manager. Moss spent four years as the production manager of APA Repertory Company. In 1966, he directed Cliff Arquette in a summer tour of *You Can't Take It With You*. In 1967 he staged

Two Gentlemen of Verona for the Los Angeles Theatre in the Parks program. He directed Stephen Jacobsen's *Needs* and Kenneth Pressman's *For Breakfast, Mr. Sachs* at the Playwrights Unit. Moss directed Louis Auchincloss's *The Club Bedroom* for the ANTA Matinee Series, *Summertime* for the American Academy of Dramatic Art, *Room Service* for the Comedy Club, *The Marriage of Figaro* for the McCarter Repertory company, *Tunnel of Love* for Dinner Theatres of America and *As You Like It* for Equity Library Theatre.

With a mailing list borrowed from the Playwrights Unit, Moss then founded Playwrights Horizons at the Clark Center for the Performing Arts. In a very real sense, Playwrights Horizons sprang forth directly from the ashes of the Playwrights Unit. According Edward Cohen, the former associate artistic of Jewish Repertory Theatre and a playwright at the Playwrights Unit, Moss carried with him from the Unit the conviction that "if a new play had a page of talent, he would produce it."⁵¹ It was perhaps this guiding principle which later led one reporter to call the Unit "surely the most generous and effective theatre workshop in the country."⁵²

Speaking of Gnys's management, Richard Lipsett, a production assistant and script-reader at the Unit reinforced the notion that Barr, Albee, and Wilder left Gnys and his playwrights to their own devices:

Well, I have to tell you, Chuck did it all. I think they, Barr and Albee, gave him carte blanche. I never saw them at the Unit. They came to the performances, but they didn't mess with the daily running of the Unit. I don't think Bob Moss and Bruce Hoover would have had such open hands in managing the Unit—but I can't be sure of that.⁵³

While the "carte blanche" attitude of the producers with regards to both the playwright's work and Gnys's management of the Unit provided a certain degree of freedom, the producers were not entirely absent from the Unit's activities. Barr directed several productions at the Unit, all three producers

attended many of its performances, and Albee, noticing a lack of member playwrights at performances at the Unit, wrote a general letter to the Unit playwrights exhorting them to read each other's scripts and attend performances. In a recent interview, Albee offered the reasoning behind his letter:

A very important thing was the fact that I wanted each of the playwrights to involve themselves in the work of the other playwrights. On the understanding that you learn not only from what happens to your work but from following through what happens to another playwright's work—you might learn something constructive and useful about revision or lack of revision or digging your heels in. I wanted them to be helpful to one another, not only to themselves.⁵⁴

Albee's concerns about internal operations of the Unit, the quality of the work, and the decisions regarding which plays were being produced, led to his submission of his own short play *Box* to the Unit under the assumed name of Rayne Endars. Chuck Gnys's subsequent rejection of this script, while later dismissed as unimportant in a *New York Times* article about the Unit's activities, was the primary reason for Albee's decision to remove Gnys from his position.⁵⁵

In fact, the decision of the producers to keep a low profile at the Unit was a conscious one. Albee stresses this in Keating's article for the *New York Times*:

"We hope the playwrights themselves will dictate the operation," he [Albee] said. "What we're going to do is to provide a theatre to work in, a stage, actors, a director, whatever we can do to be helpful. We are not going to say anything about the kind of work that should be done. if a man wants to do something that seems completely incomprehensible to us, fine. . . Mr. Albee stressed the fact that the unit will not be a course in playwriting—"You can't teach that," he said—but he will be on hand to discuss, analyze and advise any writer who wants his help. "It will be a workshop operation," he said.⁵⁶

The absence of the Albee/Barr/Wilder presence was of course a double-edged sword, for on the one hand there were none of the pressures associated with producing under the aegis of a famous producing group, while on the other hand, there was little of the hoped-for advice, good or otherwise, that was expected or desired from the playwrights. Edward Albee was perhaps, of the three, the least available. James Prideaux, playwright and screenwriter, offers this remembrance:

On the way home, walking through Greenwich Village, I glanced into the window of a dusty old bookstore and there he [Albee] was, sitting in the back bent over a book. For a moment he looked up and our eyes met. I was dying to go in, to tell him how much I admired his work, but he gave no sign of recognition and look right down again.

I walked on, a little saddened. Surely he must have thought something of me and my play or I wouldn't be a part of his Playwrights Unit. Later Richard told me he hadn't read *Postcards*. It was unusual that he had stopped into the Cherry Lane at all.

In the years to come, I was never to forget that it was through Edward's Playwrights Unit that my career as a playwright was made possible. How could I not be grateful to him for that?⁵⁷

It must be added that while other writers at the Unit had similar stories of only seeing Albee in the back of darkened theatres or catching a rare glimpse of him as he entered or left with brief business, others, like Kenneth Pressman, remember Albee as a motivating force in playwriting at that time.⁵⁸ Playwright John Guare, whose *For Wally Pantoni We Leave a Credenza* was produced at the Unit, referred in an interview to Albee as a sort of playwright-hero who had battled the forces of Broadway and had won.⁵⁹ Guare went so far as to state that Albee figured even more importantly than Barr as the motivating force behind the Unit, for even though his was a presence that was fleeting, it was the one which gave the Unit its unique

notoriety and importance in the milieu of the off-off Broadway movement.

The Unit continued its operations under Chuck Gnys until 1970, when Gnys left to direct a rock musical, *The Survival of Saint Joan*, which had its beginnings at the Playwrights Unit. Gnys went on to a successful career managing actors, musicians, and other performers under the aegis of Curtis Brown Management. The management of the Unit was then handed to Robert Moss, who had previously directed several productions at the Unit and to his partner, Bruce Hoover, a director and Broadway stage manager. Moss managed the Unit until May of 1971, producing the plays of Michael Carton, Edward M. Cohen, David Trainer, Steven Jacobsen, Doric Wilson, Michael Wilkes, and Kenneth Pressman. The Unit closed shortly after the critical and financial failure of Albee's *All Over*, which was directed by John Gielgud on Broadway. Edward Cohen, whose play *The Breeding Ground* was in production at that time, described the casting problems which preceded the fall of Albee's *All Over* in May of 1971 and the dissolution of the Unit:

All Over was the play that everyone thought was going to reestablish him [Edward Albee]—because he had had hard times with his plays. But everyone had great faith and the talk was all over the place that it was his masterpiece. . . . That was the irony, it was a totally miscast production. No one near the level of stardom Edward wanted, no one near the age that was required to play it. It was absolutely a compromise cast from day one . . . What happened was *All Over* opened and was a disaster. The reviews were very bad and business was worse. . . . It created enormous panic in Edward and in Richard Barr, because the expectations were so high, that when you have a humiliating failure, given all the hoopla that preceded it . . . their response was immediately, "Close up, we got to pull back everything, there's no money, there's no nothing . . . we're going to have to put every penny we've got to keep thing this going . . . We'll have to shut the Playwrights Unit. . . ."⁶⁰

An interview with Robert Moss, Bruce Hoover, and Kenneth Pressman, corroborated Cohen's thoughts on the ending of the Unit.⁶¹

The critical failure of *All Over* was an immediate cause, but the very nature of producing in New York City had changed since the heady days of early nineteen-sixties. By 1966, the three producers had already made a major outlay of over \$120,000 to run the Unit in its three years of existence. The budget of the Unit just from its initial outlay of \$23,232.88 in 1964 to \$29,045.33 in 1967 shows there was a twenty-five percent increase in the cost of its operation. In the summer of 1968 Albarwild Theatre Arts, Inc. received \$197,000 in funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, \$65,000 of which was to be matched. Of those funds, \$32,000 were used to maintain the Playwrights Unit, while \$165,000 was to be used to cover operations at the Cherry Lane Theatre.⁶² Thus by 1968 the cost of running the Unit had increased by at least 38%. By 1971, the year the Unit closed, the costs of operation had reached \$1,000 a week or \$52,000 a year, by Albee's own estimates.⁶³

In another sense, the very success the Unit achieved may have sowed the seeds of its own demise. One of the frequent comments that the playwrights have made in the interviews conducted for this study was that there were no reviews written of the productions of the Unit—in general the critical eye of the New York theatre was not upon off-off Broadway. However, with the phenomenal success of *The Boys in the Band* in 1968, off-off Broadway was suddenly seen in a different light. John Guare, in a discussion about the Playwrights Unit's production of his play *To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza*, suggested that the success of *The Boys in the Band* somehow ended experimentation of off-off Broadway:

. . . One of the great things about it was that they [the off-off Broadway productions] weren't reviewed . . . and then bit by bit, they got to be reviewed. One of the other things that was great was that they were sort of just done, I mean you just felt very safe and free. . . . There wasn't anyone there to move it or buy it. And then they suddenly got to be reviewed, brutally or

extravagantly. . . . off-off Broadway had become something that fed commercial theatre rather than being experimental.⁶⁴

In addition to the burgeoning critical consideration of off-off Broadway, another reason for the closing of the Playwrights Unit and the demise of the importance of the off-off Broadway scene was the growth of other competing not-for-profit theatres like Circle Repertory and the New York Shakespeare Festival which rendered the Playwrights Unit somewhat redundant in its mission to develop new playwrights.

The milieu of the off-off Broadway theatre of the 1960s and its coffeehouse theatres—Caffe Cino, Cafe La Mama, the Judson Poets Theatre, provided a fertile ground for the sort of experimental theatre that Barr, Wilder, and Albee were trying to develop. There is a sense, however, that Barr, in particular, felt that these playwrights were not being served in the cafes, that their talents were being dissipated in less than professional surroundings.

In addition, the ABW Playwrights Unit was specifically geared towards the playwrights' work, unlike the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio, which at that time was controlled by actors and directors. James Prideaux, one of the playwrights at the Unit had this brief statement to offer about the work at the Actors Studio:

We met on Mondays at 5:00 PM, about 200 of us, all budding playwrights. Generally we would see a one-act or a scene from a play one of us had written, followed by an open discussion. These were savage. They all hacked away at what they had seen with a kind of vengeance. It was as if were one to succeed, others must be made to fail. I had entered the group in the hope of presenting some of my work there, but I soon saw that my self-confidence, tough as it was, couldn't withstand the kind of attacks they made on each other's work. I could never show them anything of mine. And many times, at the end of these discussions, I would swear to leave and never return.⁶⁵

To this memory of the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio, Edward Parone, manager of the ABW Playwrights Unit, in his preface to his collection of plays from the Unit, *New Theatre in America*, adds this description:

The Actor's Studio formed its Playwrights Unit a few years ago. Plays or scenes from plays by the members are performed usually, though not always, by Studio actors. The unit is run by a committee; meetings are held. Discussions take place after the performances. The unit is supported by the Studio, with foundation money for a specific number of projects. but the Studio, it seems from my observation, is in theory and practice an *actor's* studio, not a playwrights' or even directors'. And perhaps the following true story may be pertinent, though it may not be typical. A young actress, a member of the Studio, came to read for the part of the girl in LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*. She mounted the stage and riffling the script in her hands and looking somewhere between the playwright and the director, said, "Uh, you don't care if I don't bother to use the lines, do you?"⁶⁶

Terrence McNally had a similar complaint about the Actors Studio: "The Actors Studio, for all the good work that was done there, was always Lee's building somehow. Even though there was a playwrights' unit there, you felt that you were talking about acting as much as the play. It was so hard to escape Lee's presence."⁶⁷ Given the growing fascination with the performer and director, the ABW Playwrights Unit seemed a safe haven for playwrights learning their craft.

The Playwrights Unit also offered a somewhat more upscale venue—staffed as it was by theatre professionals. Experienced directors and well known actors, like Frank Langella, Viveca Lindfors, James Coco, Margaret Hamilton, and Nancy Marchand were available for performances at the Unit because of the short runs and because of the influence and connections of Edward Albee and Richard Barr. What the Playwrights Unit offered, then, was a professional production in a theatre with talented actors, an

experienced director, and a mailing list of patrons who could be expected to support the work and perhaps provide the connections to move the plays or the playwright onto another level of production.

The Playwrights Unit came to be a stepping stone, in that sense, from the experimentation and freedom of the cafes and coffeehouse theatres, to a new level of professionalism. If a play was successful in the Playwrights Unit, the eyes of Albarwild were certainly upon it, although the plays were produced without options or obligations.⁶⁸ In the Spring of 1965 a New Playwrights Series was produced by Theatre 1965 at the Cherry Lane Theatre; it consisted of ten plays, including *Up to Thursday* by Sam Shepard, *Home Free* by Lanford Wilson, *Balls* by Paul Foster, *Conerico Was Here to Stay* by Frank Gagliano, *Pigeons* by Lawrence Osgood, *Lovey* by Joseph Morgenstern, *Hunting the Jingo Bird* by Kenneth Pressman, *A Lesson in A Dead Language* by Adrienne Kennedy, and *Do Not Pass Go* by Charles Nolte.

In addition, Lanford Wilson's full length *The Rimers of Eldrich* was first professionally produced by Theatre 1968 at the Cherry Lane. Wilson speaks of the experience:

Home Free [at the Cherry Lane] was the first professional thing I had ever had done . . . had been done at La Mama earlier but [at the Cherry Lane] it was for money! I got a percentage of the house, it was fabulous! Who had ever heard of such a thing—what a concept! . . . It certainly made you feel professional . . . it was your first professional recognition also. I mean we were reviewed for crying out loud . . . at the Cherry Lane. Most of them had never been reviewed before. At the Cherry Lane it was for real—it was for a limited run—but it was for real.⁶⁹

As Wilson explains it, the Playwrights Unit and the productions given at the Cherry Lane were a validation of the artistic experimentation these playwrights were attempting. It is hard to imagine any major Broadway producers today, let alone any single American playwright, who would

invest, for example, in an off-Broadway production of Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of A Negro*. There was a certain heroism tied to this kind of producing and sponsorship of playwrights. Looking at Douglas Anderson's 1988 article and as play development is practiced in the 1990s, it is clear there has been great change in producing new plays since the days of the Playwrights Unit.

The positive reaction from most of the playwrights interviewed in the course of my research was leavened by one note of discord. Lawrence Wunderlich, whose plays, *Nine-to-Five-to-Zero*, parts one and two, and *Prometheus Rebound* were performed at the Unit in 1964 and 1965 respectively, wrote of this experience:

I don't want to belabor the whole first year's operation of the Playwright's Unit. But if Albee's "guess" is "that the theatre in the United States will always hew more closely to the post-Ibsen/Chekhov tradition" because "it is our nature as a country, a society," he was quite right when it came to *this* group; a good majority of the playwrights were hewing very closely indeed, so closely, in fact, that a quaint, nostalgic air of the past hung over most of their work; so closely that I could see very little in their work that had much if anything to do with *us, here, and now*, in the final third of the twentieth century.⁷⁰

Although his article is fairly sketchy and disorganized, Wunderlich's primary argument against the Unit is its lack of consistent support for work which was experimental. And from the above excerpt, it is clear that he did not feel the Unit was producing scripts which represented the most avant-garde or most challenging work available (with the exception of several plays, including his own).

What is fascinating about the article is the discussion of several details, Wunderlich was not only a playreader for the ABW workshop, but the manager of the Village South Theatre, where the Unit was located in its first

seven years. Wunderlich chronologizes the first four years of the Unit through September of 1967, discussing the initial meetings, the correspondence between the producers and the Unit playwrights, the various management techniques that Edward Parone and Chuck Gnys used to organize and inform the playwrights, the sources of funding for the unit, and ends his article with an excellent chronology of productions through spring of 1967.

At several points Wunderlich seems to question the very nature of a playwrights workshop, wondering if a workshop as such can actually produce fine playwrights:

We find ourselves face to face with a hodgepodge of romantics, cynics, realists, stoics, naturalist, nihilists, absurdist, Philistines, and incompetents. And while we dimly suspect that such a "group" may contain the raw materials for the making of a democracy, we know that it contains little of the select material for the makings of a playwrights workshop. It is, and it remains, a pastiche. And to paraphrase a statement attributed to Voltaire, I disapprove of a pastiche but I will defend to the death the right of the individual parts of the pastiche to operate autonomously.⁷¹

What Wunderlich offers then is a contrarian's view of the achievements of the Unit, which, even if it is not terribly successful in its criticism, at least provides a fairly detailed and well-supported argument for the Unit's eclecticism.

Certainly Wunderlich's reaction is a minority opinion. Almost all the playwrights interviewed had quite positive responses to their productions at the Unit, with James Prideaux articulating what seemed to be the "prototypical" Playwrights Unit experience:

When finally Richard forced me into the theatre, there were no seats left and so we had to sit on the steps next to the exit. The lights came down. The curtain went up. And the audience

began to laugh. And clap. And laugh. And clap some more. *Postcards* is hardly more than thirty minutes long, but they were the greatest thirty minutes of my life. My heart soared, literally soared as I listened to the audience. At the end they wouldn't stop applauding and Richard pushed me to my feet, saying, "Jimmy, you'd better go up." So I ran up on stage and took a bow with my beaming actors. I suppose I went someplace after that. I assume I got home. But I have no recollection of it. I was in another world.⁷²

Prideaux, in his interview for this study, confessed that in his career as a playwright and screenwriter no other moment was quite as stupendous or as memorable than this successful evening at the Unit.⁷³

Mart Crowley, author of *The Boys In the Band* (produced at the Playwrights Unit in January of 1968), spoke of the Unit's audience, as many of the playwrights did, in quite dramatic terms. He remembered looking out at the huge line of people waiting to get into the theatre on a rainy January evening, and imagining it was "like the third act of Wilder's *Our Town*—there were all these umbrellas."⁷⁴ Crowley later discussed the experience in an article in San Francisco's *Bay Area Reporter*:

Boys might have ended in that five-day workshop, except for one small miracle—audiences were wild about the play. "The first night," Crowley says, "I don't think anybody was there. But the second night, there was a line around the block. The New York intelligentsia [began to] descend on the play. And suddenly it was famous."⁷⁵

The audience at the Playwrights Unit was invited and attended the performances free of charge. They were the product of a very carefully prepared mailing list which had been nurtured over many years by Chuck Gnys and the other managers of the Unit. Jean Claude van Itallie speaks about the houses being "packed, simply packed to the rafters,"⁷⁶ and other playwrights also refer to the responsive audiences. Edward Parone spoke of the way the audience talked directly to actors in LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*, in

particular having a remembrance of Leontyne Price "who lived in the neighborhood, suddenly bursting out with 'Right on!' and 'Say it!' several times."⁷⁷

The success of the Unit was directly tied to the Broadway professionals who sponsored its activities. It was the experience of working on Broadway, producing both new plays and revivals, that provided the impetus for Barr and Wilder to reject the commercial pressures of the Great White Way and yet retain the rigorous demands of its production standards in the off-Broadway and off-off Broadway milieu. It was also the connection with Broadway theatre professionals—actors, directors, and designers, stage managers, and administrative staff—that allowed Barr and Wilder to provide an extraordinary nurturing experience to each new play they chose to produce. However, the Playwrights Unit existed within the world of the off-off Broadway theatre of the 1960s, and the milieu of this theatre community provided a fertile environment for the Unit's success. Most of the playwrights who came to the Unit, though not all, had been produced earlier at venues such as Cafe La Mama or Caffé Cino, and most continued to produce work at other off-off Broadway venues during and after their productions at the Playwrights Unit. The Unit, however, and the Cherry Lane Theatre, gave most of these playwrights their first experience working within the world of New York's professional theatre, an experience, for better or worse, that was very different from the cafes and storefront theatres of off-off Broadway and one which brought them into the critical focus of the New York theatre community. A critical historical examination of the exact chronology of the Playwrights Unit within aegis of Albarwild, Inc. and Theater 1960-71, follows.

Notes

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⁶J. C. Trewin, *Mr. Macready, a Nineteenth-Century Tragedian and His Theatre* (London: Harrap & Co., 1955), 151.

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⁹Thomas Gale Moore, *The Economics of the American Theater* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), xiii-xiv.

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¹⁵William Harris, "How a Lone Producer Gambled on an Epic," *New York Times*, 7 November 1993, 2:5,25;

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³⁰Barry Plaxen, interview by author, tape recording, Bloomingsburg, NY, 4 May 1996.

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³²Stuart W. Little, *Off-Broadway: The Prophetic Theater* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1972), 219.

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³⁴Alex Atkinson, "The Antic Arts: Innocents Off-Broadway," *Holiday*, September 1961, 61-66.

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⁴⁰Thomas Morgan, "Clinton Wilder is Dead at 65; Helped Develop Playwrights," *New York Times*, 15 February 1986, 33.

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⁴⁵Sam Zolotow, "Playwrights Unit Receives Subsidy for Staging," *New York Times*, 6 June 1966.

⁴⁶John Keating, "Action Speaks Louder..." *New York Times*, 20 October 1963, X3.

⁴⁷Barbara La Fontaine, "Triple Threat On, Off and Off-Off Broadway," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 February 1968, 36-46.

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⁴⁹Edward Parone, , interview with author, New York City, 14 March 1995; also contact sheet from Merle Debuskey from the Edward Parone Clippings Folder, Billy Rose Theater Archives, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

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⁵⁷James Prideaux, "Memoirs," unpublished, May 1995, 212-213.

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⁵⁹John Guare, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, 28 March 1995.

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⁷⁴Mart Crowley, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, 19 February 1995.

⁷⁵Wendell Ricketts, "Talking Truth: *Boys in the Band* author Mart Crowley on his 'Gorgeous Little Monster'," *Bay Area Reporter*, 8 February 1990, 35.

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Chapter III

Producers at Work:

ABW Productions, Inc. on Broadway, Off-Broadway,
and Off-Off Broadway at the Playwrights Unit, 1960-1965

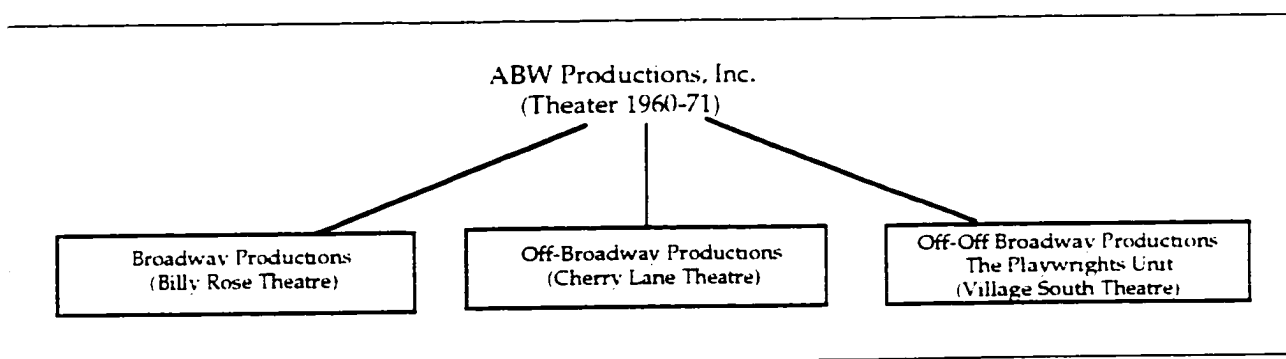
It is nearly impossible to discuss the work of the Albee/Barr/Wilder Playwrights Unit without examining how the Unit fit into the aesthetic and economic producing strategies that Richard Barr and his partners employed off and on Broadway as ABW Productions, Inc. This chapter explores then, in a chronological form, the history of play development at the Playwrights Unit including the activities of ABW Productions, Inc. It covers the period from ABW's Theater 1960 season (January 1960 to April 1960) through Theater 1965 (September 1964 to June 1965).

Richard Barr, when he began producing off-Broadway, titled his producing group Theater 1960-71 (Theater 1960, Theater 1961, etc.) as the embracing term for all his producing activities, whether on, off, or off-off Broadway at the Playwrights Unit. Barr later set up, in 1966, a not-for-profit company, Albarwild Theatre Arts, Inc. to receive foundation and government funding, but most of the business activities took place under the name ABW Productions, Inc. which is the term used in this dissertation (or simply ABW).

ABW Productions began as an off-Broadway organization and did not produce on Broadway until Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). Thereafter it produced on Broadway (usually at the Billy Rose Theatre, now the Nederlander Theatre), off-Broadway (usually at the Cherry Lane Theatre), and off-off Broadway at the Playwrights Unit, which was based at the Village South Theatre (now the Soho Playhouse) for most of its tenure. There were

three different staffs to run each area, and a central office which was located in the Broadway theatre district (see Figure 1 below, a diagram of ABW Productions, Inc.)

Figure 1.—ABW Productions, Inc.
Organization Chart



While each staff worked independently, all were included in the ABW “family,” a term used by many former ABW employees. There was much crossover of staff between these operations. For example, though the Playwrights Unit enjoyed autonomy from ABW’s general operations, many of its actors and directors worked in ABW’s productions on and off Broadway as well. The main difference between the Unit and ABW off-Broadway was that Unit artists, including the playwrights, were unpaid.

To add to this confusion, Barr had a proclivity for designating several ABW productions within any given season a specially named series. These series coexisted with other productions not included under their aegis. For example, during ABW’s Theater 1962 season Barr referred to his season at the Cherry Lane as the *Theatre of the Absurd Repertory*, yet at the same time he sponsored a Monday night series of new plays at the Cherry Lane (the original inspiration for the Playwrights Unit) entitled *Playwrights 1962, Series 1-2*.

In order to clarify the various seasons, series, and venues, Table 1

below chronicles this additional organizational hierarchy. Appendix 1, which is a full chronology of all ABW productions, lists these additional series in greater detail. ABW's named seasons and series, though somewhat confusing, were marketing ploys to draw audiences to see work which was difficult, patently experimental, and at odds with traditionally commercial fare. Barr constantly improvised with the various venues and series of plays; he didn't want to be locked in to a subscription season.

Table 1 ABW Productions, Inc. Named Series, 1961-1969			
<i>Season</i>	<i>Series</i>	<i>Theatre</i>	<i>Venue</i>
Theatre 1960	N/A		
Theater 1961	Way Out At The York (one evening of short plays & performance pieces)	York Theatre	OOB
Theater 1962	Theatre of the Absurd Repertory	Cherry Lane Theatre	OB
	Playwrights 1962 Series 1-2 (Monday night workshops)	Cherry Lane Theatre	OOB
Theater 1963	Playwrights Series 3-4 (Monday night workshops)	Cherry Lane Theatre & Village South Theatre	OOB
Theater 1964	N/A		
Theater 1965	New Playwrights Series 1-4	Cherry Lane Theatre	OB
Theater 1966	N/A		
Theater 1967	Festival of New American Plays	Cherry Lane Theatre	OB
Theater 1968	N/A		
Theater 1969	Theater 1969 Playwrights Repertory	Billy Rose Theatre	OB

There often seems no rhyme or reason to Barr's producing choices; now he's a champion of the absurd, later he isn't; now he's producing experimental work, then he's promoting sitcom-ish comedies. Barr worked this way ostensibly to control expenses and to accommodate exciting new American plays, yet more often than not his decisions were an extension of an exuberant, mercurial personality—and the effects were eventually

disastrous, contributing to the end of ABW Productions and the closure of the Playwrights Unit. Yet it was Richard Barr's idealism that lent an adventurous vitality to ABW Productions, and it was his fanatical devotion to the American playwright that made it an important playwrights' theatre.

In 1959 a deeply dissatisfied Barr left what he termed a "pleasant" though relatively undistinguished career as a Broadway producer, without having achieved his ultimate goal in producing, as he explains:

Americans have lagged behind Europe, . . . have continually been fifty years, at least, behind the current art movements in the theater. And the primary purpose . . . was to try and bring the theater up to the point in which the other arts had arrived in this country. And for example, painting, . . . the abstract expressionist movement moved ahead of Europe for the first time . . . in the history of our art. Certainly, Martha Graham in her field, Frank Lloyd Wright in his field pushed those particular art media into areas which . . . in some cases, surpassed Europe. It seemed to me it was time to do something about the theater . . .¹

His producing psyche balanced between a provocative taste in theatre and a desire to return original investment, Barr combined frugality with a remarkable ability to produce and promote new plays and new playwrights.

Joseph Cali, production stage manager for the Theater 1967's *Tinu Alice*, recalled regular morning business meetings at Barr's Greenwich Village apartment, with Barr's bed surrounded by stacks of scripts he had read earlier that morning. "Richard could read ten pages at the beginning, middle, and end of a script," recalled Cali, "and know if he wanted to produce it or not." Cali also remarked on Barr's professionalism: "As a producer, he protected investors, because he didn't over budget, he never 'cooked the books.' He never took anything off the top."² Edward Albee and Jerome Cline, ABW's accountant, corroborated Cali's comments on Barr's scrupulous attention to details.³ Norman Nadel discusses ABW's producing strategy:

It represents the rare instance of a theater corporation which not only has worked midtown and downtown, but has produced plays by a single playwright in both areas. . . . 'We took our Broadway knowledge to off-Broadway, then our off-Broadway experience back to Broadway,' explains producer Barr. 'Out of what we learned we kept costs down in both areas.'⁴

Nadel points out that total weekly operating expense for the off-Broadway production of *The American Dream* and *The Death of Bessie Smith* at the Cherry Lane was \$3,400, compared to the weekly bill for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which was \$25,000.⁵

Both budgets were far under norm for equity productions off-Broadway and on Broadway during the early 1960s (compare Tables 2 and 3 below).

TABLE 26
ABW PRODUCTIONS, ON AND OFF-BROADWAY

	OFF-BROADWAY <i>The American Dream</i> and <i>Bartleby</i> (approximate)	BROADWAY <i>Who's Afraid of</i> <i>Virginia Woolf</i>
Productions Costs		
Scenery	\$650	\$9,335.95
Properties	50	5,488.96
Wardrobe	100	1,957.28
Director's Fee	500 (same director)	5,000.00
Advertising	2,060	5,884.65
Scripts	75	596.10
Rehearsal Expenses	2,455	15,621.86
Auditing Fee	150	250.00
Legal Fee	--	2,520.00
Electrical	50	128.75
Payroll Taxes	60	616.86
Office	200	1,500.00

(Totals are not given because each production had other costs—music in one, a choreographer in the other, for example—that cannot be compared. The cost categories above are basic obligations both on and off Broadway.)

Richard Barr brought the production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in

for approximately \$49,920 as compared to the average figure for a Broadway production at that time which was about \$100,609. *Virginia Woolf* paid off its entire production costs in 31 days. Nadel also points out that investors who put a total of \$75,000 into *Virginia Woolf* recouped their investment and earned (as of the date of the article) a clear profit of \$210,000.⁷ One way Barr mitigated his costs of production, according to Nadel, was by leasing the Cherry Lane for five years, rather than by renting it for a single production.

TABLE 3⁸

AVERAGE PRODUCTIONS COSTS
FOR THE 1960 - 61 SEASON ON BROADWAY

Total	\$100,609
Scenery	22,445
Properties	4,707
Wardrobe	9,253
Electrical and sound	5,111
Scenery designers	3,532
Director's Fee	4,449
Cast	6,015
Crew and stagehands	5,296
Advertising	12,026
Legal and Audit	3,143
Managers	4,142
Theater	1,991
Press agents	1,434
Office	1,665
Total itemized costs	85,000
Mean of remainder	14,290

A comparison of Tables 2 and 3 shows that scenery was the largest expense in most Broadway productions, \$22,445, whereas the scenery for *Virginia Woolf*? was less than half this cost, at \$9,335.95. The wardrobe budget for *Virginia Woolf*? was one-fifth of that spent in average Broadway non-musical, small cast productions. *Virginia Woolf*'s largest expense was its rehearsal costs, reflecting Barr's policy of rehearsing in the performance space.

Advertising costs for *Virginia Woolf*? were half the average, since Barr believed word of mouth from previews would do more than a massive media campaign.

John Keating discussed Barr's ability to negotiate quality productions with tiny budgets in his *Theatre Arts* article, "A Producer Should 'Produce'":

They have excited almost as much attention within the theatrical world for the economy and efficiency of their productions as for the plays' considerable artistic merit. Barr and Wilder have made an enviable . . . reputation among their competitors by putting on their productions for what amounts to peanuts. They brought in their production of Jack Richardson's mordant comedy *Gallows Humor*, for example, for about \$4,000, and the series of four different works . . . cost only \$11,500. . . .⁹

Joseph Cali put Barr's frugality into simple terms, "Richard knew how to produce inexpensively, without making the production look cheap."¹⁰

Barry Plaxen, the Cherry Lane's former administrative director, points out that not only did Barr save money by leasing the theatre, but also by keeping a crew of professionals from one production to the next.¹¹ On staff at the Cherry Lane were two production stage managers, one to coordinate technical aspects, the other to run the performance. Plaxen describes the flow:

They operate autonomously but, of course, their areas of responsibility overlap in many places. Having permanent stage managers working together, has been a boon to us. They anticipate each other's needs, appreciate each other's ability, and most importantly, know and understand how each likes something done. If, and when, either of the stage managers needs an assistant, it is he who hires him.¹²

Other permanent staff members were the house electrician, house manager, and treasurer. As Plaxen points out, though the work load varied, production to production, the duties did not; the Cherry Lane ran without constant oversight, leaving more time for creative considerations.

The Playwrights Unit was operated like the Cherry Lane. Its paid

permanent staff, consisting of a managing director, a theatre manager, a stage manager, and a lighting technician, were augmented by volunteers supplied by the playwright. The budgets at the Unit were minuscule, averaging about \$100 per production, exclusive of rent and utilities.¹³ All Unit playwrights, actors, directors, and designers worked gratis—only if the play transferred to off Broadway did anyone receive compensation.¹⁴

Barr hired, over and over again, the same remarkable theatre talents: director Alan Schneider, stage manager Mark Wright, designer William Ritman, business manager Michael Kasdan, press agent Howard Atlee, administrative director Barry Plaxen, and a pool of dedicated actors. In a press release for Albee's play *Malcolm*, Barr explained his reasoning:

When *Malcolm* . . . opens . . . the realization of a plan begun six years ago at the Provincetown Playhouse will have begun. The plan was very simply to return the theatre to the playwrights, creating around them an organization supported by a pool of fine actors who would continue to work together by choice. . . . For want of a better word, we are calling our way American Repertory. . . . Our theatre is centered around the playwright. We have no contractual obligations to produce, and we are only interested in new plays.¹⁵

Barr's "American Repertory" concept grew out of his dissatisfaction with the division of power on Broadway. An economically influential star or director could, according to Barr, distort a play "so that the author's intention disappeared somewhere in Boston."¹⁶ Barr's solution to this "power problem" was to allow all artistic decisions to flow from the playwright.

Of all Barr's producing partners, Clinton Wilder was his perfect complement. While Barr involved himself at all levels of production, day-to-day, Wilder was a more relaxed, genteel, and wealthy participant—able to defuse a difficult situation by his warmth, social graces, and deep pockets.¹⁷ Wilder was also the more conservative of the two producers, and was,

according to Jerome Cline, the only one who could say no to Richard Barr.¹⁸

Because Wilder moved in different social circles than Barr, the two producers were able to raise funds from a large pool of business associates.¹⁹ The image of the immaculate businessman and the sophisticated investor convinced investors that the avant-garde plays Barr and Wilder promoted were worthwhile. Once the partnership added its star playwright, Edward Albee, the triumvirate was complete. Elenore Lester describes this threesome:

They were a comfortably attuned group of individualists: Albee, looking like all the Holden Caulfields who have ever suffered though prep school; Clinton Wilder . . . warm, ebullient, dashing in a black and white checked jacket, open collar shirt, a thick, theatrical shock of dark hair, and Barr, tall, urbane, very much the public figure in his dark business suit, exuding an air of astuteness and energy. This trio, which made theatrical history by introducing the new style and vision of Albee to Broadway, is now a powerhouse of theatrical activity.²⁰

In truth the ABW partnership, like most off-Broadway producing partnerships, was never without monetary worries. For most of its existence, it depended greatly on Barr's ability to produce new plays on a shoestring and his knack for discovering and nurturing a stable of Edward Albees—thus the Playwrights Unit remained Barr's quixotic obsession even as, by 1971, financial realities were crashing down around him.

Richard Barr's inspiration for producing stimulating new American plays was his first off-Broadway success—Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*, which Barr premiered with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Provincetown Playhouse on 10 January 1960. Barr expertly parlayed the strong critical response for *Zoo Story* into several important prizes and a record number of performances for a nonmusical off-Broadway play (1,030 by September 1965). *Zoo Story* remained a money-maker to which Barr returned again and again.

Like a scientist obsessed with a successful experiment he was desperate

to repeat, Barr continued his strategy of mixing short plays throughout his off-Broadway tenure—a technique which eventually became the paradigm for play development at the Playwrights Unit. Two short plays would be presented, generally one by an author of renown and the other by a newer playwright. Barr wanted to capture the playwrights when they were, like Albee, “still in the one-act stage, to speed the gestation period to Broadway.”²¹

Barr was then able quickly to pull out of plays which did not succeed while, with equal swiftness, moving on to other work which might prove more successful, as Barry Plaxen elaborates:

We do not let a play linger. If there is no business immediately after opening, it is closed quickly to prevent a further loss of capital. . . . Because we are a permanent company we cannot allow too much of a drain on our capital. Unlike the independent producer who might be able to hibernate while he attempts to recuperate his losses, we must go into a new production. With sky-rocketing costs, we must bow to simple economic truths.²²

Even with this kind of tight management, Barr certainly did not make a killing producing *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Zoo Story*, but crafted a kind of survivalist existence off-Broadway, doing difficult work he admired using star performers and directors to attract adventurous theatre-goers.

Barr next produced Eugène Ionesco's *The Killer* off-Broadway at the Seven Arts Theatre on 22 March 1960, attempting to tie his ambitions to the absurdist theatre of the late 1950s. In the production, which he also directed, Barr brought other arts into the theatre, as Stuart Little relates:

The abstract painter Ilse Getz did a collage backdrop of New York City. Allan Kaprow, the artist and composer, built a special sound filter to run metropolitan static through on his electronic sound track giving off a continuous urban hum. And Todd Bolender, the dancer and choreographer of the New York City Ballet, worked out movement while Barr himself directed the production over all.²³

Though Barr moved toward a revisionist American realism in his producing tastes, he retained great interest in the other arts, evidenced by his continued support of the Valerie Betti and Paul Taylor Dance Companies, and his attempt to set up a Broadway performing arts center in 1969.

The Killer received kudos from the critics for the high minded effort to bring Ionesco plays to New York audiences.²⁴ This was another strategy that proved successful; Barr consciously approached the production of new plays from a literary, intellectual orientation. Later he would directly link his Theatre of the Absurd Repertory at the Cherry Lane Theatre with Martin Esslin's book, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (although Barr would live to regret this decision as he became pigeon-holed as a producer of absurdist works).²⁵

The following year the Theatre 1961²⁶ season began with Richard Hepburn's historical comedy, *The Sudden End of Anne Cinquefoil*, on 10 January 1961, Barr's first unmitigated off-Broadway failure. It is difficult to understand why Barr took on *Sudden End*—unless he thought to lure Katherine Hepburn (Richard Hepburn's sister) off-Broadway. Barr offered a special 60%/40% split of profits to the limited partners, an arrangement that he repeated when dealing with particularly difficult new work.²⁷

Though the play and production were flawed, William Ritman's sets for *Sudden End* established an ABW tradition: Ritman's design expertly accentuated the play's dramaturgy (on a limited budget). Throughout his career with ABW Productions, Inc., Ritman received a litany of praise for his fidelity to the playwright's vision. Another ABW tradition established was an ensemble of actors; many of those involved with *Sudden End* were used in other ABW productions, including those at the Playwrights Unit. During the production of *Sudden End* Joseph Cali first became involved in ABW as a house manager. Cali described this experience:

I don't know if Richard intended this to happen, but it did happen; we became a family. . . . There was an atmosphere in the theatre, at the Cherry Lane itself, where everybody knew everyone else. The back of the house was never cut off from the front of the house, so that there was never any separation. And it all has to do with the way that Richard ran a show.²⁸

It was this "family atmosphere" that permitted the ABW producing partnership to open and close shows quickly. In this case, Theater 1960 moved on to the production of Edward Albee's *American Dream*.

Barr first joined with Clinton Wilder on the production of *American Dream*. Wilder describes their very informal meeting:

Richard was carrying around an unbound manuscript which he asked me to read. . . . It was 'The American Dream,' and I flipped. A few days later, I said to Richard, 'I like that little play you showed me.' We decided to produce it. That's how our whole partnership began. We've never had a contract. We don't have one with Edward. We simply ask each other first."²⁹

The informality of Barr's and Wilder's partnership was the consequence of a like-minded approach to producing off-Broadway. Both producers felt that off-Broadway could be the training ground for a new generation of American playwrights. They had met in Europe in the summer of 1960 and planned a very frugal, yet ambitious season off-Broadway that fall.³⁰

With the success of *American Dream*,³¹ which opened at the Cherry Lane Theatre on 24 January 1961 (later joined by Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith* on 28 February 1961), Alan Schneider became the primary interpreter of Edward Albee's plays as ABW's "most favored director." Richard Barr describes Schneider's particular success working with playwrights:

We had known of Alan's work, but we had not met him, nor had we known how faithful a director he was to a playwright's intention, as opposed to the many directors who superimpose their own personality, distort, and actually change texts without the playwright's permission, even though he is present. Alan

will have none of this and we were impressed with the way he worked.³²

Schneider was the quintessential playwright's director; probing with a myriad of questions, ever mindful of the playwright's presence, coaxing performances out of actors who might not understand the absurdist, non-linear work which he so admired.³³ Although Schneider never directed at the Playwrights Unit, he was the model against which all other ABW directors were measured, including those who worked at the Unit.

Shortly after *American Dream* and *The Death of Bessie Smith*, Barr presented *Way Out at the York*—an evening which represented the initial stirrings of the Playwrights Unit. Alex Atkinson offers this description of the evening which was a combination of theatre, film, and sound effects:

Two ears came onto the stage of the York Playhouse . . . and engaged in conversation. They were over six feet high, and rather unexpected. . . . An item later in the program . . . was called Poem I and concerned a number of pink-and-white-striped boxes, inside which some characters made tapping sounds, but did not speak. After about ten minutes, a person came slithering across downstage bearing a skull, and that was the end of it. Some members of the audience now let it be known that they were more than a little uneasy . . . others . . . were deep in thought. Many had gone somewhere else.³⁴

This unique evening also consisted of two short plays, *The Abstract Wife* and *The Tourniquet* by Ursule Molinaro, a future Playwrights Unit member.

The Theatre 1961 season ended on 18 April with Jack Richardson's *Gallows Humor*. Richardson was the first American playwright of substance, besides Albee, to be produced by the ABW partnership (Albee's important playwriting contemporaries included Jack Gelber, Arthur Kopit, Jack Richardson, and Murray Schisgal). Richardson's *Gallows Humor* received respectful but not glittering reviews which contributed to Barr's painful

awareness that his producing career rested almost solely upon the success of Albee's plays; Barr desperately needed another star playwright.

In May of 1961, Barr and Wilder won the Vernon Rice award "for devotion to new American playwrights and new ideas."³⁵ With the award, which they were to win again four years later, Barr and Wilder capitalized on their commitment to new playwrights. Though Theatre 1961 had not been one of their busier seasons, Barr and Wilder established a reputation for producing new plays and new ideas with a certain consistency of success.

On 17 September 1961 ABW's Theater 1962 premiered Beckett's *Happy Days*, directed by Alan Schneider at the Cherry Lane theatre. Schneider had brought *Happy Days* from Beckett himself to the Barr/Wilder producing team which, in Schneider's own words, was "riding high as off-Broadway impresarios." Despite the intrinsic difficulties of premiering a Beckett play, the production was a critical success. It was also a perfect example of the cruel economics of producing off-Broadway as Schneider elaborates:

The producers—and Edward—came to one of the our occasional runthroughs and loved it. So did our audiences for the five previews we were allotted. Our producers were economy-minded, as usual; they had announced at the start of rehearsal that they were bringing in our production for \$2,200, and they stuck to their budget. This was at a time when off-Broadway productions cost around \$10,000 at least.³⁶

Though the budget was minuscule, ticket sales were only fair. Much to Schneider's disappointment, Barr/Wilder cut back *Happy Day's* performances.

The Theater 1962 season featured the *Theatre of the Absurd Repertory*, which included *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett, *Bertha* by Kenneth Koch, *Gallows Humor* by Jack Richardson, *The Sandbox* by Edward Albee, Jean Genet's *Deathwatch*, Fernando Arrabal's *Picnic on the Battlefield*, Albee's *The American Dream* and *The Zoo Story*, and Ionesco's *The Killer*. Barr had

chosen the absurdists because, as Stuart Little opines, "They were there, they were good, and not enough good American playwrights were around."³⁷ Barr's success with the absurdists leveraged his ability to bring new American playwrights to fore.

Focusing again on the practical logistics of producing, Barr believed it was useless to spend a lot of money on advertising. The expense of running an ad in the daily newspapers far exceeded the off-Broadway box-office potential. A simple listing in the *Times*, a good review, and most importantly, word of mouth, were the only ways to draw audiences off-Broadway. He pointed out that "you can't have a hit without good notices, but you can have a flop with them."³⁸ Barr was proud of the extraordinary efficiency of his and Wilder's well-oiled Cherry Lane producing machine:

The result of this experience is that 'The Theatre of the Absurd,' a spectacularly ambitious project, will cost only \$6,500 irrespective of returnable cash—bonds and advances. This is less than half what many less difficult, less professionally managed productions presently cost. . . . The 'Theatre of the Absurd' can pay off its investment in six weeks at 75 percent capacity.³⁹

This smooth operation, while certainly providing for investors' returns permitted Barr to produce his first series of Monday night workshops of new American plays at the Cherry Lane Theatre.

The workshops presented the plays of 'unknowns' in whose talent the Barr-Wilder team believed, but whose work was not ready for regular performance. The evenings were budgeted at approximately \$2,000 to \$3,000 for a total of three to four evenings. Barr describes their process:

Well, we have always had the idea in the back of our mind right from the beginning and actually started a year after we began off Broadway to present new playwrights, but on a very, very limited basis in the sense that we would use our theater on occasion, on Monday nights, which is the dark night off Broadway, to present productions that are good deal more than

workshops but weren't fully costumed and mounted—they were between a workshop and an off Broadway production.⁴⁰

The success of these workshops, which were, in fact, fully, if minimally, mounted productions, led directly to the formation of the Playwrights Unit.

The first evening of new works, presented as Playwrights 1962 on 13 November 1961, consisted of *Sweet of You To Say So* by Page Johnson, Michael Wilkes's *The Audience*, *The Blueberry Affair* by Gudrun Powers, and Doric Wilson's *And He Made a Her*, all directed by Barr. Of this grouping of playwrights, only Page Johnson continued with the ABW Playwrights Unit. Doric Wilson, now a well-known gay playwright and activist, was not entirely pleased with the move of *And He Made A Her* from the Caffe Cino to the Cherry Lane, as he relates:

This is typical Richard Barr. In his stupid pompous theories, he killed my play, killed it, dead as a doornail, killed it. First of all the play had already been done [at Caffe Cino]. I didn't go to rehearsals, I was working. All that we were doing was transferring it onto a stage. With some new people. Paxton who had directed it at the Cino was the lead there. So what were we losing? We weren't losing anything. Whatever he did, I knew it didn't work, but I was too young, I didn't know why.⁴¹

After dress rehearsal and in distress over Barr's direction of the play, Wilson went out to a bar for a drink. At the bar, Wilson was, in his own words,

entrapped by a plain (ill-fittingly) clothed policeman who rammed a gun into my larynx and arrested me for sexual (I was innocent) whatever. All part of a Koch-Greitzer-V.I.D. (they now deny it) campaign to clear the queers out of the Village . . . Richard Barr got me out of jail. ⁴²

Though Barr had blundered with Wilson's play, it was Barr's generosity that represented his true character. Doric Wilson states frankly:

That was Richard. He fucked over my play, out of stupidity and pomposity and ignorance; but out of incredible courage he was right there, right on the line. He stayed with me all the way

throughout the court thing, we got it finally all taken care of. . . I don't even know how it was all done. That was Richard Barr.⁴³

Wilson suggested that much of what Barr had wanted to achieve had been denied to him because of Barr's homosexuality.

Barr had been offered the artistic directorship of the Theatre Forum at Lincoln Center. "They practically brought him to measure the toilets," Wilson stated, "and didn't give it to him because of his gayness." Barr was open about his homosexuality throughout his career. His large parties held nearly every Sunday, were "ostensibly gay" according to Wilson, though anyone (and everyone) in the theatre community attended.⁴⁴ The parties and the marginalization were confirmed by Richard Foltz, ABW's production secretary, who stated that ABW was considered a kind of "gay mafia" by other theatre professionals and the media. Though Foltz enjoyed not having to hide his sexual orientation while working for ABW Productions, he felt that the group was denigrated for this same orientation.⁴⁵

The Playwrights 1962 evening was a success, as Alice Drummond, who performed in Page Johnson's *Sweet of You To Say So* recalls:

Everybody was standing up, yelling bravo. It was only a twenty minute play, but it was really wonderful. I was already upstairs taking my makeup off because I was going to be in the next play and I was halfway through my makeup for the next play and there was still yelling. They were yelling down there. So I came back. We thought it was pretty good.⁴⁶

With this success, Theater 1962 presented a second evening of short works, Playwrights 1962, Series 2, on 11 December 61 at the Cherry Lane, using the set and properties available from the current show. The evening consisted of Gene Feist's *A Toy for the Clowns*, C. Skrivanek Atherton's *Chit Chat on a Rat*, directed by Gene Feist, the founder of Roundabout Theatre, and *Prometheus Rebound* by Lawrence Wunderlich, directed by Richard Barr.

The month following, on 1 January 1962, Barr produced a third evening Playwrights Series III, which included *Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set Of Pills* by Megan Terry, and *This Side of the Door* by Terrence McNally, with Estelle Parsons.

Megan Terry did not have any other plays produced at the Unit though she remained in close contact with Edward Parone, Richard Barr, and Clinton Wilder.⁴⁷ Barbara La Fontaine writes about Terry's experience:

Of the Unit she [Terry] said, 'They really knock themselves out for you. They give you superb production.' And she added that it was only because of money Barr provided when he optioned a Terry play in 1959 that she had been able to establish herself and work further on her own.⁴⁸

Terry left to focus on her work with the Open Theatre, but remained fervent about the work done by Unit. She corresponded many times with Clinton Wilder, and, though not active, remained on the Unit's roster. She considered ABW's production of *Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set Of Pills* one of the turning points in her career.⁴⁹ *Copper Queen* was later published by University of Minnesota's Office for Advanced Drama Research.

In August of 1962 Barr and Wilder announced they were taking a lease on the Cherry Lane Theatre.⁵⁰ Confident of their record off-Broadway, they were not fazed by the \$30,000 price tag for the five year lease of the theatre. They did not plan to have a subscription season, preferring to "put things on and let them run their course, then put something else on."⁵¹ This "non-season" policy allowed Barr and Wilder to sublet the theatre or co-produce as necessary to cover the rent and other expenses.

Theater 1963 produced William Hanley's two short plays, *Mrs. Dally Has a Lover* and *Whisper into My Good Ear*, at the Cherry Lane on 1 October 1962. Hanley's writing personified the kind of dramaturgy that Barr was

finding more attractive—a radicalized yet accessible realism, dealing with sensitive, even explosive issues. Mrs. Dally was played by Estelle Parsons, and the production was directed by Richard Altman, a Playwrights Unit regular.

Barr was rewarded for his support of a new writer with an excellent review by the *Times*' Howard Taubman. Taubman was particularly pleased with Hanley's use of language, though it came, in his opinion, at the expense of dramatic structure—a point later echoed in reviews of other new ABW playwrights. More importantly, Taubman wrote: "the double bill is welcome not only for itself but also as a herald of what a fine new writer should accomplish in the theater."⁵² *Mrs. Dally Has a Lover* appeared on Broadway in September 1965.

In this same vein of radicalized, yet accessible realism, was, of course, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which was produced by Theater 1963 on 13 October 1962 at the Billy Rose Theatre. Alan Schneider, director of the production, succinctly describes *Virginia Woolf*'s success:

With Uta's (Hagen) "Jesus H. Christ" entrance, I felt the audience fused into rapt attention, punctuated by machine-gun bursts of New York laughter. And two minutes into the performance, the actors on stage, unable to produce anything other than perfection, I knew—from my usual pacing position beside the playwright at the very back of the orchestra—that nothing could stop us. Whatever happened tomorrow or next day, that audience was as one, absorbing Edward's "dark legend of truth and illusion" into their blood and bones. It was absolutely terrific to be part of that communal experience, to watch and listen and feel eleven hundred transported and transformed, knowing that it was their own guts that were being kicked around on that stage.⁵³

With the success of *Virginia Woolf* came the extraordinary sums of money that permitted Barr, Wilder, Albee to found the Playwrights Unit.

During the Theater 1964 season Edward Albee was added to the rank of co-producer, along with Barr and Wilder. This remarkable relationship was

an historic event on Broadway; not since the Playwrights Company in the late 1930's had there been a playwright co-producing his own work on Broadway.⁵⁴ Thomas B. Morgan, in *Life* magazine, describes Albee's control:

Understandably, Albee has converted his prestige into power. Not for him the humiliation of being ejected, protesting from a theater during rehearsals, as Tennessee Williams once was. Albee will not join the Broadway legions of playwrights cajoled, seduced or driven by directors, stars and producers. . . . With producers Barr and Wilder as chief executives and Alan Schneider in charge of staging, Albee has taken control of every facet of his life in the theater. He dominates casting and the selection of other professionals; he revises his works to suit himself: his criticisms of performances, lighting and the rest are heard respectfully: he makes no concession to theater owners or investors. In short, Albee exercises more power, perhaps, than any other playwright in the history of the American theater.⁵⁵

Certainly neither Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, or any of Albee's contemporaries had this sort of relationship with their producers.

Albee exerted his new influence by championing absurdist plays, even though Barr preferred to focus on a new American realism. It was at Albee's that the first play of the Theater 1964 season was Ugo Betti's *Corruption in the Palace of Justice*, produced on 8 October 1963 at the Cherry Lane.⁵⁶ Once again Barr, Wilder, and now, Albee, were rewarded by the critics for producing a rarely seen European work. Betti's play received a particularly warm welcome from Howard Taubman:

The maturest and deepest play in town is "Corruption in the Palace of Justice" which arrived at the Cherry Lane Theater last night. . . . Granted that this Italian dramatist wrote subtly, even enigmatically. But he dealt with profound issues, and his work is too significant to be neglected in a theater that cares for something more than overnight sensations. If the drama is to assume the place it can have in New York's intellectual life, plays like Betti's must be done.⁵⁷

Corruption's critical success was not translated into a commercial one. The

play managed to stay open, however, even though its production coincided with the Kennedy assassination.⁵⁸

On the cusp of the success of *Virginia Woolf* and *Corruption*, the first meeting of the Theater 1964 Playwrights Unit was held on Sunday, 29 September 1963, led by Edward Parone, newly hired as the Unit's Managing Director. Playwright Laurence Wunderlich recalled that the initial meeting "was so very brief and . . . there was next to no discussion among the invited playwrights."⁵⁹ A total of thirty-five playwrights were invited; twenty-three decided to participate, bringing 20 scripts to start the season.⁶⁰

The following playwrights were chosen for the 1964 ABW Playwrights Unit: Bill Amidon, Otis Bigelow, Coe Bridges, Lewis John Carlino, Donald Dewey, James Dey, Edward K. Evans, Frank Gagliano, Morton Goolde, David Graeme, John Guare, Arthur Hadley, Robert Heide, Jan Holm, Eric Hughes, Page Johnson, Leroi Jones, Lee Kalcheim, Adrienne Kennedy, Kenneth Koch, Arthur Kopit, Terrence McNally, Ursule Molinaro, Howard Moss, Tom Oliver, Lawrence Osgood, Harvey D. Perr, Don Peterson, Jack Richardson, Megan Terry, Stuart Richard Townsend, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Deric Washburn, Arnold Weinstein, Doric Wilson, Lawrence Wunderlich.⁶¹

A total of \$23,232.88 from the profits of *Virginia Woolf* were dedicated to the yearly operating costs of the Unit (see Table 3). The Village South Theatre, a 199-seat off-Broadway theatre, was leased for a year. The main expenses for the Unit were its rent, utilities, and small staff. The production budget was less than that for the printing and xeroxing of scripts. Because the Unit was a showcase, artists were expected provide their services without payment, an common off-off Broadway arrangement. If one considers how many plays were produced in one year (23), then perhaps in terms of sheer volume the \$23,232.88 was well spent. At any rate, in 1964, it was a

considerable amount of money to be spent on a wholly experimental exercise.

TABLE 3
OPERATING COSTS
PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT⁶²
(1964)

Rent & utilities - Village South Theatre	\$11,241.50
Salaries and payroll taxes	8,679.00
Printing	829.07
Telephone and telegraph	605.88
Scripts	523.48
Productions expenses and fees	448.19
Maintenance and repairs	268.23
Photos	242.80
Manager and stage manager expenses	195.81
Miscellaneous	198.92
Total	\$23,232.88

Barr had been gathering names of new playwrights for many years before the founding of the Unit. He read all plays which were brought to his attention, either solicited or unsolicited, and created a card file for each script, including the title of the play and the author's name, agent, and address. Wunderlich, an ABW playreader, describes this process further:

If the play was of more than routine interest or had something special to recommend it, he [Barr] would mark his notebooks and card file accordingly. Many 'known' playwrights as well as many more 'unknown' playwrights each had a card, and the rest were simply listed alphabetically with an N.G. typed at the upper right-hand corner of the card. When I started to work with Barr, this card file was nearing a thousand titles, and it became one of my first jobs to register scripts in the file as they were sent in, to note down whether they have been read and returned, and what have you. . . . At the time the office was receiving on the average of a dozen or so plays per week.⁶³

From this volume of plays, Barr was able to cull a substantial "stable" of writers, most of whom had more than one script to recommend them.

The Unit was to be divided into two branches, a workshop to play to invited audiences and a playwrights series which would be free and open to

the public. Playwrights whose plays were produced at the Unit were under no obligation to sell their scripts to the ABW organization. The playwrights series, as it was originally conceived, proved impossible to coordinate, because unlike the workshop, it required a greater time commitment than actors and directors were willing to accept without pay.

Edward Parone was chosen as the Unit's managing director, with Lawrence Wunderlich as its theatre manager, and Johnny Dodd as the lighting designer/janitor. Initially, these were the only paid staff members of the Unit, though Wunderlich questioned the lack of a permanent stage manager.⁶⁴ They were left to their own devices by the producers—something which Wunderlich did not entirely regret, since it suggested that Messrs. Albee, Barr, and Wilder would not interfere in the Unit's daily operations.

The Unit was not to be a school, but a fully operational theatre, as Clinton Wilder describes:

We would rehearse there—our basic, permanent set is a simple one and there are few props, which can be easily moved off stage—then give four or five previews before the official performance. . . . There will be absolutely no restrictions on the kind of thing the playwrights can do. It may be a three-act play, a single scene or an act or two from a work in progress. Admission will be free and, after allowing for people the playwright themselves want to invite, it will be on a first come, first served basis.⁶⁵

Wilder's description confirms Wunderlich's description of the Unit's function as a working theatre. "We were not there to talk about plays," Wunderlich writes, "We were there to see that plays were cast, rehearsed, produced, and to see that audiences came."⁶⁶

A total of 19 playwrights had 18 evenings of 23 plays produced at ABW's Playwrights Unit under the aegis of Theater 1964. Though it was the busiest year in the Unit's existence, the season got off to a rough start. The

first play was Lee Kalcheim's *A Party For Divorce*, on Sunday 17 November 1963 at the Village South Theatre. While Kalcheim, a Yale School of Drama graduate, later wrote the Emmy Award-winning television sitcom *All In The Family*, the style of this early effort came as a surprise to some Unit members.

In particular, Wunderlich, a product of off-off Broadway, and a La Mama playwright, was disappointed with *A Party For Divorce*'s realism:

All of this was told in an artless, tape-recorder-type of dialogue which murmured *natural* and *naturally* and *naturalism*, while the three actors wandered about the stage, tinkered with bottles and glasses and other props, and in general tried their utmost to create a vivid, *real* picture of what *really* happens in *reality*. The play seemed, in other words, a latter day Quintessence of Zolaism. I was breathless with astonishment. Had I missed something? Who was Lee Kalcheim? And most disturbing of all . . . if Lee Kalcheim was most *definitely* in this group of playwrights, then what the hell was I doing in this group of playwrights? (Wunderlich's italics)⁶⁷

Kalcheim's play was clearly representative of Barr's taste for the tense, threatening realism of Albee's *Virginia Woolf*. Linda Feinfeld Magyar, the first production secretary for ABW Productions Inc., confirmed that *A Party For Divorce* was "a complete and utter shock":

It was like a television sitcom . . . like a bad television sitcom. And no one could believe how awful it was. And everyone, and I mean everyone, Michael Kasdan, Larry Wunderlich, Joseph Cali, all of them, kept saying that he [Kalcheim] was in the Unit because his father or his uncle was some big agent at William Morris. . . and it was not as if we were snobs or anything. Except for Larry, who was a snob, and he was furious from the start. . . . It was a scandal.⁶⁸

A Party For Divorce certainly was not an auspicious beginning for the developmental theatre which was championing the avant-garde.

Yet Kalcheim's play represented Barr's own shift in taste from the absurdist theatre to the menacing, perhaps Pinteresque, issue-related realism

that he saw growing out of the 60s generation of playwrights, as Barr states:

I have a feeling that the new playwrights are moving back toward a much more conventional form than Ionesco or Beckett, toward a recognition of man as an intuitive animal at a new level of awareness. What we're interested in is human beings, human behavior, human feelings. The best new plays are pleas for a recognition of man as a dignified animal, man as man. The playwrights strip man bare of his pretensions and try to merge the intuitive and the rational. The 'absurd' playwrights, reacting against rationalism have left out reason altogether.⁶⁹

Tied to this was Barr's pragmatism—he was a commercial Broadway producer, and this always, subtly or unsubtly, colored his producing decisions.

Over the next six months a new play was produced at the Unit nearly every Sunday. In spite of much excellent work, a great many of the scripts were mediocre, patently unadventurous, or weakly imitative of Albee and the European absurdists. It seems fair to say, however, that the writers were chosen not because their work was perfect, but because they demonstrated talent. Though many Unit's playwrights did contribute important plays to American drama, their initial works at the Unit were often unimpressive.

Following Kalcheim's play were several Unit plays of lesser importance (see Appendix 1). Specially noted in these productions, however, should be the casting of Margaret Hamilton and Maria Karnilova in Lawrence Osgood's *Pigeons*. Barr's ability to procure actors of importance to work gratis provided fledgling playwrights the opportunity to see their work under the best of circumstances. For the actors, the Unit offered the opportunity, with a small time commitment, to perform roles not available to them in the commercial theatre. In addition, acting in the Playwrights Unit was an opportunity to be considered for ABW productions on and off Broadway.

The Unit's experimental work also drew the enthusiastic participation

of a growing pool of regular performers like Alice Drummond, John S. Becher, Ruth White, and Jane Hoffman who performed with ABW on and off Broadway in addition to the Playwrights Unit. The willingness of a core group of professional, versatile actors to perform for no compensation made it possible to expeditiously produce new plays with difficult acting styles.

The next important work produced during the Theater 1964 Playwrights Unit was Jean-Claude van Itallie's *War*. The play was given two performances on 22 December 1963 at the Village South Theatre and was directed by Michael Kahn (in 1998, the director of theatre training at the Juilliard School). *War* featured actor Gerome Ragni, one of the creators of the tribal rock musical *Hair*. Later a principal playwright in the seminal performance group, the Open Theatre, van Itallie wrote that he "loved the production, but it was only on for two days. I wanted it more in the world."⁷⁰

War was later produced at the Caffè Cino in a production that van Itallie liked less than his Playwright's Unit production (partly because *War* was a more traditional, proscenium-style play). Phyllis Jane Wagner describes the Unit production of *War* in these terms:

It provided a thrilling debut, for at the Playwrights Unit Vandom Theater production on December 22, 1963, the audience cried "Author! Author!" and, although he didn't know who the audience was, van Itallie was "ecstatic."⁷¹

Yet, in spite of this auspicious debut, van Itallie was not satisfied with the Unit; he felt he was being treated as a neophyte in a "nursery school" operation. Van Itallie, in response to a questionnaire prepared by fellow Playwrights Unit playwright Tom Oliver, had this to say about the Unit:

For some reason, perhaps a good one, although I doubt it, the Unit was kept very hermetic. Reviewers, some of whom came out of curiosity or friendship to some of the plays, were not allowed to review the plays. . . . The intention, then, is merely

one of a workshop, not as a showcase at all. In that case I think that the Unit fails dismally. . . . *This is far too square a group to even try to pretend that it is a workshop in avant-garde theatre.* If it is not a place for experiments in the theatre, and it is not, then it must be a showcase. The 'beginning playwright who is learning mechanics and audience reaction' is, I think, a bit of a myth. . . . The really good playwrights have a theatre sense that no amount of workshops is going to teach the mediocre playwright. . . . *The path, then, I think, for the Barr/Albee/Wilder Unit would be that of a showcase . . . for far fewer playwrights (say a dozen at topmost, perhaps only six), . . .* admitted to this group of six or twelve. (van Itallie's italics)⁷²

Van Itallie's comments reflected a point of view common to the veterans of off-off Broadway, who regarded the Unit as a somewhat patronizing attempt of the "establishment" to take advantage of their talents. Sam Shepard expressed a similar point of view:

Now major steps are taken by important people in the habit of THEATRE. Things called NEW PLAYWRIGHTS SERIES presented by big brothers and uncles with paid actors, directors, lighters and such. Paying audiences. Happy times. Large criticizers from the dailies. Hand shakes all around. End of three week run. Brothers and uncles can now relax and rest assured that they did their bit for the cold people who never could have ever had a bigger break.⁷³

Shepard's and van Itallie's responses reflected the distrust of a generation who viewed the "Establishment" producers and theatre owners as part of that against which they sought to rebel. All the same, Shepard's and van Itallie's productions at the Unit were a measure of how seriously Richard Barr took the innovations which were happening off-off Broadway.

Following *War* was Leroi Jones' (Amiri Baraka's) play *Dutchman*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on Sunday, 12 January 1964. The play was directed by Edward Parone and featured Al Freeman, Jr. and Jennifer West. It was paired with Eric Hughes' play *The Empty Room* which featured Roscoe Lee Browne. The production of Jones' *Dutchman* at the Unit was explosive.

The audiences had visceral reactions to the play; that of both outrage and fierce admiration—reactions which the play continues to evoke. Lawrence Wunderlich offers his impression of the production:

There was “audience participation” of the sort that I had often read or heard about but never witnessed before. Shouts of “Yes, sir!” and “You said it!” and “Hallelujah!” and “A-men!” rose up from all over the theatre and punctuated the play. At the end, there was a standing ovation and the author was called to the stage.⁷⁴

Wunderlich’s impressions were confirmed by Edward Parone who added that opera singer Jessye Norman, who lived nearby, stopped in for the performance and offered her two bits of “audience participation” as well.⁷⁵

In an interview with James Hatch, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) offered his point of view regarding the audience’s reaction to *Dutchman*:

They reacted to the language and the dialogue, but I think they were puzzled. Where the woman gets really crazy and the young boy starts denouncing her, it seemed they were trying to figure out what was happening. It seemed to be like a mystery play [to them]. Then, when the boy is killed, it’s kind of a shock. You could see people leaning back. I think the whole context of that time, the social context of the play, added to it. Works really feed on their time and take their strength from that time. And *Dutchman* really reflects the things that were happening during that period. So most of the power in that play is just what I was able to get from what was happening.⁷⁶

Barr’s selection of *Dutchman* reflected a movement away from the abstractions of absurdist drama—to a more tangible, explosive theatre directly related to the issues confronting Barr’s 1960s audiences.

Baraka was pleased the Unit production, with Edward Parone’s direction, and in particular, actress Jennifer West:

She was a Southern white woman, from Appalachia—a hillbilly, actually. I thought that was good because she had a lot of intensity, rather than that kind of laid-back quality that a lot of New York and Hollywood types get. She had a very sharp

engagement in the dialogue. Very sharp. She didn't back off, so the dialogue really shot back and forth.⁷⁷

The success of the production of *Dutchman* proved that the Playwrights Unit was going to be a successful laboratory. *Dutchman* became the first play from the Playwrights Unit to actually move off-Broadway.

Shortly after the opening of *Dutchman*, Theater 1964 presented *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by Adrienne Kennedy on 14 January 1964 at the East End Theatre. The play was Albee's favorite, and he remains particularly proud of its production.⁷⁸ Ms. Kennedy was one of Albee's star students at his workshop at Circle in the Square theatre. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *Dutchman* opened within days of each other off-Broadway; a reflection of those turbulent times. Kennedy's play received a perceptive review by Howard Taubman who described it as "an overflowing portion of the hallucinated horrors that torment the last hours of a Negro girl."⁷⁹ It once again emphasized the influence that Albee wielded over the ABW producing organization. Although Kennedy did not produce other plays with ABW, and had no other plays produced at the Unit, she remained on its roster.

Ursule Molinaro's short expressionistic play, *The Engagement*, was presented on 1 March 1964 at Playwrights Unit. Lawrence Wunderlich, quite taken with her work, discussed the audience response:

There was much loud laughter during the grotesqueries of this dark little comedy of fragmentation. . . and the theatre was filled with many audible gasps during the horrors of the attempted destruction of the hero. Robert Haddad, the director, virtually choreographed the entire piece as a sort of wild *danse macabre*. . . and again, for the second time, the vociferous audience response required that the author go to the stage.⁸⁰

After this auspicious opening, Barr arrived at the cast party, "bursting with enthusiasm, and revealed the news that ABW was to option the play and

give it a regular off-Broadway production." Barr later forgot all about this promise, an occurrence that was all too common as his ardor for new plays was often "short and erratic."⁸¹

On 24 March 1964, the ABW production of Samuel Beckett's *Play* at the Cherry Lane was joined by Fernando Arrabal's *Two Executioners* and Leroi Jones' *Dutchman*, both plays directed by Edward Parone in an evening of works entitled *Three at the Cherry Lane*. *Dutchman* exploded off-Broadway as it had at the Playwrights Unit, confounding the author himself:

I remember the night that it [*Dutchman*] opened. At about two o'clock in the morning, I went to the newsstand at the corner of St. Mark's and Second Avenue and bought all the newspapers. I stood there reading them and they were so intense, so angry. They were much angrier than I'd expected. They called me names, said I was crazy, that I needed to be locked up. As I was walking back from the newsstand, I was thinking, 'Well, I can see now they want to make me famous for some reason. If they do that, I could kind of like it 'cause I have a lot of things to pay them back for.'⁸²

Dutchman drew criticism for its inferred anti-white rhetoric, for its similarity to Albee's *Zoo Story*, and for its inflammatory dialogue. It was later paired with Albee's *The American Dream* on 21 April 1964 at the Cherry Lane.

On 16 May 1964, the Broadway production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* closed after six hundred and sixty performances, having grossed \$2,585,166 since it had opened at the Billy Rose Theatre on 13 October 1962. Clinton Wilder estimated that the profits from the production were valued at more than \$750,000 including film rights.⁸³ While *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* continued in production both nationally and in Europe, its Broadway closing ended a certain source of income, and the following season would see ABW scramble to replace *Virginia Woolf's* income-earning potential.

Altogether, the first year at the Unit saw a large proportion of mediocre

work, but with Leroi Jones' *Dutchman*, van Itallie's *War*, and the smaller successes of other playwrights continuing to produce at the Unit, including Jean-Claude van Itallie, Lee Kalcheim, James Paul Dey, Tom Oliver, Ursule Molinaro, and Harvey Perr, there was also excitement for the coming season. The critical and commercial success of Jones' *Dutchman* alone justified the Unit's existence and certainly merited ABW's continued support.

Still, there was unrest among the Unit playwrights. Wunderlich offers this view regarding the Unit's first season:

At the end of the unit's first year, some of the members were not conscious that anything at all had happened. Others were vaguely disgruntled. Others were roaring mad. And still others wept because they felt that a dream had died. And some of us who were more concerned than others wrote letters to the producers. Others wrote long, unsolicited reports to the producers and poured out their hearts, their hopes, their fears.⁸⁴

In addition to this outpouring, Tom Oliver, one of the Unit playwrights, wrote a 15-item questionnaire and arranged for it to be distributed to the other playwrights.⁸⁵ Oliver's response, Jean-Claude van Itallie's response, and the tally of votes on this questionnaire are on file at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection of New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

Wunderlich had hoped for a more performance-oriented, less text-bound theatre. In response to the above-mentioned questionnaire's fourth question, "If, suddenly, more were to be spent, what single improvement would you like to ask for?" Wunderlich's response was:

I would like to see a greater synthesis of the arts . . . which, after all, is what the theatre is supposed to be. Not simply actors in rehearsal clothes on a bare stage . . . but a fusion of all the elements which make for exciting and what I would call *valid* theatre: costumes, sets, lights, sound effects and/or music, dance. I've heard somewhere that it's called "Total Theatre." Or have I got things mixed up?⁸⁶

While Wunderlich seemed most concerned about the Unit's aesthetics, the other playwrights were more concerned about technical difficulties.

Most of the playwrights thought that ABW's lack of firm commitment to the scripts created confusion. Producers and agents who came to the Unit assumed that the scripts had been optioned by ABW, when in fact, ABW made it a policy not to immediately option Unit scripts. This of course affected how the audiences responded to the work, since like van Itallie, most the playwrights treated the Unit as a showcase rather than a workshop. According to David Graeme, one of the Unit playwrights, audiences tended to be less focused, less serious than traditional off-Broadway "opening night" audiences, particularly during earlier, matinee performances.⁸⁷

For both Wunderlich and most of the playwrights, holding onto actors without pay was a problem. Wunderlich complained about having to "squash" rehearsals between "Broadway auditions, off-Broadway performances, industrials, television soaps, and commercials." The lack of payment, however, was not only a Unit problem, but a problem with all off-Broadway productions. David Graeme also complained about not being able to procure a decent director, but admitted he had not pursued Edward Parone diligently enough to help him find one. In spite of these problems, however, the Unit was still able to draw excellent performers.

Although there were problems with the lack of direction at the Playwrights Unit, there were administrative discussions going on between Parone, Barr, Wilder, and Albee to solve them. The producers were keeping tabs on what was being done at the Unit, as can be noted by Clinton Wilder's own notes regarding the plays there.⁸⁸ To be fair, ABW's producers certainly had their hands full with their off-Broadway producing, as well as their productions of Albee's plays on Broadway. In spite of this, Barr attended

nearly every production at the Unit over its nearly ten years of existence.

The next season, the Unit was able to afford, in addition to a theatre manager, two stage managers, Walter Cavalieri and Rilla Bergman, with Cavalieri doubling as a lighting designer. This stage manager set-up was similar to the Cherry Lane operation and added to the Unit's efficiency. Since there were two plays in continuous rehearsal at the Unit, one in the theatre and another in the lounge underneath, having two stage managers was a necessity.⁸⁹ Another change in the Unit organization was the replacement of Edward Parone, who continued on as a successful professional director, his career given a boost by his direction of Jones' *Dutchman*.

Parone was succeeded by Charles (Chuck) Gnys. Gnys was an experienced, Catholic University-trained director, who had experience as a Broadway stage-manager. He had been introduced to Edward Albee and Richard Barr through a mutual friend, Ned Rorem. According to Marcia Merrill Nash, Gnys's costume manager and production assistant at the Unit, Gnys was tremendously excited by the prospect, believing that the Unit was going to be the most important venue for new plays in New York City.⁹⁰

Theater 1965 began its fall season with the Playwrights Unit's production of Tom Oliver's *Mr. Altschuler's Tree* on 11 October 1964, followed by a play by Lee Kalcheim, *Don't Call Us*, on 18 October 1964. *The Folding Green*, an Albee-esque farce by poet and *New Yorker* poetry editor Howard Moss, was then produced at the Unit on 9 November 1964. Moss's play was the first full-length, three act play ever produced at the Unit. *The Folding Green* was also unusual because it represented the theatrical work of an established novelist. Unlike the American Place Theatre, the Unit usually produced plays by writers whose primary focus was playwriting.

Theater 1965's off-Broadway production of Otis Bigelow's *Giant's Dance*

at the Cherry Lane on 16 November 1964, was a flop. Bigelow, a Unit stage manager, was a close friend of Barr's. Howard Taubman, in his *Times* review, though suggesting that, "on the fringes of *The Giant's Dance* . . . are diverting intimations of fantasy and humor," criticized the production for "too much Disney-like cuteness and second-hand philosophy for comfort."⁹¹ In light of Barr's fall plans to present a series of new American plays at the Cherry Lane, the critical and commercial failure of *Giant's Dance* meant an uphill battle to win approval for the new plays to come.

The next important work produced by the Theater 1965 Playwrights Unit was Sam Shepard's short play *Up To Thursday*, produced with Otway Crockett's *The Burial Committee* on 23 November 1964. *Up To Thursday*, personally selected by Albee from a suitcase of scripts Shepard had deposited in his arms,⁹² was directed by Chuck Gnyss—the first play he directed at the Unit—and featured a young Harvey Keitel and Kevin O'Connor, a regular off-off Broadway actor. Of Shepard's many plays, it remains unpublished.

Shepard was one of several important off-off Broadway playwrights produced at the Unit during its Theater 1965 season. Others included John Guare, Lanford Wilson, and Jean-Claude van Itallie. The Unit was for Shepard, as it was for Wilson and van Itallie, problematic. Lacking the control over their work they held at Theater Genesis and Caffè Cino, they came up hard against the Unit's professionalism. Yet working in the professional theatre has always meant compromises. Where better to learn when and how to put one's foot down, and how to gracefully collaborate, than at a professional theatre ostensibly dedicated to the playwright?

Shepard's *Up To Thursday* is awkward, heavy-handed, cryptic, and lacks the form and control of his later work. Yet it is the work of a brilliant theatrical mind; a fascinating play, given over to a structure framed by the

musicality of a Beatles' rock song and a kind of rootless adolescent terror. The reaction by the other Unit playwrights was one of awe. As Harvey Perr states it, "Shepard knocked us out."⁹³ The importance of the play, even if Shepard himself has excluded it from his published oeuvre, was the introduction of a powerful radical form of playwriting based in "pop" culture and rock n' roll.

Following Shepard's *Up To Thursday* was a short play by Jerome Max, *What Color Goes With Brown?* Max was the subject of an article by Robert Pasolli which depicted him as one of a gaggle of new playwrights surviving on grants and non-commercial productions off-off Broadway in the hopes of landing a commercial career. Pasolli describes Max's particular plight:

Max's conception of the non-commercial theatre as a tributary rather than an alternative theatre lurks beneath the surface of most writers' involvement there. . . . Belief in the inherent superiority of professionalism is one of the disguises, the feeling that public acclaim justifies private existence is another. If there ever was a time when the non-commercial scene conceived of itself as an alternate to the commercial theatre . . . that moment is now. The attitude of Off-Off Broadway, and of the workshops and showcases is emphatically careerist, and each successful move into the commercial theatre. . . . entrenches that attitude.⁹⁴

Although Pasolli bemoans the lack of a strong noncommercial theatre, he ignores the operations off-Broadway, like ABW Productions, which were producing experimental plays and evolving into a not-for-profit theatre.

Barr considered off-Broadway the "underground, subsidized" theatre before there was a not-for-profit theatre in the United States. Many playwrights chosen by the Albee-Barr-Wilder workshop sustained critically important careers in the non-commercial (though professional) American theatre. The problem was not, as Pasolli puts it, the tainted ambitions of "careerist" writers—obviously if one is to continue writing for the theatre, one ultimately must be paid—the problem was "selling out," writing drivel

to appease the taste of the lowest common denominator. This kind of commercial pressure was exactly what Richard Barr was trying to prevent—and to a great extent he was successful.

Theater 1965's major production was Albee's *Tiny Alice*, produced on Broadway at the Billy Rose Theatre on December 29, 1964, directed by Alan Schneider, with settings by William Ritman. The production of *Tiny Alice* represented the turning point in the fortunes of ABW Productions, Inc., and thereby, the Playwrights Unit. Albee's *Tiny Alice* had proven difficult in rehearsal. Alan Schneider, its director, offers his impression of the play:

What that work was specifically saying, or how to make whatever it was saying clear, none of us was entirely sure—including, I believe, Edward. Still in his mid-thirties, he had written his "big, philosophical play," his *Lady from the Sea*, his *Dream Play*, his *Tempest*. Perhaps if he had waited to rewrite it once or twice before we went into rehearsal . . . but he would not.⁹⁵

Schneider's comments reveal ABW's central problem—that it rested its fortunes on a single playwright. Albee, as Linda Feinfeld Magyar relates, refused to explain his play even to its cast and director. The situation, including the odd casting of John Gielgud as Julian, insisted upon by Albee, was extraordinarily frustrating for the producers as well as for Schneider.⁹⁶

Tiny Alice, an important experimental work by a imaginative and forceful playwright, should not, perhaps, have been first produced on Broadway. No one in the ABW operation, however, was willing to say that to Albee. James Prideaux, who worked at the ABW offices, put it this way:

I honestly believe that Edward Albee's career was damaged by the one person who revered it most, by Richard Barr. Because Edward could do no wrong in Richard's eyes. He was never asked to rewrite. . . . He was never told point-blank that the play was too long, too wordy, too diffused, too lacking in drama. Whatever he brought into the office got produced . . . just as it was.⁹⁷

Prideaux confessed, as many Unit playwrights also confessed, of being jealous of Albee's success—yet there was truth to his assertion. This was the serious downside in making the playwright the unquestioned center of the producing paradigm—particularly when that playwright was Edward Albee.

Tiny Alice, however, opened to favorable reviews; Howard Taubman of *The New York Times* gave it this respectful mention:

The mark of a real writer is his refusal to stand still or repeat himself. In "Tiny Alice" Edward Albee has moved into the difficult, mysterious, ever tantalizing realm of faith. Mr. Albee has not, unless I am mistaken after a first hearing, cast fresh light on this theme. But he has written with the literacy of a man who knows that the word itself can be charged with drama and with a gift for making a scene on a stage reverberate with subtle overtones.⁹⁸

While Taubman's review was charitable, it emphasized the more inscrutable aspects of the play, a point stressed by other reviews of *Tiny Alice* which conspired to confuse readers and scare away audiences. During the previews audiences seemed to understand with the structure and narrative of the play; yet after the reviews had instructed them that *Tiny Alice* was incomprehensible, the audiences began to pull away.⁹⁹ Albee was furious and called a press conference on 22 March 1965 in which he lambasted the critics for their inability to support new and difficult plays on Broadway.

Sitting alone on the set in the Billy Rose theatre, surrounded by five television newsreel cameras, and speaking to an audience of one hundred and fifty press representatives, Albee refused to elaborate further on the meanings of *Tiny Alice*, but rather carefully explained its narrative.¹⁰⁰ Alan Schneider believed that this conference set into motion a long-lasting feud between Albee and the newspaper critics; one that ultimately shortened the run of *Tiny Alice*, curtailed the producing life of ABW Productions, Inc., and

nearly ended the career of Albee himself.¹⁰¹

The production lasted 167 performances, not a spectacular run, but certainly a respectable one. The problem for ABW Productions, Inc. was that *Tiny Alice* had been an extraordinary expense, and one that had eaten into the reserve created by *Virginia Woolf*. *Tiny Alice* had been groomed as Albee's next big hit, and a cash cow to boot—in fact, *Tiny Alice* set the pattern that would lead toward the ultimate collapse of the ABW firm; each year Albee would bring out new play, which would be promptly trampled by the critics, and contribute to the gathering financial crisis.

The next important play produced by the Theater 1965 Playwrights Unit on 31 January 1965 was Lanford Wilson's *No Trespassing*, a one-act play, directed by Milton Katselas. *No Trespassing* had been previously produced at Cafe La Mama (30 January 1964) and at the Caffè Cino (16 January 1965). Wilson was already a well-established off-off-Broadway playwright whose career would take off shortly after his Unit productions. Albee's response to Wilson's *No Trespassing* offers some insight into how playwrights were chosen for participation in the Unit, and how Albee (and perhaps Barr) sensed talent (or not) in the playwrights chosen. Albee wrote to Barr:

Attached, NO TRESPASSING, by Lanford Wilson. I have the feeling this fellow's dramatic instinct is, at the moment, pretty superficial. . . or, to put it better, second-hand. And, unfortunately, the play doesn't go anywhere except toward a revelation; the characters do not develop, and the piece is an incident, or a short story. But there's a deep-down kind of wildness, and I think we should encourage him, so let's put him in for a year and see what happens to him.¹⁰²

For most of the playwrights, including Wilson, the attitude was "watch and see what happens." Rather than look for a perfect script, Albee seems to have been looking for a certain spark of talent to nurture within the playwright.

On 7 and 8 February 1965, the Playwrights Unit produced Jean-Claude van Itallie's double bill *The Doris Plays : It's Almost Like Being and I'm Really Here*. Both plays were directed by Joseph Chaikin, founder of the Open Theatre. *It's Almost Like Being* was subsequently produced by the Open Theatre at the Sheridan Square Playhouse and on public television on Channel 13. Van Itallie published *Almost Like Being* in the *Tulane Drama Review* and in book form with his play *America Hurrah!* Not surprisingly, *Almost like Being* was van Itallie's last production at the Playwrights Unit.

With Barr's typical unbridled optimism, in spite of the poor showing for *Tiny Alice*, and in celebration of the fifth anniversary of Albee's *Zoo Story*, Theater 1965 produced, over the course of twelve weeks, eight new playwrights, most of whom had their work first presented at the Playwrights Unit. Entitled the New Playwrights Series, each evening of theatre was to be given eight performances. The first evening opened on 10 February 1965 at the Cherry Lane Theatre and consisted of Sam Shepard's *Up To Thursday*, Paul Foster's *Balls*, and Lanford Wilson's *Home Free*.

Shepard's *Up To Thursday* was the Unit production directed by Gnys, with Harvey Keitel and Kevin O'Connor. Paul Foster, a La Mama regular, had previously produced *Balls* at La Mama (4 November 1964) and at Caffe Cino (5 November 1964).¹⁰³ Though Foster had no plays produced at the Unit, his name was on its roster. Lanford Wilson's *Home Free* had also been produced at the Cino and at La Mama. Although Barr was not fond of the play, Albee insisted upon its production.¹⁰⁴ The reviews of the productions were respectful, and there was encouragement for both the playwrights and the producers. Leonard Harris of the *New York World-Telegraph* wrote:

Five years ago Barr and Wilder discovered Albee. Now they there are on another talent hunt. I suggest you join them. There aren't too many Albees extant, but the woods still yield

some rare fauna.¹⁰⁵

Most of the reviews encouraged the readers to attend the performances, though several reviewers found the language, form, or content of the plays enigmatic. The *Times* embraced the evening of neophytes, reporting on it rather than offering a traditional review. The plays were regarded as less important than the playwrights' opportunity to experiment on the stage.

While the New Playwrights Series was running at the Cherry Lane, the Playwrights Unit continued its regular season. The next important work produced there was John Guare's play *To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza*, directed by Edwin Patrick Aldridge on 21 February 1965. The experience had a profound affect on Guare:

They [Albee, Barr, and Wilder] leased a theater in the lower reaches of Greenwich Village on Vandam Street and from 1963 to 1969 for six months of the year, every week produced a new play by a new playwright. A movement called Off-Off-Broadway was beginning. You'd stop by the Barr-Wilder-Albee workshop to see what was on this week, to argue its merits, its flaws, how to fix it, how to protect it, to drink in this fabulous sense of the new. Who was in the play or who directed the play was not as important as the fact that what you were seeing was a new play written by a new American playwright.¹⁰⁶

Guare's recollection reflects Unit's primary importance as an off-off Broadway workshop (countering van Itallie's remarks) and as an entrée into the commercial theatre. *To Wally Pantoni We Leave a Credenza* was produced on NBC Television in 1969.¹⁰⁷ Guare considered *To Wally Pantoni* a seminal work in his own development, having tried out in one-act form the devices he would use in later plays like *The House of Blue Leaves*.¹⁰⁸

The New Playwrights Series at the Cherry Lane continued with a second evening of plays, *Pigeons*, a one-act play by Lawrence Osgood, directed by Edward Parone featuring Geraldine Fitzgerald, and *Conerico Was Here To*

Stay, directed by Melvin Bernhardt, both of which had been previously produced at the Unit. The plays opened on 3 March 1965 for eight performances. *Conerico* received the better reviews, although neither play received the strong if somewhat mystified reviews of the first evening.

On 30 March 1965, Theater 1965 sent a letter to the members of the Playwrights Unit announcing that operations at the Village South Theatre would be discontinued on a weekly basis. The reason given was lack of plays and lack of funds. With the closing of *Virginia Woolf* in May of 1964, the failure of *Giant's Dance*, and the abbreviated run of *Tiny Alice*, funding for the Unit had reached its lowest ebb. The Unit ended its season on 4 April 1965 with the second and third parts of Wunderlich's *9 to 5 to 0* (*A Neofarce in Three Doses*) the first half having been performed during the Unit's first season. *9 to 5 to 0* was not optioned by ABW Productions, and Wunderlich did not continue as the Unit's theatre manager in its following season. *9 to 5 to 0* was later produced at La Mama, E.T.C. on 9 June 1969.¹⁰⁹

The third evening in the New Playwrights Series included Kenneth Pressman's *Hunting The Jingo Bird*, directed by Chuck Gnys, and *Lovey* by Joseph Morgenstern, directed by Edward Parone. Pressman's play had been previously produced at the Unit. Morgenstern, a former drama critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* was a new member of Playwrights Unit, though he would not have any plays produced there. The evening was viewed as "less promising" by *Post* critic Richard Watts, Jr.,¹¹⁰ and Walter Kerr of the *Herald Tribune* clearly preferred Morgenstern's play over Pressman's.¹¹¹

Lovey hit a special chord with the critics because of its dark view of race relations in a time when race and gender were becoming important cultural issues. Pressman's play was lost on the critics who had come to expect Theater 1965 to present more experimental work. Both plays were "far less

avant garde than those that have preceded them yet they seem to shun the conventional and, as a result, fall between two schools."¹¹²

The fourth evening of the New Playwrights Series was the Pinter-esque *Do Not Pass Go* by Charles Nolte, who was not a Unit playwright. *Do Not Pass Go* was produced by Theater 1965 with Frith Banbury at the Cherry Lane on 19 April 1965. The play, which follows a structure similar to Albee's own *Zoo Story*, was well received, in particular, by the *Times*' Howard Taubman:

Of the new plays introduced by Theater 1965 at the Cherry Lane this season "Do Not Pass Go" is far and away the best. It is, in fact, one of the better new plays presented this season—not a vintage one, it is true—on or off Broadway.¹¹³

Taubman's enthusiasm, however, was not shared by the other critics. Nevertheless, the *Times* had provided the critical response that ABW needed. *Do Not Pass Go* ran for sixteen performances, more than any other evening in the Series.

Having nurtured a reputation for developing new plays,¹¹⁴ coupled with Barr's public campaign to discover another Albee, the New Playwrights Series was a litmus test for Theater 1965's ability to produce new writers. The cost of the Series, particularly after the failure of *Giant's Dance* and *Tiny Alice*, was beginning to pull at ABW's financial fabric. Audiences certainly did not turn out in droves for these problematic new plays—*Hunting the Jingo Bird* and *Lovey* closed after only six of eight proposed performances. This was perhaps a result of the series having been promoted as "plays you haven't seen by playwrights you haven't heard of yet."¹¹⁵

The "laboratory" atmosphere suggested by the reviews, reminiscent of van Itallie's complaints of the Playwrights Unit's "nursery school atmosphere," was perhaps also to blame for the series' mixed success. Harold Clurman offered this point of view regarding the series which might be

considered typical:

Since these plays were written by people in the formative stage of their development, we must regard their performance as workshop activities. One or two of these plays entertained, hardly any of them bored me, and a few show distinct glints of talent. None of them is good enough to attack! For this reason I do not wish to review them in the ordinary sense. What is most worth noticing is the traits they share. They possess a generic character in common with a dozen or so plays that I have seen in private showings.¹¹⁶

Clurman's view was perhaps a function of the attitude of the reviewers who regarded anything "downtown" as experimental and not entirely finished works—and the audiences responded in kind.

Also problematic was the pairing of the plays. Michael Smith of the *Village Voice* was particularly disappointed by the grouping of *Balls, Up To Thursday*, and *Home Free!*. He writes of this problem:

The plays represent radically different visions and methods, and each of them seems diminished in the context of the others. The lesson may be that mere excellence is not a sharp enough criterion for producers to use in selecting scripts to work on. The program as whole lacks direction and clarity of intention, and as a result it seems to be nothing but a showcase. Instead of a coherent production, an evening to which audiences might really want to come, we are given a collection of works out of context, lumped together in a vaguely educational manner, as if the only reason for attending is self-improvement and the experience necessarily a chore.¹¹⁷

If the decision was to pair weaker plays with stronger works, then ABW was guilty of not following its own successful pattern of slipping new works into production with its more critically acclaimed work.

The Theater 1965 season had been an important one for ABW Productions. It represented the turning point in the fortunes of the Unit. While Barr would continue ambitious projects—including producing Albee on Broadway, new plays off-off Broadway, and experimenting with repertory

production—the Playwrights Unit would never again present as many plays. Twenty-three plays had been produced at the Unit—the Theater 1966 Playwrights Unit would field only six plays, the Unit's average thereafter. Playwrights, in the future, would arrive with stronger credentials and their scripts and productions at the Unit would be given greater scrutiny.

Following the mixed results of the Theater 1965 season, Barr and Albee were invited to the first National Playwrights' Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Foundation. During the conference, the producer and playwright were grilled in a pointed question and answer session. Albee, for his part, proved the darker spirit of the two:

The majority of plays that our actors unfortunately have to act in and that our audiences seem to prefer to see are plays that one can't remember five minutes after you leave the theater. It's a kind of watching the television. It's parenthesis around life, rather than an underlining of some point of life. Now if that's the kind of theater that's wanted, it's the kind of theater that we'll get and it'll turn out to be the kind of theater we deserve. Which isn't so hot, is it?¹¹⁸

Albee was wrestling with a fundamental communication problem between himself and his audience. He was adamant that playwrights not abnegate their responsibility to question the status quo in an effort to "entertain" audiences, rather than "engage" them.

Barr, for his part, was queried on the details of how scripts were selected, and in particular, what made a play produceable in his mind. His response was typically upbeat, and at the same time, fairly rebellious:

What we look for is someone who is making an observation on the human situation, on the world today as he sees it in a way that is original and provocative and exciting. . . . Whether they're produceable or not doesn't, strangely enough, concern us as much as that first point. Obviously we are delighted if a young playwright or a not-so-young playwright presents us with a play that is produceable and we do it, such as LeRoi Jones

Dutchman, that sprang out of our playwrights' unit, and there have been several others. Hanley's plays of course you know and there are lots more coming.¹¹⁹

While Barr retained his relentlessly upbeat demeanor, it was clear that both Barr and Albee were wrestling with frustrations regarding not only the problems of critics and audiences, but also ABW's internal operations.

Also at the Playwrights Conference Lanford Wilson expressed his dissatisfaction with the movement of his plays from the Caffè Cino to the Cherry Lane. Part of the problem was moving the play into a larger house, but more importantly, with fewer performances at the Cherry Lane and even fewer at the Playwrights Unit, it was difficult to allow the material to grow. Wilson felt that with more time in front of an audience

the actors became more comfortable with the part, they began to do more interesting things and the reaction was different from night to night and you began to get a much clearer idea of what your play really was and the possibilities and the various reactions of the play on different houses. And when a play was done, after I'd had a couple of them done there, when a play was held over for two weeks, I learned even more the second week and it got considerably better.¹²⁰

For Wilson, the learning experience was better at the Cino because he had time to fiddle with the play; the Playwrights Unit, with its two to three performances per play, was not as useful.

More importantly, there were, as Wunderlich points out, serious morale problems at the Unit, serious enough to instigate a letter from Edward Albee to its members stating his concern that few of the playwrights bothered to observe each other's work. The Unit playwrights found the letter irksome because Albee himself visited the Unit infrequently. According to Wunderlich, it was his, Barr's, and Wilder's lack of involvement that contributed to the apathy at the Unit. It remained then for the Unit's third

season to solve some of these problems, particularly those which were based on a lack of direction from the producing partners. The solutions, financial and administrative, would come with establishment of ABW Productions, Inc.'s not-for-profit entity, Albarwild Theater Arts, Inc., and shortly thereafter, new funding, and a new proactive stance toward the Unit's playwrights and plays.

Notes

¹Richard Barr, Interview on WCBS-TV, 12 November 1963, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 2, Folder 2, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

²Joseph Cali, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 9 March 1997.

³Edward Albee, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 19 June 1996; Jerome Cline, interview with author, Lynbrook, New York, 2 June 1997. See Howard Atlee's comment in Marilyn Stasio, *Broadway's Beautiful Losers*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972), 422.

⁴Norman Nadel, "ABW Tries Both: Off Broadway, On—It's Costs That Count," *New York World-Telegram*, 15 November 1963.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Thomas Gale Moore, *The Economics of the American Theater* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), 48 (table III-2).

⁹John Keating, "A Producer should 'Produce'" *Theatre Arts* (September 1961): 12-13, 75-76.

¹⁰Cali, interview.

¹¹Barry Plaxen, "Managing the Cherry Lane Theatre," *Theatre Crafts* 1, no. 1 (March 1967): 32-37.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³The budgets of Playwrights Unit productions averaged between \$35 to \$300. See Chuck Gnys to Richard Barr, 11 October 1966 and 24 May 1967, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

¹⁴Robert Pasolli, "The New Playwrights' Scene of the Sixties: Jerome Max is Alive and Well and Living in Rome...," *Tulane Drama Review* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 154-162.

¹⁵Richard Barr, "The Playwright's The Thing," press release, undated,

Michael Kasdan Collection, Lawrence and Lee Institute, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷James Prideaux, telephone interview with author, 27 March 1995.

¹⁸Cline, interview.

¹⁹Cali, interview.

²⁰Elenore Lester, "Albee: 'I'm Still In Process'," *Sunday New York Times*, 18 September 1966, 1D.

²¹Faye Hammel, "Three For the Play: Theatre '64 says the writer must be king," *New York Times*, 3 March 1966, 10.

²²Plaxen, 36.

²³Stuart W. Little, *Off Broadway: The Prophetic Theatre* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972), 222.

²⁴Rodney E. Sheratsky, "The Off-Broadway Theatre, 1945-1962," diss. New York University, 1966, 421.

²⁵Michael Smith, "Richard Barr: Avant-Garde Producer of 'Rear-Guard' Plays," *The Village Voice*, 8 February 1962.

²⁶This spelling of "theatre" was the only time Barr/Wilder used it in its title, in all other years the spelling was "theater," as in "Theater 1963."

²⁷"Barr-Lutz-Brown Seek \$13,000 for 'Sudden End'; Off-Broadway Joint Venture," *New York Times*, September 1961.

²⁸Cali, interview.

²⁹Hammel, 10.

³⁰Little, 223.

³¹Sheratsky, 445.

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⁴⁴Doric Wilson, interview.

⁴⁵Richard Foltz, interview by author, New York, N.Y., 30 March 1997

⁴⁶Alice Drummond and Page Johnson, 1997, interview by author. New York, N.Y., 2 May 1997.

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⁶²Playwrights Unit budget, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

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⁶⁴Wunderlich, 18.

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Chapter IV

Producers at Work:

ABW Productions, Inc. on Broadway, Off-Broadway,
and Off-Off Broadway at the Playwrights Unit, 1966-1971

From the Theater 1966 season, ending with the poor reception of its 1971 production of Albee's *All Over*, ABW Productions suffered a series of setbacks resulting from lack of funding, poor producing and budgetary decisions, and the loss of key individuals in its organization, which precipitated its own decline as a producing organization and the dissolution of the Playwrights Unit in 1971. There were multiple signs of disintegration along the way: the commercial failure of Albee's plays, starting with *Tiny Alice* and culminating with his *All Over*, the swift closing of plays like Mercier's *Johnny No Trump* and the Theater 1969 absurdist repertory on Broadway, as well as the loss of Clinton Wilder as a producing partner. ABW's decline began in 1965 with a tightening of the budget for its Playwrights Unit.

On 2 August 1965, the members of the Playwrights Unit received a missive from Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Edward Albee, which stated that the Unit would operate for nine months rather than six and the Cherry Lane would be used for its activities (instead of a year-long lease of Village South). In this letter, the producers also requested that only the best work be submitted to them, and that the producers themselves would attend Unit production meetings and meet with the playwrights. The letter also requested first refusal on all new work, asked the playwrights to fill out an information form, and announced that the Unit had received a grant from

the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA).¹

Wunderlich noted that while the letter was ostensibly a “toughening up of the ABW attitude,” the changes mandated were a “general backsliding and disintegration of ABW’s initial policies regarding the Unit.” The letter was a weak attempt to address the Unit’s “lack of an aesthetic, the collapse of any esprit de corps, . . . fewer submissions of plays for productions, erratic attendance of productions by members, etc.” Wunderlich also commented on the “even darker cloud” of the “virtual failure” of Albee’s *Tiny Alice*.²

Wunderlich complained that the “shunting” of Playwrights Unit productions back and forth between the Cherry Lane and Village South theatres “served to destroy the last vestige of unity which the Unit had offered: the unity of a single place or headquarters.”³ Though Wunderlich offers an almost celebratory narrative of ABW’s financial troubles, Barr was doing everything humanly possible to keep the Unit open in spite of Theater 1965’s poor showing at the box office. This meant flexibility in the use of facilities, the number of productions, and the play selection process.

However, this same flexibility suggested that Barr, Wilder, and Albee were improvising, both with the Unit and the ABW organization as a whole. The constant shifting reflected Barr’s own production style; as an independent producer he did not have a board of directors to appease. Much of ABW’s instability, though, was a result of the constant scramble for funds—the Unit existed just as public arts funding was becoming established. Commercial producers, unlike the new regional theaters, were being left out of the funding equation—something which Barr bitterly resented.⁴

The grants received from NYSCA and the Music Corporation of America, Inc. (MCA) were similar amounts of \$5,000 each; certainly not enough to keep the Unit going. Clinton Wilder’s notes show that costs above

the \$10,000 raised by the grants were to be shared among the partners at a cost of approximately \$6,791.66 each.⁵ Acknowledging their need for subsidy, in the winter of 1965, ABW established a not-for-profit entity, Albarwild Theater Arts, Inc., to serve as its repository for private and public funding.

Given that not-for-profit funding was regarded with some contempt by commercial producers in the late 1960s, it is amazing that ABW Productions, established along the old lines of the independent producer, adapted so well. Bruce Hoover, co-manager of the Unit in 1971, offered this insight:

They [ABW Productions] had to have been in the right place at the right time; they only got small amounts of money. Richard ran the not-for-profit side of the business, and he didn't do fund raising. The idea of money from foundations and corporations was bizarre. Raising money for playwrights? Nobody had ever done that before. They really scored with that funding.⁶

Because the Unit was now operating under this subsidy, it had to include its budgets in its grant requests; these budgets offer some insight into how individual Unit productions were funded.

Table 4.— BUDGET FOR THE
THEATRE 1967 UNIT PRODUCTION OF
LEONARD MELFI'S *HALLOWEEN* (10/27/66)⁷

Scripts	\$44.52
Invitations	\$6.00
Postcards	\$16.00
Inserts	\$15.00
Programs and who's who	\$20.00
Production	\$28.78
Total	\$130.30

Table 4 shows the Unit production budget for Leonard Melfi's *Halloween*, produced at the Unit on 27 October 1966. In general, the largest

sum was spent for the copying of scripts, though occasionally production expenses increased when the plays demanded more sophisticated scenic elements. The other major expense was the mailing of invitations and postcards to solicit an audience. The bulk of the expenses were the copying of the scripts and the preparation of mailing and program materials for a total of 101.52. The actual production cost was \$28.78. The focus on mailing materials indicates how important the Unit's audiences were to its success; the total cost of the mailing (\$37.00) was more than the cost of production.⁸

Table 5.—PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT BUDGET 1966-67⁹

Village South Rental	\$7,500
Administrative Director	7,500
Technical Director	3,200
Production Expenses (15 Plays)	1,500
Electricity	1,200
Telephones	400
Miscellaneous (Taxes, Maintenance, Cleaning)	<u>1,200</u>
Total	\$22,500

The costs of production began to grow, however, as the Unit increased the number of shows and extended their run. Both the individual budgets of each Unit production and the Unit's overall budget had increased by 1970, reflecting the move from workshop productions to full performances and the growing cost of producing off-off Broadway. In Table 5, the 1966-67 Unit budget, the cost for administrative staff is \$10,700. By the 1970 season (Table 6) the cost is \$32,500, which it remains for the 1971 season (Table 7). The production budget moves from \$1,500 in 1967 to \$4,000 in 1970, and \$5,000 in

1971. The rental costs increase from \$7,500 at the Village South in 1967 to \$14,400 in 1971 at 83 East Fourth Street (for three floors), although the rental costs in 1970 on East Fourth Street are only \$4,200 (presumably because the Unit was using only one floor). But the final outcome of Unit's growth toward a professional showcase was that the Unit's total budget of \$22,500 in 1967 nearly tripled to \$64,750 by 1971.

Table 6.—THEATER 1970 PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT¹⁰
ESTIMATED BUDGET 1969-70

Managing Director	\$17,500
Assistant Director	10,000
Technical Assistants	5,000
Gas	1,000
Electricity	1,200
Maintenance	1,000
Printing & Mailing	750
Scripts	1,000
Production Expenses	5,000
Repairs	750
Rent	4,200
Photos	250
Office Supplies	350
Miscellaneous	<u>500</u>
	<u>48,500</u>

Reflecting the changes announced by ABW's letter was the Theater 1966 Unit production of Sam Shepard's one-act, *4-H Club*, directed by Chuck Gnys and produced at the Village South theatre on 9 September 1965. *4-H Club* is a more clearly delineated play than *Up To Thursday*, suggestive of Shepard's later, claustrophobic, "family" dramas. The three young male characters take on defined roles and relationships, play carefully manipulated games, and speak in separate voices. Shepard made substantial growth as a playwright between *Up To Thursday* and *4-H Club*, though whether it was the Unit's influence that brought this out is difficult to prove.

Table 7.—THEATER 1971 PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT¹¹
ESTIMATED BUDGET 1970-71

Rent (3 Floors)	\$14,400
Electricity	1,200
Heat	800
Staff	32,500
Printing & Mailing	750
Telephone	1,000
Scripts	800
Production Expenses	4,000
(10 Full plays	
(10 staged readings	
20 play readings)	
Theatre Maintenance	3,500
(included super)	
Office Supplies	500
Insurance 1,500	
Taxes	3,300
Miscellaneous	<u>500</u>
TOTAL	\$64,750

On 24 September 1965 the Playwrights Unit produced Emanuel Peluso's *Good Day*, featuring Frank Langella and Nancy Marchand at the Village South, directed by Ben Shaktman. Shortly thereafter, on 18 October 1965, Chuck Gnys and Peter Harron, as independent off-Broadway producers (with some funding from ABW), produced Peluso's *Good Day* on a double bill with Jerome Max's *The Exhaustion of Our Son's Love* at the Cherry Lane, for which they later received an Obie Award.¹² The double bill received good notices which emphasized the plays' language and the actors' performances. Once again, there was respectful encouragement for the young authors. However, Elliott Fremont-Smith of the *Times* considered both plays derivative:

One play [*Good Day*] was reminiscent of the works of Edward Albee. It might fit somewhere between "The American Dream" and "Tiny Alice," nearer the latter. The other play [*The*

Exhaustion of Our Son's Love] was, in its argot, firmly in the much older tradition of Broadway Jewish comedy, updated slightly with lines inspired, perhaps, by "How to Be a Jewish Mother." Lots of laughs, but mostly the same old laughs. The question here is, is inflection enough?¹³

Fremont-Smith was not alone in noting the similarity between *Good Day* and *Tiny Alice*. *Good Day* was nicknamed "tiny *Tiny Alice*" by ABW's staff.¹⁴

The Playwrights Unit next produced A. R. Gurney's *The Rape of Bunny Stuntz*, a one-act, on 13 November 1965 at the Cherry Lane, directed by Chuck Gnys. At the time, Gurney, a graduate of the Yale School of Drama, was the recipient of a J. Walter Thompson Playwriting Fellowship, and an assistant professor of English at M.I.T. *Bunny Stuntz* was Gurney's first play produced in New York City, and he was profoundly changed by the experience:

I didn't call myself a playwright or anything; I was a teacher without a Ph.D., holding on by my fingernails, trying to support this family of mine. And teaching! Oh! Six days a week! I was writing for WGBH, the local television station, doing journeyman work for them, and I did some work for Harcourt Brace editing drama for highschool texts, but I really didn't see myself as a playwright. It took me a long time to see myself that way. So this was probably the first time. It's very important to be able to call yourself a writer, rather than a dabbler. It was very gratifying to have that call from Chuck Gnys in New York.¹⁵

Like other Unit playwrights, Gurney pointed to the Playwrights Unit production of *Bunny Stuntz* as a turning point in his career.

All the resources of Theater 1966 were being funneled into Albee's Broadway-bound play, *Malcolm*—an adaptation of a novel by James Purdy. Directed by Alan Schneider, designed by William Ritman, with a cast of ABW regulars including Alice Drummond, Ruth White, Jennifer West, and Estelle Parsons, *Malcolm* was supposed to be the next big Albee hit.¹⁶ It was not. Not only was the budget blown out of proportion, but the play itself failed to connect with its audiences or the critics. At \$126,055 (originally projected for

\$150,000) the *Malcolm* budget was by no means unusual for Broadway production of a non-musical drama (\$125,000 was the 1962 average). However compared with that of *Virginia Woolf* (\$49,922), *Malcolm's* budget was obviously out of step with ABW's normally austere production budgets.¹⁷

Alan Schneider, the director of *Malcolm*, knew from the beginning that the play had problems. He offers this anecdote of *Malcolm's* woes:

People who are not in the theater inevitably ask theater people who happen to be associated with an obvious failure whether they knew all along that they had no chance. In the case of *Malcolm*, I think we did. But we kept pretending that we didn't; that in the theater *anything* is possible. Half of me kept thinking that the actors or the lines or those wild costumes might, at the last second, provide a magical transformation. Half of me kept hoping that the producers would finally get Edward to agree to cancel the opening.¹⁸

Schneider also complained about the elaborate set, about "treadmills that never worked" and "confusing and inconsistent lighting."¹⁹

The show was panned by the *Post's* Richard Watts (normally an Albee fan) and received this disastrous *Times* review from Stanley Kauffman:

The structure is more organic than "Tiny Alice," but the net effect is the same: arty hugger-mugger—almost a superciliousness that permits the viewer to supply meanings if he chooses or else to be content with his ignorance. . . . This view reduces ideas to decoration, character to pageant symbol, and theme to a conveyor belt for effects. It is to shrink art to no more than sensual response—one kind or another of "happening." To some of us, this modish view is nihilistic, not progressive.²⁰

Kauffman's review was a barometer for the impatience most critics were developing with Albee's work. Having been chided by Albee as philistines, the reviewers were hungry for blood. The combative relationship between Albee and his critics added to ABW's spiraling financial woes.

The last production of the Theater 1966 Playwrights Unit was James Prideaux's *Postcards*, directed by Richard Barr. *Postcards* was Prideaux's first play to be produced, and he was one of the Unit's most enthusiastic supporters. Of his *Postcards* experience, Prideaux writes:

At the end [of the performance of *Postcards*] they wouldn't stop applauding and Richard pushed me to my feet, saying, "Jimmy, you'd better go up." So I ran up on stage and took a bow with my beaming actors. I suppose I went someplace after that. I assume I got home. But I have no recollection of it. I was in another world. . . . The most exciting night of my life had been in the little Cherry Lane theatre on a summer night in 1966. And nothing was ever to match it. . . .²¹

As an ABW office worker, Prideaux was the ultimate insider. His comments, from an unpublished memoir, provide a window into ABW's development process. *Postcards* was later produced on Broadway by Richard Barr.

The Theater 1966 Playwrights Unit season was remarkable for its shift to fewer but better productions—both in terms of stagecraft and writing. Nearly all the plays were directed by Chuck Gnys, giving the season a stylistic unity. Gnys ran the Unit with an easygoing management style and a passion for professional, high-quality productions.²² He was particularly skilled in using lighting to offset the Unit's minimal production values.²³ The Theater 1966 Playwrights Unit writers had more playwriting experience; many had already received grants and other awards for their writing. The number of performances doubled, from two or three performances to five or more. If Unit production values had hovered between workshop and showcase, they were now tending toward the latter; production costs began to rise.

On 1 June 1966, Sam Zolotow of the *Times* reported that Albarwild Theater Arts, Inc. had received a grant of \$197,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation (table 8).²⁴ This grant was to be matched by \$65,000 from other

sources. \$32,500 was earmarked for the Unit; the balance for the production of new plays and revivals at the Cherry Lane. The matching funds were to come from the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities and the NYSCA.

TABLE 8.—ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION GRANT DISBURSEMENT TO ALBARWILD THEATER ARTS, INC.²⁵

	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69
Rockefeller Foundation	\$100,000	\$40,000	\$25,000
Other sources	\$ 35,000	\$95,000	\$110,000

This funding provided for a full three-year lease of the Village South theatre which was renamed The Playwrights Unit. The Unit was given a full renovation, including painting, a new marquee, a new sound system, more lighting equipment, and a new set of masking flats. The stage was raised to improve sight lines and made more flexible in order to allow for varying levels. The lounge and dressing rooms were renovated as well.²⁶

The funding could not have come at a better time. The Theater 1966 season, though hardly as ambitious as Theater 1965, had been a financial disaster with the sudden closing of *Malcolm*. Yet the Playwrights Unit had become much more focused; it wasn't necessary to produce twenty to thirty plays to justify the Unit's existence. Fewer plays by experienced playwrights with more performances was a better formula; it was the formula that produced Mart Crowley's *Boys in the Band*.

On 6 September 1966, Theater 1967 began its Festival of American Plays, initiated with the production of three one-act plays by Thornton Wilder, *The Long Christmas Dinner*, *Queens of France*, and *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*. Wilder was an early supporter of Albee's work, a

friend of Alan Schneider,²⁷ and an innovative writer in his own right. The producing choice was a happy one; the three plays, directed by Michael Kahn, received excellent reviews, were a hit at the box office, and provided just the right note to start the Theater 1967 season. The Wilder plays moved to the Orpheum theatre, a larger house on Second Avenue.²⁸

Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little* was then produced at the Playwrights Unit on 8 September 1966. The one-act play, starting with its Unit production, made a five year developmental journey during which it was transformed into a full-length play. One stop along the way was Edward Parone's developmental group at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles where it won an award. In February of 1970, *Miss Reardon* moved to Broadway with the stellar cast of Julie Harris, Estelle Parsons, and Nancy Marchand. While not as successful as Zindel's *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon-Marigolds*, *Miss Reardon* was characterized as a hit by *Variety* and was Zindel's last major success on Broadway.

The Unit production of *And Miss Reardon* came at an important moment for Zindel. Though he had received a Ford Foundation grant for his *Gamma Rays*, which had premiered at Houston's Alley Theatre, Zindel was still, at this point, a chemistry teacher in Staten Island. The success of *Miss Reardon* at the Unit and later at the Mark Taper Forum was an important stepping stone to the 1970 success of *Gamma Rays*. In spite of this, Zindel thought there was something wanting in the Unit's structure:

What the Playwrights Unit was missing was the great vision of a theatre person who wanted to nurture playwrights. . . . a special kind of mother-goddess or father-god. There was nothing like that. There was Barr who was a great producer. There was Wilder who was the money man. And then there was Albee, who was an important playwright. But there was no one there who had that other thing. They all played their parts as best they could, which was terrific and very generous in the light of how

filled their lives were. But, if the ideal play is a dream, you need someone with vision who could help you develop that dream. There wasn't anyone at the Unit who could do that.²⁹

But Zindel also noted there was a kind of male-oriented family created by the producers with elements of "fun, adventure, and love" that made the Unit and all of ABW productions special.

Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*, then opened at the Martin Beck Theatre on 22 September 1967. Alan Schneider offers this memory:

Although the response, as in previews, could not match the thunderclap intensity of that first head-on collision with a new writer, it filled the Martin Beck. Then the reviews came out. Everyone liked us. Almost everyone, that is. Walter Kerr, the new daily critic for *The New York Times*, felt the play was too talky and too hollow. . . . Walter analyzed it to death, sounding as though he was trying hard to rationalize a personal distaste. I came home with Jean...saying that if this play—this level and quality of dramatic writing—did not survive because of Walter Kerr's abstract and intellectual ideas about playwriting, it would not be possible for me to work in the New York theater.³⁰

Schneider's disappointment in the reception of this, Albee's first play to win a Pulitzer Prize, was perhaps the only damper on the Theater 1967 season, one which was busy, eclectic, and particularly fruitful for the Playwrights Unit. In spite of Kerr's review, *A Delicate Balance* ran for a total of 132 performances and received the Pulitzer Prize in May of 1968. Though the success *Delicate Balance* did have was mixed, it provided a note of artistic excellence that resonated throughout the Theater 1967 season.

On 11 October 1966 Theater 1967 produced Lee Kalcheim's *Match Play* and *Party For Divorce* at the Provincetown Theatre, directed by Robert Livingstone. Michael Kasdan, ABW's production manager, Inc., served as a co-producer along with Clinton Wilder and Richard Barr. Both *Match Play* and *Party For Divorce* had been previously produced at the Playwrights Unit.

Walter Kerr did not have many good things to say about either play, attributing their weakness to the writer's inexperience:

Watching upcoming playwrights try their wings can be fun or it can be strangely flat. The flatness that trails the author, Lee Kalcheim . . . is, I'm afraid, twofold. It begins with the strictly conventional design of his people and his props, which is something we don't exactly expect of ambitious youngsters today.³¹

Kerr's comments echo the critics who expected new plays to offend their sensibilities and push form and content to outrageous limits. When ABW playwrights presented more conventional work, the critics were felt short-changed. The playwrights were damned if they risked formal innovation and damned if they didn't. The critical response was also an indication of ABW's improvised producing strategy.

The Festival of American Plays at the Cherry Lane continued with George Kaufman's *The Butter and Egg Man*, produced on 17 October 1966 and directed by Burt Shrevelove. Barr shifted from his embrace of the European avant-garde in a calculated attempt to connect new American playwrights with earlier American drama and comedy. By reviving Kaufman's *The Butter and Egg Man*, "the granddaddy of all show-biz blockbusters," as Kerr noted in his review of production, Theater 1967 linked itself with the unabashed showmanship of earlier American theatre. The play, while not a commercial success, provided momentum for the season at the Cherry Lane.

The Unit then produced Leonard Melfi's *Halloween* on 27 October 1966, directed by Melvin Bernhardt. Melfi was already an established off-off Broadway playwright, with previous productions at La Mama and Theater Genesis. This production was followed on 15 December 1966 by Warren Wexler's *The Martyrization of Hilda*, featuring actress Viveca Lindfors. A film star in her native Sweden by the time she performed in Wexler's play,

Lindfors' appearance at the Unit was another example of Barr's ability to book major stars to work gratis on new plays at his Playwrights Unit.

On 26 December 1966 Theater 1967 presented the Paul Taylor dance company at the ANTA Theatre. This was one of many times that Barr showcased Taylor's dance group. Taylor was a close friend and a frequent guest at Barr's home.³² ABW next produced Unit playwright Frank Gagliano's *Night of The Dunces* at the Cherry Lane on 28 December 1966. Kerr's review for the *Times* was not encouraging:

Author Gagliano contrives a few passages of moderately effective melodrama as switchblades pop loose and stray cigarette lighters seem to menace the written word, but he is never able to resolve the split personality that is the essential personality of his play. In the end, it is a bit as though the Sermon on the Mount were being decked out with tricks from "The Cat and the Canary," all human psychology having fallen by the wayside.³³

Impatient with the Albee/Pinter menace that characterized many of ABW's new American plays, Kerr was at least reviewing the play and not the process as had been his wont with the New Playwrights Series.

The Unit then produced Louis Auchincloss's *The Club Bedroom* on 12 January 1967, and directed by Chuck Gnys. Auchincloss, a well-established writer, author of such novels as *The Great World and Timothy Colt* and *Pursuit of the Prodigal*, was brought to the Unit through connections with Chuck Gnys and Perry Knowlton, Gnys's long-time companion. *The Club Bedroom*, Auchincloss's only work for the theatre, dramatizing the woes of a society matron down on her luck. The play featured two outstanding actresses, Jessie Royce Landis, who had appeared on New York and London stages, and Dorothy Sands, a 35-year Broadway veteran.

One of ABW's most important off-Broadway productions of off-off Broadway writers was Lanford Wilson's *The Rimers of Eldrich*, which opened

at the Cherry Lane on 20 February 1967. *Rimers* was directed by ABW regular Michael Kahn, who had also staged Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. If Alan Schneider was ABW's most-favored director, then Kahn was its next-favored. Wilson's *The Rimers of Eldritch* was, after Jones's *Dutchman* and Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, the most critically successful new play yet produced by ABW Productions. Of its many favorable reviews, Dan Sullivan's review in the *Times* was typical:

We applaud when new ground is won for the theater by the avant-garde. Shouldn't we applaud when the ground is held? Lanford Wilson's new play at the Cherry Lane suggests that we should. There is nothing new in the fragmented voices and fractured time sense of "The Rimers of Eldritch"—nothing that would surprise Joyce or Thornton Wilder or, in particular, the Dylan Thomas of "Under Milk Wood." But to say that Mr. Wilson makes use of other's methods is not to say that he makes poor or cheap use of them. In fact, he handles the collage technique so beautifully that we leave convinced that no other method would have served his story and characters half so well.³⁴

While the review of *The Rimers of Eldritch* by the *Times* was not explosive, the play's success was important, because it was the first time that a veteran off-off Broadway playwright had achieved an important off-Broadway success.

Rimers validated the off-off Broadway institutions, like the Caffe Cino and the Playwrights Unit, as important contributors to the future of the commercial theatre. For Wilson, however, the experience of moving from the Cino to the Cherry Lane represented a frustrating loss of control:

We had been producing our own plays; I would find a director and the director would find the cast and some of the cast members would build the set and we sort of did everything ourselves. So when we turned professional we were assigned a director. A director would come to us and say I like your play very much and then we go to casting and they would cast it; they would have regular casting calls. No one you wanted would get in, and so it was very strange. It was like a peek at the future. It was just very, very different.³⁵

Added to this dilemma was the absence of Wilson's director of choice, Marshall Mason. Wilson was not pleased with Michael Kahn's direction, because *Rimers* was "a play for voices" and Kahn was not able to achieve this effect to Wilson's liking. Even so, the production won the Vernon Rice Award and, as Wilson confessed, "it sort of put me on the map." Wilson emphasized that the effect of this production was to prepare him for the complexities of the American commercial theatre.

The Playwrights Unit then presented Emanuel Peluso's *Little Fears* on 23 March 1967, directed by Chuck Gnys. It featured actress Nancy Marchand, who had performed in Peluso's *Good Day*, and also actress Judith Granite, a Playwrights Unit regular. On 29 April 1967, the Playwrights Unit presented *Afternoon of a Sugar Cube* by Tom Oliver, which was directed by Chuck Gnys. The production was a staged reading, one of the few the Unit ever gave under Gnys's direction. Included in the cast was a young Richard Thomas, the future star of the television show *The Waltons*.

Included in the program for *Afternoon of a Sugar Cube* was a questionnaire from the playwright, which touched on the use of LSD, homosexuality, and other material which the audience might find "shocking." This was the only occurrence of an audience questionnaire in the Unit's history and points to its perhaps "square" atmosphere. It is hard to imagine such a questionnaire being passed around at La Mama or Caffe Cino. It was clearly an attempt to gauge how this sort of material would appeal to the admittedly more conservative off-Broadway audiences.

Continuing in this examination of drug culture was ABW's off-Broadway production of Grandin Conover's *The Party On Greenwich Avenue*, which portrayed the downside of a Greenwich Village drug party. Directed by Richard Altman and featuring Clarence Williams III (later of

television's *Mod Squad*), the play was roundly lambasted by the *Times* Dan Sullivan, although George Oppenheimer offered this perspective:

This first work of 29-year-old Grandin Conover is sometimes muddled and often diffuse, but it is filled with a strange fascination and, at times, a tenderness and compassion. I am not sure that I understand all that he is trying to say. The play has the effect of what I imagine a psychedelic experience must be At all events, it has definitely the nature of a dream from which you awaken regretfully when the author falters, but recapture and are caught up again in his witching world.³⁶

Conover's play pushed the boundaries of content in a tamer fashion than Oliver's play, which Barr must have considered too racy for off-Broadway.

The Theater 1967 season was one of more ambitious of the Albee/Barr/Wilder partnership. Newly funded through the Rockefeller Foundation, ABW and its Playwrights Unit took a more conservative approach to producing new plays; forging a link between older, established American plays and the new American playwrights. The Theater 1967 season had seen a new luster in the work of ABW's star playwright, Edward Albee, with his Pulitzer Prize for *A Delicate Balance*. Theater 1967 produced a total of six plays off-Broadway, and a total of eight new plays, several of them full-length, at the Unit. Notably absent from the Theater 1967 season were the absurdist European playwrights. ABW Productions was committed to a more realistic brand of dramaturgy and would continue in this vein until 1969, when ABW would, somewhat anachronistically, present the plays of Albee, Beckett, and Ionesco in repertory at the Billy Rose theatre on Broadway.

Theatre 1968 began with the Playwrights Unit production of Steven Jacobsen's *Needs*. *Needs* was the first play directed at the Unit by Robert Moss, who would become its manager in 1971. Jacobsen, a real estate lawyer who had studied playwriting at Circle in the Square theatre with Jack

Richardson, had his first play, *The Kibosh*, produced at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Anspacher Theatre. Jacobsen sent his unsolicited script in to the Playwrights Unit and Chuck Gnys contacted him soon after. He was thrilled with the attention his play received at the Unit:

What was so wonderful about the Playwrights Unit is that as a young playwright you got the full process. You worked with a director; he always had questions. And he would come with his questions and I had to have a dialogue with him . . . and I'd have to change the play, if we agreed. That was a very exciting process; it was a collaboration that as a neophyte I had no idea about. This whole idea of working with a director of experience . . . with actors of experience, of going to auditions, going to rehearsals, of reworking the play as it proceeded from the page to the stage was what was offered to a playwright at the Playwrights Unit.³⁷

Jacobsen emphasized the difference between his experience at the Unit and at the New York Shakespeare Festival—while the NYSF production of *The Kibosh* was exciting in its own right, much more time was taken at the Unit to answer his needs as a new playwright.

Theater 1968 then produced Mary Mercier's *Johnny No-Trump* on Broadway at the Cort Theatre, where it was directed by ABW veteran Joseph Hardy.³⁸ Previously produced in a reading at New Dramatists where Mercier was a member, *Johnny No-Trump* was her first play. Unfortunately neither the play or the production was well received by the critics. Clive Barnes, now the lead critic for the *Times* offered this conciliatory but killing view:

Mary Mercier's "Johnny No-Trump," which came to the Cort Theater last night, cannot be characterized as either good or bad. In fact, if I had to summarize it with one word I'd be tempted to call it schizophrenic. For there are times when the characters . . . seem to be talking with absolute truthfulness, but the moment passes, and within seconds the play has changed gear and is offering what, especially by comparison, is nothing more than slick gibberish.³⁹

This "schizophrenic" production was the first time ABW had ever presented

a first play by a new playwright on Broadway—even Albee's first plays had been presented off-Broadway. The play included a stellar cast: Pat Hingle, Sada Thompson, James Broderick, and Bernadette Peters. While generally panned, *Johnny No-Trump* was complemented for its exceptional production, rounded out by excellent direction, a superb cast, and an exceptionally beautiful set by William Ritman. In an historic act of anger and frustration with the critics, Richard Barr, perhaps unfairly, closed *Johnny No-Trump* without a second performance. The play was such a phenomenal flop, even by Broadway standards, that its name became synonymous with failure; a play closed suddenly on Broadway was *Johnny No-Trumped*.⁴⁰

Johnny No-Trump was followed by the Playwrights Unit production of James Prideaux's *Lemonade*, which had been rehearsing at the same time. Prideaux was working in the ABW office during *Johnny No-Trump*'s production period and was horrified to see that Mercier, under the pressure of a Broadway opening, never solved the play's ending (a point which Barr later conceded)⁴¹:

Richard had made a mistake in not taking the play out-of-town for a run of previews before coming into New York. Surely then the local reviews would have prodded them into changing that ending. But Richard didn't take plays out-of-town and there was a reason for that. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, his biggest hit and the high-point of his career, hadn't gone out-of-town. And *Woolf* was the criterion in that office for ever after. 'This is the way we did it with *Woolf* and this is the way we do it,' I heard him say a hundred times. He was to pay a price for that.⁴²

Prideaux was particularly incensed that the play worked up to the last five minutes when, in his words, "a hit became a flop."⁴³ Barr's aggressive attempt to move to Broadway failed because he ignored his own successful producing strategies and because his organization had neither the financing or the organization to produce on Broadway as well as it could off.⁴⁴

Prideaux's *Lemonade* went into rehearsals with Mitchell Nestor as its director and actresses Charlotte Rae and Irene Dailey. Prideaux then, perhaps foolishly, left the rehearsals and continued his work on *Johnny No-Trump*. He returned only to discover that his "delicate little play had become a kind of vulgar, rowdy farce." He immediately asked Chuck Gny's to cancel the production—the first production ever canceled at the Playwrights Unit. Prideaux was justifiably terrified of Barr's reaction, as he relates:

Now Richard Barr had a drinking problem. . . . Because he started drinking at lunch, the affable, reasonable Richard we had known in the morning could be anything but once the drinking started. Unfortunately, that evening was the first paid preview of *Johnny No-Trump* and it was my job to be on hand. As I came down the street toward the Cort Theatre . . . Richard saw me. . . he suddenly turned and said the very words I dreaded to hear. "How are things going downtown, Jimmy?" he asked. I took a deep breath. "Richard, I canceled that production this afternoon. It wasn't doing justice to my play." He walked right over to me and put his nose almost up to mine. He had been drinking heavily. His eyes narrowed into slits. "Well, I am . . . very . . . very *angry!*" he snarled.⁴⁵

Prideaux was one of several ABW employees who mentioned Barr's drinking. Albee himself mentioned that Barr had to be escorted out of rehearsals on occasion. But the story had a happy ending. Barr contacted Prideaux the next morning, "perfectly sober and very cheery" and told Prideaux, "I just want to say, Jimmy, that you did exactly the right thing. It's such a good play. We'll do it later. And we'll do it *right*." Both incidents, *Johnny No Trump* and *Lemonade*, reflecting Barr's temper as well as his drinking problems, coupled with chronic underfinancing, inevitably contributed to the collapse of the Albee/Barr/Wilder producing partnership.

Theater 1968 next produced, on Broadway, Albee's *Everything In the Garden*, an adaptation of the play (which had appeared in London only five years before) by English playwright Giles Cooper. The cast included Barbara

Bel Geddes, Barry Nelson, Robert Moore, Richard Thomas (who had just appeared at the Playwrights Unit), and Tom Aldredge, and was directed by Alan Schneider, with settings by William Ritman. Only Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder were listed as the producers. Once again, the reviews were mixed, the audiences low, and the production foundered, closing eleven weeks after it opened. Clive Barnes' response was typical:

The theme of the play, from beginning to end, is entirely Mr. Cooper's. Mr. Albee has added nothing but points of differing emphasis. . . . Mr. Albee's play is *not* so good as the original. It lacks cool, it strives too hard to be a hit—which Mr. Cooper's play . . . quite definitely was not. . . . This is a monstrously heavy handed account by Mr. Albee of a stealthily subtle play. If Mr. Albee wishes to sing us a song of social significance he should not choose such a shrill and hysterical falsetto.⁴⁶

Barnes seemed irked that Albee was palming the play off as his own. Though not a disaster, the play certainly not the success needed after Mercier's play.

Yet, even with the so-so critical reception of *Everything In the Garden*, the Theater 1968 season forged on. Barbara La Fontaine, in a *Sunday New York Times* article on the ABW partnership, offers this view:

The play's [*Everything In the Garden's*] demise came rather earlier than expected, and the three producers sound casual indeed when describing their operation. Nevertheless, if one chooses to ask the question, "Is this any way to run a producer's office?" the answer has to be, "You bet it is." . . . As for the cheerful vagueness with which Albee, Barr and Wilder describe the way they work, the association has been a sound one from its beginning seven years ago, and at this point the partnership may be unique on Broadway for the general peace and quiet with which it goes about the business of producing plays.⁴⁷

Yet even as "peace and quiet" reigned in the producing partnership, economic realities were beginning to rise to ABW's glossy surface.

In March of 1968, with the closing of *Everything In The Garden*, Clinton Wilder withdrew as a partner. According to the brief *Times* mention

of the event, Wilder was pulling out to attend to family investments, including his own Fantod Foundation. The same announcement disclosed that Barr was planning to produce Mart Crowley's *The Boys In the Band* with Charles Woodward, a Buffalo insurance agent, who was to replace Wilder.⁴⁸

Several ABW staff members believed that Wilder's decision to leave the partnership was based, in part, on Barr's decision to produce *Boys In The Band* which dealt frankly with homosexuality.⁴⁹ While all three ABW partners were gay, only Barr was fairly open about it.⁵⁰ Albee's own nonparticipation as a producer on *Boys In The Band* may be explained by a self-confessed dislike for the play—perhaps buoyed by Albee's own career-long insistence that he not be pigeonholed as a "gay" playwright.⁵¹ Ironically, *The Boys in the Band* was exactly the kind of hit Barr had wanted from his Playwrights Unit, yet it was too "far out" for his partners.

Wilder did later arrange for his Fantod Foundation to provide funding for the Theater 1969 Broadway repertory and joined Barr and Woodward in the 1976 production of Albee's *Seascape*, but for all intents and purposes the Albee/Barr/Wilder partnership was over. The loss of Wilder had a profound effect on the partnership. He was a more experienced producer than Charles Woodward, and a necessary foil to Barr's unbridled enthusiasm. Woodward, with neither the experience nor the clout to provide this hint of austerity, would prove to be less effective as producing partner.⁵²

Regardless of Albee's and Wilder's discontents, Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* was one of the most important and successful plays to come out of the Unit. The production, which opened on 23 January 1968, was directed by Robert Moore, who was currently starring as Jack in Albee's *Everything In The Garden*. The cast included Kenneth Nelson, Frederick Combs, Cliff Gorman, Nicholas Cortland, Laurence Luckinbill, Chuck Daniel, Robert La

Tourneaux, Peter White, and Keith Prentice, with settings by Peter Harvey.

Crowley, an out-of-work screenwriter at the time, recalled the difficulty he had in getting the play a producer. He left the play with an agent, Jane Roberts of Richard London International, and, as he writes:

I remember I left her office, and about mid-way in the block was this rundown movie house, playing some Andy Warhol picture. . . . When I came back, she was a changed woman. She sat at her desk, straightening pencils and scooping up ashes into little piles and patting everything down, and never once looking me in the eye. And she said, "I don't know anyone I can send this to. This is like some weekend at Fire Island!"⁵³

Distraught, Crowley inquired if the agent knew Richard Barr. She did, contacted him, and the next day, to Crowley's and his agent's surprise, Barr summoned Crowley to make arrangements for a Unit production. Robert Moore, an actor playing the role of Jack in Albee's *Everything In The Garden* was chosen to direct. A graduate of Catholic University, Crowley knew Chuck Gnys at the Unit, and there is a question whether Gnys assisted Crowley on the revisions of the script. According to Perry Knowlton, Crowley had written parts of the play at his and Gnys's home in Andes, New York. Gnys had, according to Knowlton, offered Crowley dramaturgical advice on the play. Although Crowley did not remember these meetings with Gnys, he did concede that the characters of Larry and Hank in the play were based on Gnys and Knowlton.⁵⁴

The audience reaction, like the reaction to Jones's *Dutchman*, was visceral. Crowley didn't remember anyone attending the first night of the Unit production, but by the second night, "there was a line around the block. The New York intelligentsia [began to] descend on the play. And suddenly it was famous."⁵⁵ Crowley's remarks echo those of van Itallie's, Jones's, and others about Unit audiences; word of mouth was extremely powerful. Gnys

turned away more than three hundred people but could not extend the run due to actors' commitments and Equity rules forbidding more than ten performances.⁵⁶ The play was quickly moved Theatre 4, a 299-seat house on West 55th Street, two parts were recast, and it opened on 14 April 1968.

The Boys in the Band settled in for a run of 1001 performances off-Broadway. According to Joseph Cali, the production made even more money than *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*⁵⁷ Richard Barr wisely kept the production off-Broadway and raised the ticket prices to an unheard of \$10 per seat.⁵⁸ Of the many reviews, most quite positive, perhaps Harold Clurman's in *New York* magazine is the most eloquent:

It is skillful and amusing in its dialogue, frank in attitude, casually obscene in speech, kind at heart, sentimental at bottom. . . . Perhaps the writing and production of such a play should be accounted an act of courage. Yet I doubt it. It would be more accurate to say that it is a novelty: no such overt depiction of a homosexual milieu has ever been presented on our stage. . . . Though full of camp fun, *The Boys in the Band* is not a cheap exploitation of its subject. It aims to show the guilt and self-loathing . . . from which many homosexuals, like members of all minorities suffer. Within the restricted area of its material . . . *The Boys in the Band* is a legitimate comedy whose author should be identified as a playwright to be watched.⁵⁹

Buoyed by such reviews, *The Boys in the Band* went on to a London production, two national tours, and a successful film. *The Boys in the Band* had justified Barr's desperate scramble to produce difficult new plays. His choice to keep the play off-Broadway with limited seating built demand and turned the production into a hit. Barr the savvy producer was back in charge.

The Playwrights Unit continued through the spring of 1968 with three productions, *The Golden Fleece* by A.R. Gurney, Jr. on 22 February, Howard Moss's *The Palace At 4 A.M.* on 25 April, and James Prideaux's *The Autograph Hound* on 9 May. Gurney's *The Golden Fleece*, a modern send-

up of the myth of Jason and Medea, was directed by Jered Barclay, with Barbara Baxley and Joseph George. Howard Moss's *The Palace At 4 A.M.* was directed by Chuck Gnys in a staged reading with Ruth Ford, Paul Roebling, and Paul Sparer. The play was later produced at the John Drew Theater in Long Island on 9 August 1972 with Beatrice Straight and Christopher Walken, directed by Edward Albee. James Prideaux's *The Autograph Hound*, which Prideaux had based on the celebrity-obsessed frequenters of Sardi's, was directed by Barry Plaxen. Barr later produced the play at Lincoln Center's Forum Theatre.⁶⁰

Theater 1968's smash hit, *The Boys in the Band*, had reinvigorated outlook the Unit and justified its existence. Under Gnys's direction, the Playwrights Unit had become the professional New York playwrights workshop that Barr had intended. Barr could send a script down to the Unit, have Gnys find it a director, actors, and a designer, and trust that it would receive a competent workshop production. The few plays that did transfer from the Unit to off-Broadway were relatively unchanged in the process. The plays that Barr did not test first at the Unit were his biggest disasters, notably *Johnny No-Trump*.

The Unit's operations were humming along; audiences were at near capacity, and Gnys was upholding the first come, first served policy. The Unit was auditioning new actors regularly and interviewing new directors, designers, and stage managers. Script reading was, according to Gnys, increasing; five or six more productions were planned before the Unit broke for the summer. The following scripts were considered: *Neighbors* by Kenneth Pressman; *Dead Letters* by Howard Koch; *That's Not Me* by Ian Wallace; *All My Pretty Ones* by Tom Sydorick; *A Small Bar Off The Water* by Mart Crowley; *The Undertaking* by David Trainer; and a new work by

Emanuel Peluso. Gnys believed that the Theater 1968 Playwrights Unit had been one of its most productive and rewarding seasons since it began five years earlier.⁶¹

Bitten by the repertory fever particularly virulent in 1960s New York theatre, Barr had planned in the fall of 1967 to run a six week absurdist repertory on Broadway at the Billy Rose, consisting of short works he had premiered off-Broadway.⁶² Barr was, in effect, attempting to move his Cherry Lane operation onto Broadway, with this explanation:

We think it's time some of the plays that succeeded off Broadway should be exposed uptown. We're going to start with a half dozen plays that already have made their mark, whether they were produced by us or not. Then we are going to bring in new ones as we find them, continuing the principle that the playwright is master of his product. We think that if you give a playwright his head, you are going to come out better than if you have a half dozen experts pushing, stepping on and tearing him apart.⁶³

By keeping the playwright and play at the center of his paradigm, Barr hoped to achieve the Broadway playwrights' theatre of his dreams.

As the president of the League of New York Theatres, a role he was to maintain for over twenty years, Barr was attempting to change the very nature of what was considered Broadway fare. He states:

I would like to break down the distinction between Broadway and Off Broadway. I think it's meaningless. I don't know how we'll do it. But I hope to work out some way whereby Off Broadway people will have more in common with the league in the future.⁶⁴

As president of the League, and as Albee's producer, if there was anyone who could campaign for this sea change in New York's producing hierarchy, it was Richard Barr. Yet his process of breaking down these distinctions was a fairly improvised, if not quixotic quest, reflecting Barr's protean nature.

Keeping to his usual anti-subscription policy,⁶⁵ Barr planned to put together a series of twin bills on Broadway at off-Broadway prices, citing a \$4.95 to \$5.95 ticket price. Though interested in stars and name performers, Barr was keeping payment to all actors at the \$200 maximum on two-week contracts; though the pay was low, the actors could pick up film and television work and continue the repertory. But his ambitious Broadway repertory for the 1968 winter season was stymied when Harold Pinter would not give Barr the rights to produce his plays *The Lover* and *The Collection*.

By January 1968, Barr switched the entire project to a performing arts center on Broadway, perhaps competitive even with Lincoln Center.⁶⁶ In addition to plays, Barr would produce dance, avant-garde films, folk concerts, and modern chamber music. Once again, Barr wanted complete flexibility:

Our project will be a contemporary theater for the performing arts. There will be no subscription because that would force us to produce on schedule in advance. We want the freedom to change the bill as often as necessary. In most cases we'll be dealing with unknown quantities. We'll adhere to a top price of \$4.95 for all presentations.⁶⁷

In addition to his wealth of ideas for the project, Barr could boast a healthy start-up fund of approximately \$150,000 from Clinton Wilder's Fantod Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the David Merrick Foundation. The program, now scheduled for September of 1968, would hypothetically include Sam Shepard's *Chicago*, Lanford Wilson's *This Is the Rill Speaking*, Albee's *The Sandbox*, Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, Frank Gilroy's *Who'll Save the Plowboy?*, and possibly Mary Mercier's *Johnny No-Trump*.⁶⁸ The addition of Mercier's play reflected Barr's regret, having closed the play after only one performance.

Around this time an event occurred which imperiled Chuck Gnys's management of the Unit. Albee, tipped off that Gnys's play selection had

become progressively more conservative, decided to test Gnys's judgment directly. Albee sent his play *Box* to the Unit under an assumed name, Rayne Endars. Just as a series of scripts were being sent back to their authors, Albee asked to read one of Gnys's comment cards—only to discover that *Box* had been rejected with a note, "totally without point or interest; hopeless."⁶⁹ In a letter to Gnys after the incident, Albee explained his motives:

Of course I sent *Box* in to the Unit under Rayne Endar's name on purpose. I am not so old (or scatterbrained) that I would send out my newest child under false authorship by accident. I did it because I was curious about a number of matters—primarily whether or not a system which allows only one of the several interested parties to make final judgments on a work is a good system. . . I think we may have to revert to the method—God help us—of everybody reading everything. Be wary now: I may send in other plays, under other names. One crushing rejection is funny, another might not be.⁷⁰

As much as Albee tried to conceal his wrath, Gnys's relationship with ABW deteriorated from this point on.⁷¹ He had lost the confidence of both Barr and Albee by taking on more authority than either had intended for the manager of the Unit to wield. To make matters worse, Gnys had not been popular with ABW's other employees on Broadway and at the Cherry Lane.⁷² Over the years, Gnys gradually established a minor fiefdom at the Unit, acquiring more and more control over its operations. Gnys chose the plays, directed many himself, and managed the Unit as an autonomous operation—and in the process isolated himself from ABW's regular operations.

For Gnys's own part, he defended his choices and refused to hedge his rejection of Albee's play. In a letter to Albee dated "Valentine's Day," Gnys spelled out his role with the Unit in no uncertain terms:

I have never believed that The Playwrights Unit should be run by committee. I think that the artistic director of a workshop theater should be chosen because of his qualifications (which

include his personal taste and opinion) and then let alone. If that individual then fails to produce the kind of season you expect, then he should be replaced. I'm very pleased and proud of my record at The Playwrights Unit. I think that no one—*no one*—is consistently doing better or more exciting theater than The Playwrights Unit. . . I didn't like 'Box' when Rayne Enders sent it in and it's painful to tell a friend that no matter what name it's submitted under I would reject it again for presentation at The Playwrights Unit.⁷³

Gnys considered himself an "artistic director" rather than the "Managing Director" that Edward Parone had been. He had little reason to believe otherwise; he had enjoyed a free hand to select or reject plays with little interference from ABW. Shortly thereafter, in a letter to Richard Barr, Gnys detailed the plays he rejected and had not sent uptown. Among these were Maria Irene Fornes's *Tango Palace* and *The Successful Life of Three*, Sam Shepard's *La Turista*, and three plays by Megan Terry including *Keep Tightly Closed In A Cool Dry Place*, *The Gloaming*, and *Oh My Darling*. Most of these plays were produced elsewhere to great acclaim: Albee's concerns were not entirely without merit.

On 5 August 1968, the Broadway repertory plans were announced, with ticket prices at \$5.50 a seat, the lowest ticket prices on Broadway—to "reach the largest audience available." The repertory season was set to begin on 30 September 1968 at the Billy Rose Theatre. In addition, modern dance performances were scheduled to start in January 1969, including the companies of Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, and José Limon. Three weeks of avant-garde film were scheduled as well.

In this advance publicity, Mercier's *Johnny No-Trump* was mentioned again, as the playwright cited the only need "was to change four pages of the sad ending."⁷⁴ However, the actual plays produced were Albee's *Box* and the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung*, Albee's *The American Dream*,

and *The Death of Bessie Smith*; Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, Albee's *The Zoo Story*, and Beckett's *Happy Days*. The sets and lighting were designed by William Ritman.⁷⁵ *Box* and the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung* were to have an out-of-town run in Buffalo, New York—the first time an Albee play had premiered outside of New York City—breaking Barr's own *Virginia Woolf* rule. Clive Barnes's review of Albee's *Box-Mao* was respectful but not positive enough to sell the play:

There will be many, I trust, who will find "Box-Mao" pretentious nonsense. . . . Were they to suggest that it was not what the Broadway audience expects of a play, I could not but agree. . . . Yet I enjoyed it. I don't say I understood it—actually I presumed, perhaps wrongly, that there wasn't very much to understand—but I let the words lap over me, like creative foam over a more than usually receptive stone, heard some of them, let them run around in my mind, and this way or that gathered an experience. Which, in the theater is what we are fundamentally talking about.⁷⁶

Barnes continues, coaxing the reader to come to the production, but though a noble attempt, it did nothing to draw Broadway audiences. The entire operation closed before the dance or films could be presented.⁷⁷

Barr was dismayed: "We didn't expect this kind of a disaster, what with favorable notices, low prices, and the caliber of plays presented."⁷⁸ In a revealing letter to the Rockefeller Foundation, Barr struggled to make the best of the situation:

Edward Albee and I, stung somewhat by the public failure of the Repertory in spite of its considerable artistic success, have been discussing a new project which would presumably grow out of the situation at the Billy Rose. We feel that many of the regional theatres which we believe your organization has contributed substantially to, have never seen some of the plays that we did at the Billy Rose Our thought was to open possibly at the Mark Taper in Los Angeles and do a tour of . . . other regional theatres with our own companies. The regional theatres would provide settings as is done in stock situations in this country.⁷⁹

Barr realized, too late perhaps, that it was the American regional theatre rather than Broadway which would become the next important place for the development of serious drama, and as importantly, new theatre audiences.

The Playwrights Unit had also run into a dilemma. The theatre on Vandam Street had been sold to Allen Boretz, a playwright; the Unit had to find a new home.⁸⁰ ABW expected to lease 219 West 19th Street, previously Jerome Robbins' American Theatre Laboratory, a facility that Gnys had managed simultaneously with the Unit.⁸¹ One of the last plays produced on Vandam Street, Terrence McNally's *Witness* was staged at the Unit on 4 September 1968, directed by Kevin O'Connor, and featuring James Coco. *Witness* was later directed by Lawrence Arrick at the Grammercy Arts Theatre and received high marks among the critics for its black humor.

The Theater 1969 season had been remarkably ambitious for ABW Productions; in many ways it was a fulfillment of a dream—to break down the barriers between Broadway and off-Broadway. While not successful, the attempt to bring a repertory of modern drama to Broadway had set an extraordinary example. The Theater 1969 Playwrights Unit had its shortest season ever, because of the transition to a new space, but continued to produce new work. On 27 February 1969, the Unit announced new facilities at 84 East 4th Street, previously the home of New Dramatists. The building was bought for \$77,000 with monies from Barr, Woodward, and Albee. Additional funds were to be raised with a revival of Ben Hecht's and Charles MacArthur's *The Front Page*. The Unit had never owned its own building before; extensive alterations were planned.⁸²

The Front Page was a last ditch effort to keep the Unit alive in spite of the expensive failure of the Playwrights Repertory. Recently staged at the Plumstead Playhouse in Long Island, *The Front Page* was a ready-made

production. Robert Ryan, its star, pressed Barr to consider a Broadway transfer. The actors agreed to perform at the Equity minimum, with Barr's comment that "To my knowledge, this is the first time that actors have gotten together to further the cause of new playwrights in the professional theatre."⁸³ Directed by Harold J. Kennedy, with settings by Will Steven Armstrong, and costumes by Sara Brook, ABW's revival of *Front Page* was a hit. *The Front Page* opened to Clive Barnes's rave review in the *Times*:

There are many bad bad plays, a few good bad plays, and just one or two positively great bad plays. I suggest that 'The Front Page' by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, joyously restored on Saturday night to Broadway, albeit for a miserably limited run, is of that number. It is gorgeously melodramatic, it contrives to play every trick in the book, it exaggerates everything to 20 times life size, but it remains one of the funniest and most exciting of all American plays.⁸⁴

Buoyed with good reviews, the production ran for eight weeks profitably, raising needed funds for the Unit.

The Unit's new facilities were renovated at a cost of approximately \$25,000. The building had three floors, two playing areas, an open floor for rehearsals, and a modern 150-seat theatre (slightly smaller than the 199-seat Village South), as well as rehearsal, office, and storage space. The cost of these new facilities, in addition to new steeper maintenance costs, had risen beyond ABW's funding ability (see tables 6 and 7 above). The Unit's expenses were falling more and more upon Albee, Barr, and Woodward (see table 9 below) and some monies from the continued activities of *The Boys in the Band*.

Table 9.—ALBAR THEATER ARTS, INC. - THE PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT
PRESENT SOURCES OF SUPPORT⁸⁵

	<u>68-69</u>	<u>69-70</u>	<u>70-71</u>
Contributions from public	6,243.60	4,273.27	none
Edward Albee	6,743.73	4,500.00	none
Richard Barr	6,653.00	17,500.00	none
Charles Woodward	1,000.00	4,500.00	none
Boys In the Band Company	none	9,600.00	none

The Unit began its Theater 1970 season at its new address, with Tom Sydorick's *Electric Ice* which was staged at the Unit on 26 September 1969. The Unit's next production was Philip Magdalany's two short plays, *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing*, both produced on 31 October 1969. The production was directed by Chuck Gnys with sets by Peter Harvey. Magdalany, who had only been writing for a year, had turned out only one other play, *Annabelle*, which had been staged at Tanglewood. *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing* were the only plays ever brought from the Playwrights Unit directly to Broadway.

Watercolor and *Criss-Crossing* were then presented at the ANTA theatre on Broadway as a Theater 1970 Playwrights Unit production on 21 January 1970. The production was directed by Chuck Gnys. The plays received a respectful review by Clive Barnes in the *New York Times*, but more importantly, Barnes sang the praises of the Unit's activities:

It is good to see the Playwrights Unit make this plunge into Broadway because over the years it has unobtrusively contributed much of value to our theater. . . . Mr. Magdalany's duo is not entirely successful, but it is just the kind of work that should be encouraged by such workshop performances. Perhaps Mr. Magdalany's principal fault is that he too easily confuses a dialogue for a play, and perhaps even mistakes an attitude for a theme.⁸⁶

Barnes was impressed by the play's absurdism as well as Gnys's direction and

Harvey's set. Magdalany's *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing* were brought in for approximately \$33,000; the only Equity production produced by Theater 1970.

Around this period, Mel Gussow wrote a *New York Times* article on the Unit, which is interesting in several respects. It leads off by making light of Gnys's rejection of Albee's *Box*, which Gussow called "a freakish rejection, a classic blooper, an accident." Ironically, only a few months after Gussow's article, Gnys left the Unit, under anything but amicable terms.⁸⁷ Gussow noted that Gnys and Barr also rejected Ron Cowen's *Summertree* (later produced at Lincoln Center), and gave a reading to Charles Gordone's *No Place To Be Somebody*, but later refused to produce it.

In the article, Richard Barr explained his reasoning behind the Unit and how plays came to be chosen for production:

We don't do unfinished work. We don't develop an idea with a playwright. Our primary consideration is literacy. . . . Second, is the subject matter really part of our time? I don't mean that it has to be about sex, race, or Vietnam, but it should have a contemporary theme. It doesn't matter if it takes place in 1612. Does the playwright seem sufficiently interesting? Will he develop, or is the play a one-shot venture? Is it so totally subjective that his chances of moving out of the area are slight?⁸⁸

Along these lines, Barr was interested in "fully formed plays and developing playwrights."⁸⁹ Gussow noted that the plays were staged with "first-rate" actors, directors, and designers, working for free, with budgets of no more than \$200, and running for a total of eight performances.

Since many of the plays had been chosen for commercial production, the Unit had been accused of being a "cheap tryout." Barr's response, though insisting this was not the Unit's focus, was, "What's the matter with a cheap tryout?"⁹⁰ Gussow wrote that over 700 scripts were submitted every year, with ninety-eight percent, according to Barr, being "worthless." The readers

included Barr, Gnys, occasionally Albee, and Woodward. One strong voice among the producers, either for or against a script, was "enough to outweigh the others." He also noted the Unit had by this time produced over 87 plays, "one third of which" had been done off-Broadway or in regional theatres.

The next play presented at the Playwrights Unit, on 28 February 1970, James Lineberger's *The Survival of Saint Joan*, directed by Chuck Gnys. The production was entitled a "rock concert" and included the music of Ruffin, a rock band. A contemporary update of the Joan of Arc story, *The Survival of Saint Joan* later moved to a production at the Studio Arena Theatre in Buffalo, a rock concert tour, and then finally off-Broadway at the Anderson Theatre co-produced by Haila Stoddard and Neal DeBrock in February of 1971.

Gnys had an interest in wedding theatre with contemporary music, writing a proposal for an organization he called the Contemporary American Music Laboratory, which he intended to found at the Playwrights Unit.⁹¹ Gnys never had the opportunity to realize his music laboratory. After leaving the Unit and directing subsequent productions of *The Survival of Saint Joan*, he became an office manager at Curtis Brown, Ltd., a literary agency, as well as director of Curtis Brown Management, a talent management firm, with clients like Horton Foote, Jr., Teri Garr, and Matthew Modine.

The Playwrights Unit of Theater 1970 had as its final presentation three short plays, *Vinyl Visits an FM Station* by Ronald Tavel, *The Fault* by Kenneth Pressman, and *The Cremation* by Paul Zindel, produced at the Unit on 20 May 1970. Both Pressman and Zindel had previously produced plays at the Unit. Tavel was the co-founder of the Playhouse of the Ridiculous with John Vaccaro and author of the infamous *Gorilla Queen*. These three short plays were the last produced by Chuck Gnys at the Playwrights Unit.

The Theater 1970 season was an exciting, yet difficult time for the

Playwrights Unit. It had a much expanded facility, but at the same time, a larger financial burden. Chuck Gnys, its manager of seven years, was ousted after a tenure that had seen many plays transfer to off-Broadway or regional theatre. Gnys provided a stabilizing effect on the Unit, keeping its many activities from becoming chaos. By the Theater 1971 season, the Unit's activities were redoubled, with plans for 10 plays, 10 staged readings, and 20 play readings. The Unit replaced the Cherry Lane as ABW's locus of activity. With the single Broadway production of Philip Magdalany's *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing*, it was clear that Theater 1970 was financially beleaguered. No work by Albee was presented; no productions were given off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane; the lease had expired during the Theater 1967 season.

Without the Cherry Lane as a base of operations, the Theater 1971 season focused around the Unit's activities. A hectic year was scheduled, a slate filled, unfortunately, with more readings and staged readings than full workshop productions. There were no outstanding plays or playwrights, but many of these writers were later involved with Playwrights Horizons.⁹² Bruce Hoover and Robert Moss became the Unit's new managing directors. Hoover, a professional stage manager, was less influential in producing decisions than Moss, who had been a stage manager for the APA Repertory and had directed several plays at the Unit.

The Unit's 1971 season included David R. Slavitt's *Fra Lorenzo or The Cardinal Sins*, *Master of the Blue Mineral Mines* by Jonathan Levy, Michael Carton's *Adjunct Consequences*, *California Wine* by Laird Koenig, Michael Carton's *The Judgement*, *The Guest*, and *the Zodiac*, and *The Pledge* a musical by Michael Valenti and Kenneth Pressman. By this point, it was clear that funding for the Unit was reaching bottom. On 14 December 1970, Bruce Hoover and Robert Moss sent out this letter soliciting funds:

Friends of The Playwrights Unit,

For the past seven years you have been witness to the birth pangs and experimental strivings of most of the new American playwrights. Now, due to the current recession, The Playwrights Unit is being threatened with a lack of funds, and for the first time in our seven year history, we are asking you, our audiences and our friends, for help.

A dollar would be nice. Five dollars would be great. Ten to twenty-five dollars would be superb. One hundred dollars fantastic and wonderful.

It would be most helpful if each of you responded with some contribution, regardless of size. It would also be very gratifying to know that The Unit has meant something of worth to you all.⁹³

Moss and Hoover's essay at fund raising was augmented by Barr's own flashier, more "Hollywood"-style attempt—a huge opening party for Albee's *All Over*. Audiences attending the production of *All Over* were invited, at the cost of \$50 to \$100 per person, to spend an evening dancing to rock music at the Unit's facilities. Barr hoped to raise \$8,000 to \$10,000 by this means. Among those attending the event were Albee's own mother, John Gielgud, Colleen Dewhurst, members of the cast of *All Over*, and oddly enough, Princess Lucie Shirazee, the Belgian widow of an Iranian Prince.⁹⁴

On 28 March 1971, Theater 1971 presented Edward Albee's *All Over* on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre. The play, though intended to resurrect Albee's career, had the opposite effect. The casting had been the largest problem; John Gielgud, who directed, had great difficulty assembling a cast of the right age and temperament for the roles. The production was designed by Rouben Ter-Artunian, with lighting by Richard Nelson. The review by Clive Barnes was duly reverential:

It is a lovely, poignant and deeply felt play. In no way at all is it an easy play—this formal minuet of death, this symphony ironically celebrating death's dominion. It is not easy in its

structure, a series of almost operatic arias demanding, in their precision, pin-point concentration from the audience, and it is certainly not easy in its subject matter. Mr. Albee has reached that strange and solstice age, that middle moment, when a man first gets glimpses of his own death, those first intimations that mortality includes him. The result is this obituary play.⁹⁵

Doing what he could to intrigue an audience, Barnes inadvertently pigeon-holed the play as high-brow art. Walter Kerr, never an Albee aficionado, wrote some of his most acid criticism regarding *All Over*:

Albee at his best would get dark humor out of what is portentous here. Having mocked middle-class clichés so well in 'The American Dream,' he should be able to hear what is poetically middle class about his present inversions and subjunctives and forced pen-portraits. He is off form, seriously. Having surrendered his vituperative energy, once the best thing about him, he has turned placid to no purpose but to overdecorate his prose.⁹⁶

If Clive Barnes's faint praise condemned the play to a high-brow grave, Kerr's criticism nailed down the lid. *All Over* struggled a while, closing after 40 performances, even after its director, actors, and playwright agreed to salary cuts. The failure of *All Over* was the straw that broke the back of the entire ABW producing operation.

On 14 April 1971, about two weeks after the opening of *All Over*, the Playwrights Unit produced its last production, Edward Cohen's *Breeding Ground*, a triptych including *Bumper to Bumper*, *Rats*, and *Sitting Shiva*, directed by Peter Frisch. Its setting was designed by Larry Maxwell with lighting by Richard Beard. The production had been scheduled for the fall, but due to casting problems, it had been postponed.

Cohen, cited earlier as the author of *Working on a New Play*, and the former associate artistic director of Jewish Repertory Theatre, said that much of what he remembered about his production of *Breeding Ground* at the Unit

had to do with the casting problems for *All Over*:

Every day when we came in to cast our little play at the Unit, we had heard about what was happening with *All Over*; that Lilli Palmer was going to do it, but her little dog wasn't let in by customs. . . . or the next week Lunt and Fontane were considering it, but they had decided that they were too old. The names were flying around that office. . . The irony was of course that I was going through the same thing with my own schtoopy little play, with Broadway understudies turning me down. I absolutely felt sympathetic with Edward's difficulties.⁹⁷

Cohen's remarks highlight how closely the Unit's fortunes were tied to Albee's own and how closely the Unit's tiny-budgeted problems mimicked ABW's larger concerns. In particular, the chaos that held rein at the Unit (about which Wunderlich bitterly complained) was endemic to ABW's entire operation, and it was the undoing of both organizations.

According to Robert Moss, the Unit closed its doors permanently on 5 May 1971. It was a tremendous loss, as Moss recalls, but its closure led him to the founding of Playwrights Horizons:

I was actually in shock when the Playwrights Unit closed, because producing is what I wanted to do and I didn't know how to keep doing it. And suddenly out of the clear blue sky I got a phone call from Louise Roberts who had seen the last play at the Unit. She was running the Clark Center for the Performing Arts, which was a dance center in the Y. They had a room that they couldn't use for dance. . . . I told her she should give me the room; just give me the room. When we closed the Playwrights Unit and on my last day there, I noticed the cardboard shoebox that had the mailing list in it on three by five cards, and I looked at it and, without any prescience of what I might or might not do, I thought—I'm going to take this. So I took this shoebox. It contained the mailing list for the Playwrights Unit. It was the smartest thing I ever did. I knew who a lot of these people were; so subsequently I had this mailing list. When I went to the Y, I simply sent out a flyer to all of these people, and they all, ALL, came. It was a list of ordinary people, who loved going to the theatre. And that's the incredible value of that shoebox. And that's how Playwrights Horizons had its start.⁹⁸

Moss took more than a shoebox with him from the Playwrights Unit. He brought with him a philosophy of providing a service to playwrights, without charge, to further the art of playwriting. Since there was no charge for the use of the facilities at the Unit, Moss didn't charge at Playwrights Horizons. If there was a page of brilliance to a script, he would produce it, regardless of whether the play would fail. Moss was concerned not with the development of plays, but with the development of playwrights. While eventually Playwrights Horizons became less of a developmental theatre and more of a second stage, it was conceived in direct imitation of the Unit.

The failure of *All Over* was a bitter loss for playwright Edward Albee, who retreated to Montauk to rethink his nearly ten years in the limelight of the New York theatre. While Albee still had great fans in Clive Barnes and Harold Clurman, he left many others "feeling befuddled, bothered and belligerent." His audiences did not know what to make of the playwright who had electrified them with emotional fireworks of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and then left them with the cold, removed *All Over*. In kind, Albee no longer knew what to make of his audiences, and even less of the critics. He was quoted in a *Times* article:

There is a syndrome in this country. The critics set somebody up, maybe too soon—underline *maybe*—and then they take great pleasure, the only pleasure critics *do* take—except possibly with their wives and mistresses—in knocking him down. . . . The majority of our critics are best qualified to cover brush fires in New Jersey. There *have* been good reviews for this play—Elliot Norton and Clurman and Clive—but the vituperation of the *bad* reviews exceeds any *rational* opinion of the play. Most American critics think playwriting stopped with Ibsen. Walter Kerr thinks it stopped with Pinero. . . Richard and I and Chuck Woodward down at The Playwrights Unit wonder if it's really possible to have a serious commercial theater.⁹⁹

Albee attacked realistic drama, belittled agitprop theatre, struggling to place

his work in a different aesthetic. Barr joined the fray stating, "A major work by a major playwright—you don't just kick it down the toilet that way."¹⁰⁰

In reading this article, one almost wishes the journalist had stopped the recorder and left Albee alone to his bitter musings. But then, surprisingly, Albee's rant ends on a remarkably bright note, as he comments:

Here I am, Edward Albee, entering into my middle age, and I think of it as a *beginning*. Life is absolutely super and wonderful. There shouldn't be any sadness in it. People should be aware of all things at all times, they should experience the extremities of life, fulfill themselves completely. Why does everyone want to go to sleep when the only thing left is to stay awake?¹⁰¹

In fact, true to his word, Albee, though certainly wounded by the failure of *All Over*, hardly stopped his altruistic sponsoring of playwrights and plays.

By July of 1971, Albee was cited in another *Times* article as having established the William Flanagan Center for Creative Persons, a rehabilitated stable above Montauk's sand dunes. Included in its initial summer were Philip Magdalany, author of *Crisscrossing* and *Watercolor*, and Robert Moss. In addition to theatre professionals, the "Stable," as it was nicknamed, became a retreat for sculptors, painters, and composers. Albee spent \$45,000 to purchase the property, \$45,000 to renovate it, and nearly \$30,000 a year for its operations. Barr was handling the paperwork of selecting artists, although Albee was the final arbiter of which artists actually used the facilities.¹⁰²

The closing of the Unit was a foregone conclusion. According to Albee, the Unit was costing \$1,000 a week to run, or over \$52,000 per year. But there were other considerations as well, as Albee explained:

As you know it [The Playwrights Unit] was successful both creatively and commercially. We produced over 100 plays; we received grants from Rockefeller and the New York State Council of the Arts. But costs being what they are the Unit must now take on a more free-wheeling form. I like to think of the Stable as an extension of the Unit. Dick's office will still read and

evaluate scripts. We plan to do workshop productions, probably in theaters that are dark Monday nights. We began the Unit so that untried dramatists could see their plays done without pressure from critics. We will continue to make that possible.¹⁰³

Albee was asked why he involved himself in such idealistic work. He responded, "Work in progress in the theater, in painting, excites me. The unfinished keeps moving, changing, hopefully growing." Albee was clearly past the worst of his anger and was working on a new play.

By July of 1972, Albee and Barr were busy at the John Drew Theater in East Hampton, producing plays such as Thornton Wilder's *The Long Christmas Dinner*, Albee's *The American Dream*, Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw*, and Howard Moss's play, *The Palace at 4 A.M.* Though Barr and Albee were investing themselves in their summer season, they both still felt the wounds of *All Over*'s commercial and critical failure. Barr opined:

The American theater is the only one in the Western World that is not subsidized. And some kind of subsidy is inevitable to insure its survival. I don't see why dance companies and symphony orchestras are subsidized and theater is not.¹⁰⁴

Barr by this time was very busy in promoting the theater as a subsidized art form, as president of both ANTA and The New York League of Theatres as well as being on the advisory board of the NYSCA.

All Over, after its debacle in New York, ran successfully in London, as well as in The Hague and in Munich. Albee continued to write new plays, winning the Pulitzer Prize for *Seascape* in 1976 and for *Three Tall Women* in 1994. He still supports new plays and new playwrights with the continued operation of the William Flanagan Center for Creative Persons, as well as his own Edward Albee Foundation. He is a member of the faculty at the University of Houston, where he has taught playwriting for many years, and

remains a vocal advocate of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Richard Barr continued to produce Albee's new plays, including *Seascape* in 1976, and *The Lady From Dubuque* in 1980, as well as other productions, *Noel Coward in Two Keys* in 1974, *P.S. Your Cat is Dead!* in 1975, and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* in 1979. Barr remained president of the League of New York Theatres (which later became the League of American Theatres), and continued to advocate the importance of new plays and new playwrights. His health deteriorated, however, because of his drinking, and in 1989, he succumbed to complications related to AIDS. He had been promoting a book of his memoirs aptly titled, *You Have to Hock Your House*. Barr died penniless, in debt, and shortly after his death, his apartment was consumed in a fire which destroyed much of his large collection of art, theatrical mementos, and most unfortunately, the bulk of his personal papers regarding his over forty years of producing new plays.

Albee and Barr's personal contributions to the Playwrights Unit had far exceeded simple monetary support. They had resurrected the play and the playwright to a position of importance in the American theatre and had fostered a renaissance of playwriting in spite of the dismal economics of Broadway. In the process, Albee and Barr established many of the concepts and processes of play development for the next generation. Both Edward Parone, who founded the new plays unit at the Mark Taper Forum and Robert Moss, who founded Playwrights Horizons, continued Barr and Albee's efforts, as did Barr and Albee themselves.

John Guare, a member of the Unit, an off-off-Broadway playwright whose plays were done at the Caffe Cino and La Mama, suggests that Albee has become a kind of high priest of playwriting in America:

In these times when writers move back and forth promiscuously

between films and TV and hopefully the stage, Albee maintains an exquisite fidelity to the theater. He believes an audience still exists in this eye-drenched era of visual style to match his belief that the text of the play is at the heart of the theater. The eye can be seduced but the ear hears truth. So one no longer young American playwright remembers a great bohemian time in New York when everyone was young and how Edward Albee created the very heart of it.¹⁰⁵

While Guare's sentiments might not appeal to those who advocate an actor's theatre, a director's theatre, an ensemble theatre, or even performance art, the playwright's theatre, one which has a 5,000 year history going back to the Greek theatre, was furthered by Barr's and Albee's efforts, and in particular, by the tiny institution they established, The Playwrights Unit.

Notes

¹Laurence Wunderlich, "Playwrights at Cross Purposes," *Works*, 1, no. 2 (Winter 1968): 30-31.

²Wunderlich, 31.

³Wunderlich, 32.

⁴Richard Barr, "Twilight for the Great White Way?" in *Theatre 1*, (New York, NY: The Twelfth Congress of the International Theatre Institute of the United States, 1969), 36-37.

⁵Theater 1967 Budget, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 1, Folder 9 Billy Rose Theatre Collection

⁶Bruce Hoover, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 19 November 1994.

⁷Theater 1967 Budget for Leonard Melfi's *Halloween*, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 2, Folder 7 Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

⁸Robert Pasolli, "The New Playwrights' Scene of the Sixties: Jerome Max is Alive and Well and Living in Rome...," *Tulane Drama Review* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 154-162.

⁹Theater 1967 Playwrights Unit Budget, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 1, Folder 10 Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

¹⁰Theater 1970 Playwrights Unit Budget, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 2, Folder 7 Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

¹¹Theater 1971 Playwrights Unit Budget, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 2, Folder 5, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

¹²Emanuel Peluso, interview by author, by electronic mail, 14 April 1995.

¹³Eliot Fremont-Smith "Theater: Double Bill at Cherry Lane," *New York Times* 19 October 1965.

- ¹⁴Richard Foltz, interview by author, New York, N.Y., 30 March 1997.
- ¹⁵A.R. Gurney, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 3 April 1996.
- ¹⁶Jerome Cline, interview with author, Lynbrook, New York, 2 June 1997.
- ¹⁷Joseph Cali, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 9 March 1997.
- ¹⁸Schneider, 373.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Stanley Kaufmann, "Theater: Edward Albee's 'Malcolm,'" *New York Times*, 12 January 1966.
- ²¹James Prideaux, *Memoirs*, unpublished, May 1995.
- ²²Marcia Merrill Nash, interview with author, Ardsley, N.Y., 2 April 1995.
- ²³Perry Knowlton, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 3 May 1995.
- ²⁴Sam Zolotow, "Playwrights' Unit Receives Subsidy for Staging," *New York Times*, 1 June 1968.
- ²⁵J. Kellum Smith, Jr. to Edward Albee, 25 May 1966, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 1, Folder 8 (Rockefeller Foundation Correspondance) Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
- ²⁶Wunderlich, 33-34.
- ²⁷Alan Schneider, *Entrances: An American Director's Journey* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), 234-233.
- ²⁸Prideaux, 223.
- ²⁹Paul Zindel, interview with author, Montegue, N.J., 21 August 1997.
- ³⁰Schneider, 377.
- ³¹Walter Kerr, "'Match-Play' and 'Party for Divorce' Open,"

³²Cline, interview.

³³Walter Kerr, "Night of the Dunce," *New York Times* 29 December 1966, 21.

³⁴Dan Sullivan, "Theater: 'The Rimers of Eldrich' at Cherry Lane," *New York Times*, 21 February 1967.

³⁵Lanford Wilson, telephone interview with author, New York, N.Y., 27 March 1995.

³⁶George Oppenheimer, "Compelling Impressions of a Psychedelic Dream," *Newsday*, 11 May 1967.

³⁷Stephen Jacobsen, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 17 April 1995.

³⁸ For this production, Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Charles Woodward, Jr. were the producers, since Albee was preparing his adaptation of *Everything In The Garden*, and was unavailable to participate.

³⁹Clive Barnes, "'Johnny No-Trump' in Premiere at Cort," *New York Times*, 9 October 1967.

⁴⁰Marilyn Stasio, *Broadway's Beautiful Losers* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972), 408.

⁴¹Richard Barr, "You Have To Hock Your House," unpublished memoir, Edward Albee Theatre Collection.

⁴²James Prideaux, *Memoirs*, unpublished, 9 May 1995, 280.

⁴³Prideaux, 280.

⁴⁴Stasio, 422-425.

⁴⁵Prideaux, 278.

⁴⁶Clive Barnes, "Edward Albee Adapts Late Briton's Play,"

⁴⁷Barbara Fontaine, "Triple Threat On, Off and Off-Off Broadway," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 February 1968, 30-31.

⁴⁸"Wilder Withdraws as Albee Partner," *New York Times*, 6 March 1968; 34.

⁴⁹Cali, interview; Foltz, interview; Plaxen, interview.

⁵⁰Cline, interview.

⁵¹Albee, interview.

⁵²Cline, interview; See also, Richard Barr, "You Have To Hock Your House," unpublished memoir, Edward Albee Theatre Collection, 316.

⁵³Wendell Ricketts, "Talking Truth: Boys In The Band author Mart Crowley on his 'Gorgeous Little Monster'," *Bay Area Reporter*, 8 February 1990, 35.

⁵⁴Mart Crowley, telephone interview by author, Bloomfield, N.J., 19 February 1995.

⁵⁵Ricketts, 35.

⁵⁶Charles Gnys to Ruth Mayleas, 6 February 1968. Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, *T-Mss 1987-008, Series I Administrative Files-Playwrights Unit, Box 1, Folder 8 (Rockefeller Foundation Correspondance) Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

⁵⁷Cali, interview.

⁵⁸David Rothenberg, "The Boys in *The Boys in the Band*," *Center Stage* (a publication of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, New York City), April 1989.

⁵⁹Harold Clurman, "Comedy About Tragedy," *New York* 6 August 1968.

⁶⁰Prideaux, 286.

⁶¹Charles Gnys to Ruth Mayleas.

⁶²Sam Zolotow, "Producing Team Plans Repertory: Albee, Barr and Wilder List 6-Week Season Here," *New York Times*, 5 September 1967.

⁶³Sam Zolotow, "Repertory Rises Again," *New York Times*, 1 October 1967.

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⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶Sam Zolotow, "Play Plan Grows Into Arts Center," *New York Times*, 16 January 1968, 25.

⁶⁷Sam Zolotow, "Play Plan Grows Into Arts Center."

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Edward Albee to Chuck Gnys, undated, Charles Gnys papers, property of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹Edward Albee, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 19 June 1996.

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⁷³Chuck Gnys to Edward Albee, 14 February 1968, Charles Gnys papers, property of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

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Chapter V

The Fire of Production:

The Play Development Process at the Playwrights Unit

This chapter will examine how the Playwrights Unit productions helped to establish the professional careers of its off-off Broadway playwrights. It will not focus on iterations of scripts to ascertain the evolution of a particular play, since, with the exception of slight cuts, most of these short plays were produced with few changes. Beginning with a general overview of the Unit's play development process and Albee's influence on this process, the discussion will move to specific plays and productions not investigated in great detail in previous chapters. Also considered will be the play's life before, during, and after its Unit production, and will include an analysis of the dramaturgical techniques the playwright seemed to have discovered in the play as compared to later, more mature works. The physical details of the productions will also be discussed, as well as the story and structure of certain individual Unit plays—since many of these scripts were very early works and remain unpublished or unknown.

The choice of plays and playwrights covered in this chapter will be based on several factors: whether the play or production represented an important aspect of the Unit's development process, whether or not the play was moved to a professional production either on or off-Broadway, and whether its production contributed to a playwright's career as a well-established dramatist. The organization of the chapter will be loosely based on chronological order. However, because several playwrights had multiple

Unit productions (as well as other ABW productions), plays may be discussed outside of this timeline.

The development process at the ABW Playwrights Unit grew out of a single evening's performance of new work (*Way Out At The York*, Theatre 1961), to a series of single performances of new plays at the Cherry Lane Theatre (Theater 1962-63). With the its official opening on September 29, 1963, the Unit continued to evolve from an intensive, full production schedule in which new plays were presented every week for two performances (Theater 1964-65), to a more selective production process where plays were still fully produced, but presented less frequently and for longer runs (Theater 1966-70), and finally to a process similar to that which is practiced in the 1990s by most developmental theatres—readings, workshops, and productions (Theater 1971). Under its four managers, Parone, Gnys, Moss, and Hoover, the changes in the development process at the Unit were tied primarily to ABW's finances and the fortunes of its uptown productions.

That said, there was no "top-down" development process at the Playwrights Unit; ABW rarely interceded in the Unit's activities. The theatre professionals hired by ABW solved problems on a play-by-play basis, rather than utilizing any pre-existing development process. The only unifying policy for the Unit, and throughout the ABW organization, was to allow the playwright to control the course of his or her own play's destiny—a reflection of how Albee participated in his own productions, as he relates:

During rehearsals, I maintain as total control as I can. I always retain final approval over the cast and director. I'm consulted about the theatre being used. And I also supervise or exert control over the set, the costumes, the lighting. Like all playwrights, I have it in my contract that I retain the right to fire the director if I'm not happy with his work.¹

The primary influence exerted by Barr, Wilder, and Albee was to choose the plays and to determine if and when a play moved from the Unit to another level of production. But in general, each play at the Unit set its own course of development—with its playwright at the helm.

Barr created the Unit not as an experimental theatre in its own right, but as a showcase that presented new work with the intention of moving it “uptown.” Unlike La Mama and the Cino, where there was not necessarily a desire to reach audiences other than those established “downtown,” the Unit was not intended as an end in itself. Though Barr embraced both off-off and off-Broadway as important venues for new work, he believed that the Broadway theatre should be the marketplace of serious drama and, as President of the League of New York Theatres, was its staunchest advocate:

“Why bring a show to Broadway at all?” . . . Why indeed! . . . Because without Broadway, new writers, composers and lyricists would head for television even more rapidly than they do now. Almost all the commercial theater in the civilized world is subsidized in one form or another. Once the various foundations, both private and public, begin to include Broadway in their thinking; once the taxing authorities see fit to reduce our burden, those of us who have for many years been responsible for most of the important creative work in theater will be able to continue to take the challenges that our subsidized regional colleagues see fit to do only on rare occasions.²

Barr’s disappointment that private and government sources did not find Broadway fit for subsidy was colored by his belief that the non-commercial off-off Broadway theatre, though important as an experimental bedrock, did not stretch the professional muscles of its playwrights.³

Barr’s notion of “development” was to strengthen a playwright’s practical skills within the professional theatre, thereby improving the writing of Broadway plays.⁴ Barr exposed off-off Broadway playwrights to the same theatre professionals he used on Broadway. Lanford Wilson explained the

move of his play *No Trespassing* from La Mama to the Playwrights Unit in these terms: "They [ABW] wanted me to see it with someone different, or wanted to give me the opportunity to work with three incredibly big professionals."⁵ Wilson's exposure to Milton Katselas, who directed *No Trespassing* and later directed *Butterflies Are Free* on Broadway, provided a significant boost to his career.⁶

The hint of Broadway success, the possibility of access to a broad swathe of American culture, was what gave the development process at the Unit its gloss—any playwright who received Barr's support might be the next Edward Albee. A good example of how the Unit worked was the development process of Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little*, which was performed at the Unit in 1966. Zindel describes how this occurred:

[W]e had this extraordinary cast [Ruth White, Elisabeth Wilson, and Harvey Keitel at the Playwrights Unit], and here it was going on at my self-selected mentor's palace, this place where all the best ideas were happening, where all these great actors were happening. We all wanted the family that made his [Albee's] plays come alive, and I got to use a lot of them during the course of my growing. From there it had many other ramifications. . . . APA [the Association of Producing Artists] would say "We liked seeing your play there [at the Unit], so why don't you do it at our afternoon matinee series." . . . Then from there Edward Parone, who was at the Unit, decided he wanted to direct it at the Mark Taper [Forum] and it went to a longer production out there. So slowly it grew, slowly it allowed me to add into it a subplot of other characters, growing into, finally, a play that ended on Broadway with Julie Harris and Estelle Parsons.⁷

Zindel was thrilled by the attention his play had been given at the Unit, and particularly that "most who entered into the production kept in mind that it was experimental and largely for the benefit of the playwright."⁸

The model for the development of short plays at the Unit was Barr's successful off-Broadway production of Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*. More

important than *Zoo Story's* development process, however, was *Zoo Story* itself and the possibilities it suggested in terms of form and content. John Guare was deeply affected by the play:

It was very vivid. I was in college in Washington at Georgetown, but I came home for a weekend to see a double bill of *Zoo Story* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. I was knocked out, and I came home, and I woke up my parents, and I acted out *Zoo Story* to them. Well, they were very groggy and they didn't know if I had actually gone through this. Had it happened to me, was I telling them something that had happened to me, had I killed someone, was I in terrible trouble? It was a profound experience; it changed all the rules. It changed everything. Also, it introduced minimalism. It made a play possible to have just two people and a park bench. People felt that there should just be a theatre constructed with that one set, and that any modern play could be done in it. Edward changed all the rules. My first experience of the *Zoo Story* was literally cannibalism. Wanting to devour it, and have it inside of me for some kind of nourishment and identity.⁹

Though many of the plays at the Unit imitated *Zoo Story's* structure, the most famous of them being Baraka's *Dutchman*, Guare recalled that *Zoo Story* also changed the notion that to succeed as a playwright one must focus on commercial success:

What Edward brought to the theatre in the 1960s was theatre as a moral force. It was not just trying to get onto Broadway. It was not trying to get on that track to Broadway. To be a playwright—there was almost a moral center to it. A play was almost a religious experience.

Albee's route to fame (not to mention fortune) as a playwright, which became a model for others, was a de facto abandonment of commercial theatre. Only by disdaining commercial success could a playwright, ironically, achieve commercial success.

Many political forces were conspiring in the 1960s to suggest a social activist route for drama; the mounting resistance to the Vietnam War, the

civil rights movement, the free speech movement, and the growth of feminism. Albee's dramaturgy provided a concrete strategy for protest in the writing of short plays. Yet equally important to the mystique of the Unit's development process was the physical presence of Albee himself. For Guare, there was a sort of mystery to Albee's presence at the Unit:

Everyone who was talking about the Unit would say 'I'm having a play done at Barr-Wilder' or 'we're going to Barr-Wilder.' Everyone called it Barr-Wilder as if the name Albee could not be spoken. As if Barr-Wilder was a code, really, for the name Albee. Because Edward was so much around. Before, to be a playwright you had to live in secrecy, you had to live out of the world, or like Tennessee [Williams] you had live in another level of consciousness, but the extraordinary thing about Edward was, you would see him on the street, that he was there. That there was a playwright living in New York City.

Paul Zindel describes Albee's presence at the Unit, as "someone in the back, hovering, usually in a leather jacket." Not only was Albee a presence at the Unit, but on the streets of Greenwich Village as well. Thomas Morgan writes: "He [Albee] enjoys strolling around Greenwich Village consulting his muse. Afoot, he clasps portentous hands behind his back and dangles a True cigarette from his lips in the thoughtful French style."¹⁰

Though Albee and Barr actively attended the Caffè Cino and La Mama, it was the occasional, unexpected meeting with Albee that made it electrifying for playwrights to live in the Village, as Lanford Wilson recalls:

It had never been like this, it wasn't supposed to be like this. You weren't supposed to meet someone whose work you thought was so incredibly brilliant on the street. I was never prepared . . . and the meetings were incredibly brief . . . because I lived in the Village and he was always in the Village. Or he was always everywhere! I saw him at every opening I went to. And I'd go to a preview, he'd be there. I'd go to opening night, he'd be there. I'd go like six weeks later—he'd be there. I always thought he was cruising me, or I was always cruising him. I remember once we crossed on the street, this is thirty years ago, and he said,

"Hi, Lanford, are you still writing more than anyone?" "Yeah," I said, "Are you still writing better than anyone?" He said, "Yeah." And that was the entire conversation. But I remember today, just as clearly as I did the following morning and the next day, and the next. He was this legend...And for some reason you didn't want to be like him, except you wanted to be as true to yourself as he was. He just always was Edward Albee.¹¹

Albee's success with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* had changed what it meant to be a playwright. "We were all riding, in a sense then, in the wake of *Virginia Woolf*," offers John Guare. "There was something new happening that was started by Edward [Albee], and it created an undertow for us."¹² *Virginia Woolf* had made it seem possible that the voice of a new generation of American playwrights would be heard.

Paul Zindel, who had made Edward Albee his mentor (to the point of being, in Zindel's own words, "a pest"), also remembers Albee as an important teacher of playwriting:

He gave us much attention. And we were beginning to become aware of the fact that across the water there was *The Zoo Story* and *The Death of Bessie Smith*, and *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream*. I guess that was the beginning, when we knew we were in the presence of somebody very special, that we were going to follow and seek and do anything that we could in order to have what he had then. We felt we were meeting someone, an eccentric perhaps, an intellectual. A man who frightened you with drama because whenever he spoke, he had a look on his face that he was going to just kill you; and then it would break into a wide smile, and we would yearn for the drama of that smile, finally. We knew that this was a man who was finding a way in which his inner world was coming alive, and we all wanted that.¹³

Zindel, while a student in Staten Island's Wagner College, had participated in a workshop taught there by Albee and was struck by his generosity, particularly since Albee was in the midst of the maelstrom of publicity and attention generated by his success with *Virginia Woolf*. As a teacher, Albee

took a hands-on approach, but resisted the idea of "development":

I like working with young playwrights who have works-in-progress and are interested in a few suggestions—but I don't believe in this business of "developing works." I don't think any play should go into rehearsal unless it is ready to be performed. I hate this notion of working through a play with the aid of actors and directors and audiences and critics. I think that's nonsense.¹⁴

In fact, the idea of tampering with another playwright's vision was so personally abhorrent that Albee resisted directing works that were not his own if they were not, in his opinion, finished.

Albee's influence, however, in the actual writing of the plays and their production process at the Unit was minimal. He never directed a play at the Unit or ran a workshop there. He was rarely in attendance at Unit, except for infrequent performances and, in fact, the playwrights rarely sought either him or Barr out for dramaturgical advice, much to their consternation:

All of us [Barr, Wilder, and Albee] tried to see all the plays, but didn't always succeed. On the other hand, we offered to discuss the work privately, or in seminar after the production, but, surprisingly, none of the playwrights wanted this. We had only one request for such a meeting during the whole nine-year period, but we had several nice letters. (267)

Albee's importance to these playwrights was primarily inspirational. Though he was not needed in the day-to-day development process of the Playwrights Unit, Albee was paying its bills and his association with the Unit gave it enormous cachet. If anything, his lack of interference in the Unit's process, whether intended or simply because of his own busy schedule, contributed the Unit's openly experimental atmosphere. Though it would be an exaggeration to state that Albee was integral to the Unit's development process, without his name and occasional presence, the Unit would have been just another off-off Broadway workshop.

The seeds of the play development process at The Playwrights Unit began with the Barr-Wilder production of *Way Out At the York* presented at the York Theatre on the set of *The Death of Bessie Smith* on 17 April 1961. Barr writes of the experience:

Before moving out of the York Playhouse in accordance with our contract, we tried yet another experiment. Dark on Monday nights in the usual Off-Broadway pattern, we presented three short avant-garde works organized by Roberts Blossom. They were not significant in themselves, but the decision to do them led us into the formation of the Playwrights Unit, which we ran for the next ten years. (228)

Way Out At the York was perhaps inspired by Barr's own directorial experimentation with electronic music, lighting, and sculpture in Ionesco's *The Killer*. According to Roberts Blossom, the actor and director responsible for putting it together, the basic reason for creating this program was "to recombine the relationship between seeing and hearing in a new way that doesn't require the use of dialogue."¹⁵

Way Out At the York featured the plays of Ursule Molinaro—*The Tourniquet* and *The Abstract Wife*. Molinaro, a respected novelist, translator, and screenwriter, though not as important as many of the other Unit playwrights, was representative of Barr's initial interest in writers who were experimenting with form in frank imitation of European absurdist playwrights like Genet or Ionesco. Molinaro is also important insofar as she was an early feminist playwright, and—with Megan Terry, C.S. Atherton, Gudrun Powers, Jan Holm, and Adrienne Kennedy—one of a handful of women who were selected by ABW to be presented at the Unit.

The Abstract Wife is a short feminist work which depicts a ménage à trois of a Husband, Wife, and Mistress. The play is essentially a monologue of the wife's list of abuses and regrets, which culminates with her setting fire to

her hair. Though *Way Out At The York* was a single performance, its atmosphere of open experimentation, without a focus on achieving any kind of off-Broadway success, inspired the more formal new play production process that was to become the Playwrights Unit. Using Monday evenings, typically dark nights in Equity theatres, to show new work became a standard operating procedure at the Unit.

ABW, in 1962, began its next stage of new play development with its Monday evening series of new plays at the Cherry Lane Theatre. Barr established this series because he felt nothing of importance had yet "surfaced" at the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio. He also believed that New Dramatists seemed "directed solely toward Broadway," while ABW's interest in new work was "more original . . . more esoteric." Scripts were "pouring in," and Barr felt many were worthwhile, though not "sufficiently developed to produce Off-Broadway," even under ABW's "economical management." (264)

Barr was a voracious reader of scripts; by the writing of his memoir in 1989 he estimated he had read six thousand "new American plays." He made it a policy to personally peruse every script that came into his office, although he admitted that reading every word of every script "was a martyrdom too severe to entertain." The four evening series of new plays at the Cherry Lane and at the Village South Theatre was ABW's first serious attempt at establishing an ongoing developmental process to deal with all these plays, and in so doing became one of the first professional theatrical organizations to simultaneously produce on Broadway, off-Broadway, and off-off Broadway. (264)

Several policies established during the series at the Cherry Lane were later made a part of regular Unit policy. These included free admission, no

reviewers, minimal settings, and volunteer work by all actors, directors, designers, and playwrights. Audiences were actively solicited and once in attendance were very enthusiastic. The evenings were extraordinarily successful. Joseph Cali remembers these evenings and the momentum leading to them:

[With *Virginia Woolf*,] suddenly the future was vast; the possibilities were tremendous. . . . The Cherry Lane became the cradle for new playwrights. Before the Unit was down at the Vandam Street Theatre, we were doing this Monday night series. Now I don't think it was called the Playwrights Unit then, but it was very successful. It was invited; there was no charge. We would do a new play; sometimes a reading, sometimes a production. Sometimes we would arrange an afternoon dress rehearsal and an invited audience for an evening performance. I think it was successful for playwrights. I think with the success of the Monday Night Series at the Cherry Lane, it was in Barr's mind to have a unit something like the Playwrights Unit. It certainly was the germ.¹⁶

Encouraged by the success of these Monday night productions, Barr felt ABW had something to contribute to the promotion of new playwrights and new plays. (264)

In this series, there were two plays which stood out—Terrence McNally's *This Side of the Door* (1962) and Megan Terry's *Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set of Pills*. McNally's play, which predates his . . . *And Things That Go Bump In The Night* (1964), was staged by Martin Fried and featured the young Estelle Parsons. It remains a very important early work, though it is unpublished. McNally, arguably the most prolific and commercially successful of the Unit playwrights, remains one of its most vocal supporters:

[T]he Playwrights Unit had a promise of new American plays in a way the others didn't. The New Dramatists always seemed more traditionally Broadway-oriented. The Actors Studio, for all the good work that was done there, was always Lee's building somehow. Even though there was a playwrights unit there, you felt that you were talking about acting as much as the play. It

was so hard to escape Lee's presence. It was [ABW's] Playwrights Unit that really was so important.¹⁷

The ABW production of *This Side of the Door* was McNally's introduction to Alan Schneider, who recommended him for a Rockefeller grant through the Office of Advanced Drama Research (OADR) at the University of Minnesota.

An early, intensely autobiographical work, *This Side of the Door* is an important antecedent to McNally's later plays both in terms of its dramatic structure and content.¹⁸ In an interview, McNally stated that the play "was painful for me to watch. I felt I was telling the secrets of my family in that play, and that didn't make me feel good."¹⁹ Written in three scenes, the short play reveals the private sorrows of a poor Texas family. The mother, Hebe, a lonely but imaginative woman, aged far beyond her years, comforts her sickly baby and defends her effeminate and rebellious son Edmund from the rage of her alcoholic husband Henderson.

In another sense, *This Side of The Door* is clearly Albee-influenced and thematically similar to Albee's *The American Dream*. Though not an absurdist work, *This Side of The Door* is certainly an informed caricature of a American family (in this case, a decidedly Texas one). In McNally's play, Albee's "bumble of joy" is transformed into a "real" physical bundle, albeit a doll, which is beaten brutally. The production of *This Side of the Door* was given a full staging as is evident from a large prop list, including toasters, bread baskets, cheeze-its, etc. The set required a sink, stove, refrigerator, step unit, and of course, the infamous door. It was a box set fitted within the Cherry Lane's small stage and had to be easily moved to accommodate the theatre's busy repertory. The play was performed in its own evening, with no accompanying works, and was the first full-length new play presented by ABW in this series.²⁰

McNally's response to the production came from a place of inexperience—it was the first play he had ever written and had produced in the professional New York theatre:

Since it was the first time I had a work PERFORMED with PROFESSIONAL actors, etc., I was very green and very nervous. So nervous I don't remember re-writing, only wishing the actors and director had been "better," meaning they would somehow magically "fix" everything that didn't "work." It was a terrifying experience for me from beginning to end. It was almost impossible for me to watch and/or experience my play with an audience in the house. I remember the Cherry Lane Theatre being very full for the performances and wishing I could just run away from the whole experience. Naturally, I "learned" very little. I was too terrified to absorb much of anything. I don't think this is an uncommon experience for a "first-timer."²¹

Yet McNally was very pleased with Estelle Parsons's performance, as well as that of William Traylor. He was particularly happy that Parsons used a scene from *This Side of The Door* for her audition for the Actors Studio. McNally also remembered that input from the ABW producing partners took place in Barr's apartment long after the performances.

While McNally was not specific about what sort of suggestions ABW had offered, he did note that these comments came *after* the production so as not to influence his writing of the play. In general, ABW partners rarely attempted to influence a playwright to change their plays in advance of production, although it was clear, particularly in this case, that a post-production discussion of the work did occasionally occur. Since this was a work that McNally decided to shelve, the comments did not figure in later productions of the play. However, having learned how to work with professional actors and directors with *This Side of the Door*, McNally's later experience with *Witness* at the Unit in the fall of 1968 was a much happier one by his own admission, and did lead to an off-Broadway production.

Megan Terry's *Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set of Pills* is an equally brutal, yet passionate work, and it is notable that this play and McNally's . . . *And Things That Go Bump In The Night* were published together in the University of Minnesota/OADR's published play series *Playwrights For Tomorrow*. Terry had also been recommended by Alan Schneider for a Rockefeller grant. In Terry's case the ABW production of *Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set of Pills* raised her to the status of produced playwright and was the catalyst to her career in the New York theatre. In a response to a questionnaire created by Tom Oliver, critiquing the Playwrights Unit, Terry wrote:

[O]n the strength of that single one-act play I was invited to belong to an experimental group in New York, which gives me further contact with very creative actors and directors, but also the University of Minnesota is now doing the play and the head of the "Office for Advanced Drama Research" has recommended me for a Rockefeller Grant. Whether I accept or not is another matter, but the fact of production and careful production has brought me into contact with more and more people in the theatre that I could have ever had. I have an additional handicap in not being on the scene, so the Unit is of very special nourishing interest to me. The thought of it and the activities of it literally feed me and keep me working. [underscore by Terry]²²

Terry's career was also buoyed by the option money that Wilder and Barr had made available to her for *Ex-Miss Copper Queen*.

Though it was ABW's production of *Ex-Miss Copper Queen* at the Cherry Lane that gave Terry the opportunity to write for the Open Theatre, the production was not an ideal situation, as she relates:

Joe Chaikin saw a play of mine at the Cherry Lane Theatre, *Ex-Miss Copper Queen on a Set of Pills*. It was produced by the Playwright's Unit—Edward Albee, Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder—on a double bill with Terrence McNally's play *The Other Side of the Door*, starring Estelle Parsons. John Strasberg and I had a very good production going and then this Actors

Studio director came in on opening night to break down the actors. The Studio had this theory, which they said they got from Freud, of breaking down the arrogance of the actor and getting to the real whatever. This fool came in one hour before curtain and turned our leading woman into a piece of protoplasm. He so destroyed her self-confidence that she forgot all her lines.²³

In spite of this unhappy experience, Terry made the connection with Chaikin and clarified for herself how she wanted to work in the theatre:

I thought, "If this is New York theatre, forget it." I was shocked and appalled. . . . After the show I got a note that Joe wanted to meet me—I didn't know who he was. He said, "Hated the production. We're thinking of starting a theatre and we're looking for writers and would you be interested?" After what I'd just been through I said, "Absolutely." I could see no future in the so-called commercial theatre if this was the way people were treated.²⁴

The experience of dealing with a method director who was clearly out of control suggested other ways of approaching production of her plays, and led her toward empowering actors in the creation of their own work.

Taking place in New York City's Lower East Side, *Ex-Miss Copper Queen* is a meeting between Copper Queen—a former Montana beauty contest winner, now a junkie—and two older homeless women, B.A. and Crissie. Copper Queen is abandoned by these two women, however, after they talk her out of her fur coat, and she dies, trying to remember the child she left behind in Montana. It is the imagined child—again the Albee influence—that provides the focal point of the play. The strength of the play lies in that mysterious bond between these women, who live within fragile realities of their own making. The quality and style of the writing is suggestive of Terry's later, politically-oriented work, but is also the somewhat diffuse work of a novice writer.

Terry was not without her criticisms of the Unit. She thought that

there should be more performances so that larger audiences would see the work. Her idea was to present all the work of a single playwright, so that the playwright might be able to see various scripts in production. She also thought it important to link the Unit's plays to alternative publishers such as Grove Press or New Directions. Terry was frustrated by the small window of opportunity offered by the Unit, stating, "It seems such a pity to me that after all the work and the one performance on Sunday at five, that only a few people can see, that the play in many cases may go back into the bottom drawer."²⁵

Though Terry was unhappy with the lack of exposure at Unit productions, she was clearly pleased by the productions themselves and found the Unit an inspiration, writing two years later to Barr, Wilder, and Albee:

I believe the productions have consistently been up to very high standards, considering the time and money limits. The writers have had a chance to not only see the work of the other writers, but to discover simpatico directors and future possibilities regarding actors through the work of the Unit. This is a tremendous benefit! It's very hard to explain what belonging to the unit has done for my confidence and self-esteem, but I do feel stronger and more able, solid, unafraid to try new things and because of these positive effects my imagination is taking me places I couldn't have conceived of a year ago.²⁶

Even though Terry did not have any other plays done at the Unit, simply being on its roster gave her a certain cachet as a playwright.

One other play from this period in the Unit's development, Doric Wilson's *And He Made A Her* produced by ABW at the Cherry Lane on 13 November 1961 (it was first produced at the Caffè Cino production on 23 March 1961), merits discussion since it was the first play of an important gay playwright, and because it was the first play by a member of the Caffè Cino to

move from off-off Broadway to off-Broadway (as well as one of the first plays actually written for the Caffe Cino).²⁷ In a *Village Voice* review of the Cino production (there is no review of the ABW production), Sandra Schmidt offered this description of *And He Made A Her*:

The play is exactly what the title says. We have Adam, a somewhat backward boy just up from the Kentucky side of Paradise, a trio of archangels airing political views, and finally Eve, there to get things started. . . It is an old story. But the trite (or maybe tried and true) theme provides some very funny trimmings. There is, for instance, some question as to whether this oddly bulging invention, 'woman,' is sprouting wings. In any case, Adam wants nothing to do with the whole affair. . . In the end she gets her man, employing only part of a feminine repertory that is obviously complete, and she goes off to make a him.²⁸

The *Village Voice* review of *And He Made A Her* was one of the first that was published of a Cino production. Wilson was later the founder of an important gay theatre, TOSOS (The Other Side of Silence), a playwright-in-residence at The Glines, and author of several seminal works of the gay theatre, including *Street Theater: The Twenty-Seventh of June, 1969* and *A Perfect Relationship*. Wilson's production at the Cherry Lane initiated the Playwrights Unit policy of showcasing the playwriting talent of the off-off Broadway theatres like the Cino and La Mama.²⁹

The Playwrights Unit itself was not officially formed until September 29, 1963.³⁰ In a letter to Barr, Wilder, and Albee, Edward Parone outlined the "immediate and philosophical program of the Playwrights Unit."³¹ Parone's main points were these: that the Playwrights Unit was reversing the "absurd Ford Foundation program" that encouraged poets and novelists to write plays while ignoring experienced playwrights; that seeing the work of others might encourage the writers to write new plays; and that the producers should not remain "aesthetically aloof"—an open policy of production did not preclude

the producers expressing their dislike or disapproval of a particular work.³²

Laurence Wunderlich wondered about the criteria that were set regarding the selection of these writers:

I had visions of the long, soul-searching, far-reaching discussions which must have taken place behind closed doors to boil hundreds of playwrights down to thirty-six. I could imagine fabulous arguments about "trends" and about the "new" playwrights and the "new" playwriting. Ultimately, I came to the idealistic conclusion that, given this particular organization, there could be one reason only why we thirty-six were called *and* chosen . . . what really welded us together was that, to a man, we had all moved out of the nineteenth century with a vengeance, moved into the twentieth century with a passion, and that we stood at the *forefront* of all that was happening (and not happening) in the theatre today. . . how *else* to 'push the horizons of the theatre a little further along the road which other arts have already traveled'?³³

To Wunderlich's consternation, it was Parone who was submitting the plays for production and judging them by what he considered "good" rather than what was considered "avant-garde." In a typical reaction, Parone considered Molinaro's *Engagement* (Wunderlich's favorite) an "awful, arty play." According to Barr, there was purposely no real policy on what sort of play would be produced at the Unit:

Our policy the first year or two was simple: we would present at the Unit, under conditions resembling professional conditions, any new plays submitted. Neither Edward, Clinton, nor I wished to exercise judgment on new and experimental work. It was too easy to be wrong! In spite of the 'open-door' policy, the quality of work was surprisingly high the first two seasons. . . We presented forty-seven different evenings by almost as many playwrights. True, most of the plays were one-acters, but it is true that most playwrights begin in that form. (265)

The outcome of this openness was an eclectic season of plays that included both avant-garde works and those which were distinctly realistic and perhaps even "commercial."

Wunderlich was horrified by the Unit's first production, Lee Kalcheim's *A Party For Divorce*, which he considered crass realism, and a "sitcom." But Kalcheim had his own perspective on the clash between the more traditional playwrights at the Unit and its avant-garde enthusiasts:

[M]y heroes as playwrights were Arthur Miller and Paddy Chayefsky, because when I was watching television as a kid, Chayefsky's dramas were live on television, and they were really impressive; I still love Chayefsky, but when I got to New York the realistic theatre was dead. Beckett and Ionesco were all the rage . . . As a matter of fact, when my play [*Party For Divorce* and *Match Play*] opened off-Broadway, Walter Kerr was reviewing for the *Times* and basically wondered 'What is this play doing here?' . . . so I got into writing comedy for television. I had to wait out the absurdist period. The theatre of the absurd was wonderful . . . but if you didn't write that way for a period of a couple of years, you were dismissed. We all did stuff at the Cafe Cino. That's where Dick Barr found us all. There was the La Mama crowd; and I did several things at the Cino. Lance's stuff was all absurd. But there I was doing my relatively old-fashioned plays right along with them.³⁴

Barr had never intended that absurdist writings dominate the Unit's agenda. The Unit was to be a place where playwrights of many different styles could work without regard as to whether they were following the latest trends.

Terrence McNally, who made his own forays into the avant-garde, most conspicuously with his first major Broadway play, . . . *And Things That Go Bump In The Night*, echoed many of Kalcheim's concerns:

The Unit was very important to all of us who were writing plays in the 60's. There was also the [Actors Studio] Playwright's Unit and Caffé Cino and La Mama, but the Unit seemed to have less of an "agenda" and cast a wider net in looking for plays, actors and directors. Without it, many of us would have had no place to go. La Mama and Cino seemed only interested in "avant garde" writers and the Actors Studio was a Byzantine court of intrigue and its Playwrights Unit was very definitely a last priority for the Studio. A lot of "famous" and "good" plays were begun there but I would give the credit to the actors and directors who made them happen, rather than Lee Strasberg or any of the

forces who ran the Studio.³⁵

McNally remains grateful for the broad support that Albee and Barr gave new playwrights, stating, "I will always be grateful to Barr/Wilder/Albee for putting back so much time, passion and money into the next generation. I am not aware of any other commercially successful playwright/producer making the same gesture of thanks and commitment."³⁶

Barr initiated Kalcheim into the New York theatre, recommending his work to the Cino, later at the Unit, and introducing him to television contacts that Kalcheim used to parlay himself into a career of writing for television. He considered the Unit an artistic home:

I knew that if I wrote a play, I could take it somewhere, and it would be done. . . . I had the feeling that once *Party For Divorce* was done, if I took a play to Dick he would do it. And it's a rare thing; unless you're enormously successful and then they'll do anything of yours; which, I think, I have two minds about, because then you get playwrights like Mamet or Shepard whose lesser work is done when there are other playwrights out there, whom nobody knows, who have better work which doesn't get done. All the politics that Lawrence Wunderlich was talking about, I wasn't aware of; all I knew was here's a space—who do you want in it? Who do you want to direct it? Go do it.³⁷

The Unit was very different from the Caffè Cino, where playwrights had to scramble to assemble casts and directors, then design and build the settings themselves. At the Unit, the playwright could focus on changing lines, improving moments, working, in Kalcheim's words, as a kind of "sculptor of dramatic action." While the Unit playwrights had to cope with some of the same production details as those at the Cino (i.e., gathering props and costumes), they were assigned a director who was there to do much of this work. ABW also assisted in terms of casting, lighting, and running the show.

Another important play from the Unit's first season and perhaps

representing exactly the opposite kind of play from Kalcheim's, was Jean-Claude van Itallie's avant-garde *War*, which was produced at the Unit on 22 December 1963 and was very well attended. Van Itallie was pleased with the play's reception, especially since it was his first play in New York, but considered the Unit problematic—questioning, among other details, its budgeting priorities. Van Itallie felt that more money should be spent on production values, and in particular, for a permanent stage manager. He was concerned that more money was being spent on a house manager “sitting in the office answering phones” rather than for a practical stage manager. Van Itallie was also unhappy that money was spent on keeping the Unit open for specific operating hours rather than simply providing playwrights with their own key and more flexible hours.³⁸

Van Itallie's criticisms, while harsh, belie a strong concern for the Unit, since at that point he had no other producing opportunities in New York. He also thought that thirty playwrights for a workshop were too many and was later proven right. Van Itallie's suggestions seem to have been taken seriously, since Chuck Gnys, who replaced Edward Parone as manager in the Unit's second year, cut back the number of playwrights, increased the number of performance dates, and was a much more “hands-on” director in terms of production details, having served as a stage manager on Broadway.³⁹

Van Itallie's *War* is a “game” of sorts, an improvisation, between an Elder Actor and a Younger Actor in preparation for their method acting class. The setting is a “loft high above New York City,” which is filled with the detritus of a theatrical life; masks and swords, pieces of costumes, and a painted drop representing “a stylized European park scene.”⁴⁰ The action of the play offers an interesting miniature of the playwright's later work. The play begins with the Elder Actor and Younger Actor exchanging competitive

taunts and put-downs, which, with the appearance of the Lady, become progressively more violent.

Van Itallie experiments with the nature of improvisation as performance, the conscientious breaking of the fourth wall (the Lady addresses the audience directly), and use of transformations, which both he and Megan Terry (under Joseph Chaikin's direction) employed extensively as the vocabulary of the Open Theatre. Written after *Motel*, which later became part of his famous collection of short plays, *America Hurrah*, *War* was subsequently performed in 1965 at the Caffè Cino, then performed at the Martinique Theatre and in a European tour in *Six from La Mama*, which was directed by Tom O'Horgan.

More than a year after the production of *War*, the Unit presented his *Almost Like Being* and *I'm Really Here*, which were parodies of the Doris Day persona and two of his earliest works presented by the Open Theatre and directed by Chaikin. Both of these plays exhibit the dramaturgical techniques van Itallie used in his more important works with the Open Theatre, including *The Serpent* and *America Hurrah!* Rhea Gaisner, a member of the Open Theatre and assistant to Joseph Chaikin on the Unit productions of *Almost Like Being* and *I'm Really Here*, offers this analysis:

Using a character who epitomized the American myth or dream, Doris Day, and an area of exploration which Chaikin called Inside-Outside, van Itallie wrote two Doris plays . . . *I'm Really Here*, the blacker of the two, ended with Doris's realization that she was mortal and vulnerable, that the movie world and its postulates doesn't hold in life. *It's Almost like Being* makes use of the conventional Hollywood ending but twists it sufficiently to explode the whole mythology it is based on. Both plays are humorous, yet pointed and barbed. Again the plays were written by van Itallie in solitude, but are work that the actors could directly relate to. Doing the plays was a logical extension of workshop exploration. . . . They are a kind of dialectic between the dream and the reality in which we live. This was to grow to

fruition in *Interview (Pavane)* which was finally produced as one of the three plays in *America Hurrah*.⁴¹

While van Itallie clearly had his criticisms of the Playwrights Unit, it remained an important place of experimentation for him. He was able, in the short plays he produced there, to play with dramaturgical techniques and content he would return to again and again in his later works.

Before a discussion of the developmental process of Amiri Baraka's/Leroi Jones's *Dutchman*, some attention should be paid to the actual production values of the plays produced at the Unit. Initially, every production was photographed by Alix Jeffry as part of a visual record. A candid shot as well as a formal company portrait was taken.⁴² The photo of Kalcheim's *Match Play*, the final production of the Unit's first year, is typical: a unit set placed against a black curtain. The actor Tony Musante converses with actress Rosemary Forsyth on a park bench draped with a cloth to suggest a couch. In ABW's later off-Broadway production of the play, the set is also simple, but elaborately dressed to suggest a Scarsdale mansion.

In van Itallie's *War*, the black drop is augmented by an elaborate dressing of theatrical detritus (masks, fans, swords, etc.), and the costuming, especially that of the Lady, is fully realized. Parone, however, thought this was a weakness of the production and the play.⁴³ Even Baraka's *Dutchman*, which was one of the Unit's most successful productions, was played on a simple bench unit. The set of *Dutchman* was more carefully built and painted, however—there are no drops draped over park benches. It is notable that Barr, Albee, and Wilder chose to have themselves photographed on the set of *Dutchman*—its lean and hungry look offered a visual icon of the Unit's powerful minimalist stagings.⁴⁴

For Baraka the process of becoming a playwright had begun with his

involvement with the New York Poet's Theater which he had founded with Diane di Prima, Frank O'Hara, and Kenneth Koch. Baraka became involved with Albee's workshop at Circle In the Square: "Edward Albee . . . opened up a workshop and drew quite a few people—Adrienne Kennedy was one, Jack Richardson, and this other playwright from Yale, Arthur Kopit."⁴⁵ Shortly after this workshop Jones had sent Richard Barr his *The Toilet*, which Barr thought "pretty risky—even for the Unit." Barr "toyed" with the idea of producing *The Toilet* but decided against it. (269)

Inspired by Albee's workshop, and the opportunity to be produced at the ABW Playwrights Unit, one night Baraka sat down and wrote *Dutchman*:

It was about eleven o'clock one evening, when I usually fumble through papers and books and things like that, and suddenly I sat down to write a play. By about four o'clock in the morning, I was through. I didn't read it that day, but I read it the next and that's when I knew what it was. Until then, I didn't even know what I'd written. I don't mean in the sense of knowing whether it was great; I mean I literally didn't know what was on the page. It's like that movie *Billy the Kid*, where Billy draws and shoots and someone says, "How do you do that without aiming?" and Billy says, 'I aimed before I drew the gun.' Essentially, I think that's what it is—a sort of buildup of things that you have and when you're ready it just comes out.⁴⁶

Baraka's story of creating *Dutchman* is akin to Albee's own inspired writing of *The Zoo Story*. For Baraka, the writing of the play was akin to jazz improvisation, where "you practice every day, you run the scales, then when you get ready to improvise, it's just a question of getting it out."⁴⁷

Baraka was pleased with Parone's direction of his play, finding him "a very good director." Parone had chosen *Dutchman*

not because it was revolutionary, which it was. . . I chose it because I like him [Jones] as a writer. I never chose plays for propaganda purposes. I choose them for aesthetic reasons. I just found it was a wonderful play—very funny and very well-written and, of course,

very revolutionary. It was going to be the first time anybody black had gotten to a stage and said, "This is how I really feel!"⁴⁸

The Unit production was a scramble to put on; but it was not the playwright who was doing the scrambling. Director Parone and his cast found the sets and costumes they needed themselves—normal policy in the Unit's first year (hence perhaps van Itallie's criticisms). The rehearsal process for *Dutchman* lasted two weeks. Parone states that "Roi wasn't around very much. He'd stop by now and then, but there was no interference."

Baraka's absence from rehearsals was notable because unlike most of the writers at the Playwrights Unit, he was primarily a poet, and did not have the hands-on theatre experience of the other Unit playwrights. In most cases, the playwrights were actively involved with their Unit productions. The other exception to this rule was the Doric Wilson, whose play *And He Made A Her* was transferred by ABW from the Caffè Cino to the Cherry Lane. By his own admission, Wilson was a very inexperienced playwright at the time and later regretted his absence from the rehearsals. *Dutchman* was produced with a shorter work by Edward Evans, *The Empty Room*, which featured Roscoe Lee Browne. Parone "grabbed" actors from that cast to play the passengers in the subway; these walk-ons had "little rehearsal at all."⁴⁹

There were two performances of *Dutchman* at the Unit, at 2 and 5 PM. According to Parone, about forty-five minutes before the curtain, Al Freeman, Jr. became agitated and said he wouldn't perform the monologue that is the heart of the play. After an argument, Parone convinced Freeman to go on stage. The response to the play was electric:

[W]hen *Dutchman* came on, I didn't know how explosive it was going to be. It was like a trigger had been pulled. The audience started talking back to the stage. After the performance several people said to me, 'That's the first time I've ever been scared to death in the theatre.' I guess they really thought somehow it was

going to explode. At five o'clock, when we did the second performance, Mr. Barr, Mr. Wilder, and Mr. Albee were in the audience. The theatre blew up all over again. I can't describe it. It's something that happens to you once in a lifetime, when you do something you *think* is going to work and *does* work. It did, as it could happen only in New York. It was the talk of the town immediately. It was the first successful play in this series we did that whole year, by all these writers.⁵⁰

Dutchman moved off-Broadway, two months later, to the Cherry Lane theatre, as part of a threesome with Beckett's *Play* and Arrabal's *The Two Executioners*, featuring Robert Hooks and Jennifer West. Parone directed this version as well.

With the off-Broadway opening of *Dutchman*, Baraka quickly understood that his own career had taken flight:

I went out late that night after the opening, up to the corner of St. Marks and Second Avenue, and read the reviews. They were mixed too, but there seemed to me a kind of overwhelming sense from them that something explosive had gone down. I had a strange sensation, standing there like that, I could tell from the reviews that now my life would change again. I wasn't sure how, but I could perceive that and it sent a chill through me. I walked back home slowly, looking at my name in the newspapers, and I felt very weird indeed. When the magazines and electronic media coverage of the play and local word got out, I could see that not only was the play an artistic success, despite my being called "foul-mouthed," "full of hatred," "furious," "angry," I could tell that the play had made its mark, that it would not quietly fade away.⁵¹

As Baraka recalls, suddenly he was offered articles to write in major New York newspapers and journals; he was asked to rewrite Broadway plays, and received "all kinds of interest and requests and offers and propositions." It was "as if the door to the American Dream had just swung open."⁵²

Of the many plays produced at the Unit, *Dutchman* is closest to Albee's *The Zoo Story* in terms of dramaturgy and content. It was revived several times, and often in tandem with *Zoo Story*. Though the play was a critical

hit, and "a smashing success at the Unit," Barr recalls that it was a financial loss. (269-270) For Baraka the success of *Dutchman* was a mixed one, since it drew him notoriety rather than approbation for having created an important artistic work. Baraka recalls:

It occurred to me that there were all these people I knew and had loved in my life—obscure people, black people, in particular, people who thought I had something to say to this society, who could never say it themselves. So I said to myself, 'I'm going to say all those things that those people really want to say. I'm going to pay society back. If they make me famous, they're going to be sorry.'⁵³

For Baraka the death of Clay in the play, was, in a sense, the death of himself. If the play development reflects, as it should, the development of a playwright, then the Unit production of *Dutchman* transformed LeRoi Jones into Amiri Baraka, the black activist poet he is today. Shortly after the success of *Dutchman*, Baraka left his Jewish wife and "co-founded the Black Arts Repertory, which became the center of the separatist Black Arts movement."⁵⁴

By the Unit's second year, Parone had left for the Mark Taper Forum in California, and the Unit's first three productions (including a musical revue) ran without a coordinator or manager. Lawrence Wunderlich remained, however, as the theatre manager. From Wunderlich's very precise "House Rules & General Information" about the Unit's operation, it is easy to see how so many plays were presented in the course of a year.⁵⁵ Because there were two rehearsal spaces at the Village South Theatre—an upstairs stage and the downstairs lounge—it was possible to rehearse two shows simultaneously. Plays opening within a week had the upstairs stage, while plays opening within two weeks rehearsed downstairs. The Village South Theatre was available from 11:00 AM to 11:00 PM, seven days a week, though

it did not remain open if there were no rehearsals or performances scheduled.

Rehearsals were precisely coordinated by the Unit staff of Lawrence Wunderlich, Rilla Bergman, and Walter Cavalieri. Sundays and Mondays were the Unit's busiest days, since both rehearsals and performances took place then. Each playwright was reminded that:

the Village South Theatre, its staff, and its facilities are being offered free of charge for a *workshop* situation, and that everyone volunteers his services and there are no fees, salaries, and/or budgets involved. Hence in addition to your actors, any technical help you can also furnish (e.g. Asst. Stage Manager, Property Manager, Designer, et al.) will be to your own advantage.

Wunderlich strongly advised that all technical work, including set building, lighting, costumes, etc., be kept to a bare minimum. No staff or budget was available for these activities, and a very small budget of \$10.00 was made available for props.

Each group using the theatre space was given strict rules on setting props and scenery as well as the removal of the same; a strict cleaning checklist was provided. Only two performances of plays were permitted during the Unit's first two years. When the theatre was available exclusively for Unit activities, there were two performances at 3:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M. or 5:00 P.M. and 8:30 PM on Sundays. On Mondays, there was either one show at 8:30 P.M., or two shows at 6:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M. or 7 and 10:00 P.M. One full hour between performances was mandated by the Actors Equity association. The capacity of the Village South Theatre was 199 seats, with 150 seats dedicated to the playwright's invitees. The Unit provided a "sufficient number" of post card invitations to be distributed among the members of each theatre group. Each postcard admitted two audience members. In addition, Unit inserts were placed in the programs of ABW productions off-

Broadway.

The performance space at the Village South Theatre itself was 22' 9" inches wide with no wing space, with a stage depth of 15', 1" from the rear wall to its apron. There were two entrances in its rear wall, one up right, the other up center, and a fire door in the rear wall up left which served as a third entrance. A traveler curtain was hung across the back of the stage, controlled from a backstage room, up right. The lighting equipment consisted of 6 ellipsoidal-reflector spotlights, 13 fresnel spotlights, 4 lighting strips, and 2 auto-transformer light boards of six dimmers each, of 2500 watts. A piano was available, as well as a tape deck, an amplifier, and two portable speakers. There was a very small amount of masking and other flats, and a very small amount of basic rehearsal furniture.

During the Unit's second year, with its carefully managed organization in place, many of off-off Broadway's playwrights had productions there. The most important of these include *Up To Thursday* by Sam Shepard, *No Trespassing* by Lanford Wilson, and *To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza* by John Guare. After relying primarily on solicited and unsolicited scripts, Albee, Barr, and Wilder were now carefully selecting plays and playwrights they had seen at the Caffe Cino, La Mama, or elsewhere off-off Broadway. On 23 November 1964, the Unit produced Sam Shepard's *Up To Thursday*, which was Chuck Gnys's directorial and managerial debut at the Unit. Efficient, organized, a consummate theatre professional, Gnys was, according to John Guare, "very preppie . . . very tweedy."⁵⁶ Gnys chose to direct some of the Unit's most unusual plays, as well as some of its most successful productions. He also served as a producer when Unit plays moved off-Broadway, or in the case of Philip Magdalany's work, to Broadway. He directed both of Sam Shepard's plays, including *4-H Club*, at the Unit.

Charles Mingus, Jr., Shepard's friend from Duarte, California, who lived and worked with Shepard during his early years in New York in the 1960s, remembers Shepard as being profoundly affected after seeing Albee's plays, as well the other European absurdists, at the Cherry Lane Theatre:

They had very bizarre talking heads kinds of elements: like two Ping-Pong balls, one character on each side of the stage with a follow spot sort of bouncing back and forth. These were very abstract things which, like the work of Beckett, Pinter, and Ionesco, made a strong impression, I'm sure, on his work. I saw elements of that kind of ambiguity and that sort of cinematography in his work. And it was the goal to make it more real, not believable, because everything is believable.⁵⁷

After seeing *Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*, Shepard produced his plays *The Rock Garden* and *Cowboys* at Theatre Genesis. He was working furiously on new one acts, whose originality, he confesses, came out of "ignorance" of the theatre.

Shepard, by his own admission, "didn't really have any references for the theatre," but felt he was better off, since he learned to shape action without preconceived ideas.⁵⁸ It was Albee's writing, however, that was the strongest influence on Shepard's earliest endeavors. Shepard himself labeled his *Rocking Chair* and *Dog* "Zoo Story-type" plays. He went so far as to introduce himself to Albee, as Ellen Oumano relates:

He discovered Albee's Greenwich Village address, rang his doorbell, and presented him with a suitcase full of plays. Albee read them and selected one, *Up to Thursday*, about a boy facing the draft, for inclusion in the New Playwrights Series of February 1965 at the Cherry Lane Theater.⁵⁹

Shepard had based the play on his own terror of the draft, which he had managed to avoid by "pretending to be a heroin addict."⁶⁰

Up To Thursday included a cast of actors who were regular performers in Shepard's work at Theatre Genesis, including Lee Kissman, Stephanie

Gordon, and Kevin O'Connor. Shepard had known them from his days at the Village Gate, where they had all worked together. The play itself is an absurdist dream play: a young man's anxieties are transferred to inanimate objects and other characters. In the first scene of the play, the Young Man is seated next to a large boulder, which is then lifted away by two men in hard hats wielding a large crane. The boy protests bitterly and the scene blacks out with the Beatles's song, "I Saw Her Standing There," blasting in the darkness.

The second scene begins with four actors, Terry, Sherry, Larry, and Harry sitting around the young man who was now lying under an American flag. They applaud the young man's nearly inaudible humming. They cross and uncross their legs. There is a moment of laughing and then of pushing each other off the chairs. They take turns taking the flag off the Young Man. He seems to acknowledge their presence; he tells them he is waiting for clean underwear to arrive. He covers himself again. They whip the flag off him and engage in petty squabbles. They exit clutching their backs. Harry and Sherry then writhe under the flag together. The Young man looks out to the audience and waves. He is grabbed again by the construction workers as the play closes with a recap of the same Beatles tune. The thrashings under the flag become violent.⁶¹

Shepard has dismissed *Up To Thursday* as being "a bad exercise in absurdity," and according to actress Stephanie Gordon, considered it "a joke."⁶² While acknowledging that it was "the first commercial production I'd done," Shepard belittled the project as an "off-off Broadway-moves-off-Broadway kind of bill." Albee, however, much admired Shepard's work and continued to promote it.⁶³ Stephen Bottoms believes that *Up To Thursday* and other early unpublished plays were Shepard's period of learning his craft:

At this stage Shepard was simply "working out," using simple

images drawn from everyday life as the starting point for stream-of-consciousness writing games. He seems, moreover, to have been somewhat embarrassed by some of the results of this playful experimentation: not all of these early plays now survive in print, largely because, once his work was finding publishers, he chose to hold some of it back. It is clear that, from an early stage in his career, Shepard matched an uninhibited writing approach, avoiding self-censorship in the creative process itself, with a canny awareness of the need to monitor both his output and his public profile.⁶⁴

While Shepard dismissed the production of *Up To Thursday*, his decision to work on his play at the Unit was a conscious one, knowing that Albee's influence and encouragement were key to his career.

Lanford Wilson's *No Trespassing*, a play which is also unpublished, was performed at the Unit on 31 January 1965. It had been produced at Caffe Cino on 16 January 1964, and according to Wilson, Edward Albee came by and "wanted to do it." Though Barr didn't like it, Albee insisted. For Wilson, the draw of the Unit was ABW's ability to procure talented actors:

They [The Playwrights Unit] had minimal sets, as I recall, and the performances were free. There were no critics and there was a difference from the longer run performances of plays off-off Broadway—because each show only ran a couple of days they could get just about anyone they wanted. And, of course, with Edward's name and the producer's name, any number of very, very good people worked there. Viveca Lindfors was there, all kinds of interesting performers. They had to rehearse, of course, and tech rehearsals and all of that, but the actual commitment was only about one or two performances. An afternoon and evening performance.⁶⁵

The Unit was not "doing anything more than the cafes as far as anyone's artistic development," according to Wilson, but "it certainly made you feel professional. It was one more place to work out, to be seen and heard." While Wilson certainly felt that the work done at the Unit was not much more advanced than anything being done at the Cino or elsewhere off-off

Broadway, it was important to him that he was working in a real theatre space; the space itself seemed to confer a air of legitimacy to his work as a playwright.

Wilson admits to “not taking the Unit terribly seriously, but I wasn’t taking anything very seriously then.” What was important was that the Unit was a place to experiment and see other work being done:

The plays were very experimental in a way that isn’t done so much these days. We were trying anything. And, of course, as soon as anyone learned something, it belonged to all of us. And so, if Megan Terry suddenly broke into song in the middle of a play; it was available to all of us. Sam Shepard slowing a play down at the end where it just ran out of gas and stopped—belonged to all of us. We weren’t seeing any uptown plays; we had had a perfectly good education in world theatre, but we weren’t seeing anyone else’s plays at all. We were being fed by each other’s work—like crazy.

The Unit was a place where the playwrights were given a space and “left alone.” Most significantly for Wilson, the Unit provided him with his first professional opportunity, the New Playwrights series at the Cherry Lane.

Wilson’s play *No Trespassing*, though unpublished, remains an important early work. The play concerns itself with Alex, a wealthy young Manhattanite from the Upper East Side, and Dan, a homeless alcoholic. Racing from the lights and sirens of the city, Alex stumbles into the vacant lot that is Dan’s home. Distracted and frightened, but resolutely cool, Alex interrogates Dan, whose only desire is to wheedle money out of him for alcohol. As Alex becomes progressively more disjointed and rambling, complaining about weak men, it becomes clear that he has murdered his father, in his father’s own bathtub.

Though somewhat imitative of Albee’s *Zoo Story*, *No Trespassing* explores several aspects of Wilson’s later dramaturgy—the homeless

character of Dan will be depicted later as Skelly, a wandering character that figures prominently in *This is The Rill Speaking* and *The Rimers of Eldritch*. Wilson also examines the gap between the privileged and those who live on the fringe of existence—a subject he deals with more thoroughly in *Balm In Gilead*. In *No Trespassing*, Wilson experiments with the nature of language and its natural rhythms, and how these subtleties define character in action.

One of the most important plays of the Unit's second year, however, was John Guare's *To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza*, which depicted the last day in the lives of an elderly couple in New York City. Guare describes the play's action:

It was about these two old, hundred year old people who lived on the Lower East Side. They've been moved into a three-ette; an apartment with three walls. They decide on that day just to take a walk, just take a walk, to watch their building being torn down. [T]hey go to a Chinese restaurant and meet a boy who was a neighbor and they're so excited they decide to leave him this credenza as a tip because they don't have enough money. And in the end they sneak back into the building—it's going to be torn down—they just can't bear to face it. There was a singer between each scene, telling a story about some tough western people and how they survived living in the desert—sort of a Rudyard Kipling ballad, how people lived in the Far West under horrible circumstances. But it was just a day in the life of these very old people—and it turns out to be their last day.⁶⁶

The play was later a special on *Experiment on Television* on CBS in 1965. For Guare the importance of *Wally Pantoni* was simply having had a play go up in New York City—it didn't matter to him whether it was good or bad.

Guare had come to the Unit after being absent from the New York theatre for six months—having been drafted into the Air Force Reserves shortly after graduation from Yale Drama School. When he returned to New York found an entirely new downtown theatre scene awaiting him:

I was thrilled to be in New York because it was so alive. The change in that one year from the spring of 1963 to the spring of 1964 was phenomenal. There was suddenly Lanford Wilson, and *Madness of Lady Bright*, and these little storefront theatres; things that had not existed before. You could shop around and say I'll go see that or I'll go see that. And to know that I had been invited to be in that first group of the Barr-Wilder was just overwhelming. It was thrilling. And it was a theatre that was also my scale, that was life size, that wasn't overwhelming. It was a theatre that was very, very possible. Also at this time it was a theatre that was sponsored by someone who was an idol to us.

The Unit was special to Guare because of Albee, though he acknowledges that Albee was "absolutely as removed as he could be; he was a mandarin." But however mysterious, Guare adds, "Edward's work was the first new voice that belonged to our time."

Guare was impressed with Gnys's management of the Unit, stating that Gnys "was not a fake artist." Gnys was "there in a coat and tie, every day, keeping everything running," and was "very affable and very supportive and very pleasant." He assigned Guare a director and gave them the space to work. Guare was recommended, by either Barr or Gnys, to the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center based on his Unit production. He was grateful to the Unit for having "given him the O'Neill," which became his artistic home.

Guare was very pleased with what he had learned with *Wally Pantoni*. He credits the play as an early experiment in the dramaturgy devices he employed in later work:

There were scenes in it that helped me; that answered stuff in *House of Blue Leaves*. It was the music, but also the emotional scenes; scenes of what people wanted from life. That play was a great catalog for me; there are things in it I used and didn't use. I just tried everything. I had never written a play like that before, and I was given a lot of courage by being in that theater under Edward Albee's aegis. I mean I just went as far as I could go. And that what was thrilling about it. In my play I had an opener; it was crazy, I had dancer in it and a bag lady. And I

realized in the afternoon of the first performance that it was all wrong and I cut it. And it was thrilling to know that you could just take something and cut it. Thanks to *Wally Pantoni*, I learned a lot, things that I mulled over. There were things that I was unhappy with and I was trying to figure it out.

The cut mentioned above was suggested by Gnys, and was one of the first times that Guare had experienced a suggestion to trim his play.

Also important to Guare was the sense that the Unit was a place where you were chosen because of the quality of the work, and not because of "your Zodiac sign," or because you "happened to have a play at the right time," a policy which, according to Guare, differentiated the Unit from the other small theatres of off-off Broadway:

I remember walking into the Cino, and Joe said to me, "You know I'm only doing plays by Aquarians." And I said, "I'm an Aquarian. I was born February fifth" And he said, "Do you have proof?" And the plays were booked by the charts, and that's how Joe worked. But Barr-Wilder was really about your work; you were picked by your work. I once did a play at Theatre Genesis; I heard that on Monday night they were doing plays, and I wrote a play on Thursday which was then done on Monday. And it was like that and it was thrilling. But it was reckless; there was just plays in the air. But the Barr-Wilder was the first one that was picked on your work not on your Zodiac sign or some other weirdness.

Although it was clear that all of off-off Broadway was a playwright's playground in the early 1960s, for Guare the Unit was important because of its professionalism, its validation of one's talent and of the process of experimentation itself.

Glenn Loney, almost five years after *Wally Pantoni* at the Playwrights Unit, recalled Guare's play:

It was finely played. In fact, I don't think I'll ever forget the tragicomic old couple, moved from the condemned building they have loved to a new apartment building. 'Look,' she says, 'you can see our shadows on the walls!' No it turns out; they are the shadows

of the people next door. And a pie wedge shaped apartment yet!
The essence of life and death in little old New York.⁶⁷

Loney recalls in particular the "Ballad of Cattle Creek Annie" in which Annie is paved over rather than "surrender her land to a government super-highway." Loney says of *Wally Pantoni*, "It remains a work of comic if undisciplined genius and a horrible reminder of what lies ahead for the megalopolis."⁶⁸

Richard Barr was pleased with the Unit's first two seasons because "in spite of the "open-door" policy, the quality of the work was surprisingly high." (265) Yet all three partners agreed that this policy was not working:

Edward, Clinton and I felt that the 'open door' policy had at least two negatives. One: we were presenting some work which simply was not worth the effort; second: we were trying to simulate a professional experience, and since most producers read and discuss their plays before presenting them, we realized we were omitting that step. It is true that Parone would weed out the worst of the submissions, but there were no script conferences held by the three of us. When Gnys took over, however, we asked to see everything that came in so that some judgment of taste could be affected. (266)

Even this precaution proved inexact, as Gnys was returning scripts without notifying ABW. Producing 22 to 23 short plays a year was more than the Unit could bear and still produce quality work and promote the careers of important new playwrights.

Still, many of the playwrights produced at the Unit during this period developed significant careers in the American theatre. Most of these writers made other theatres or development groups their artistic "homes." But as John Guare states, this was not the point:

I was so thrilled I had a play in New York, I mean I still walk by that theatre on Vandam Street and say that's where my life started right there. Whether it was good or not; it didn't really matter. The fact it was accepted; the actors showed up and we

rehearsed it for four weeks and we had a wonderful time. . . I mean you didn't think of a career, you didn't say who was here tonight, because there was nothing to transfer to. I mean you just wanted to have a play done—to write the next play. So it wasn't in the sense of career making.

The point was to learn, to experiment, and to build a body of work. That several plays moved off-Broadway, though certainly significant, was less important than the thrill of a first professional New York production.

Though the next several years at the Playwrights Unit did not produce as many plays or playwrights per year as in its first two years, there were more important productions, including Mart Crowley's *The Boys In The Band*. The Theater 1966 season was brief and included six good plays, all of which were subsequently published or produced. Of these plays, Shepard's *4-H Club* and Gurney's *Bunny Stuntz* are the most important, and represent two almost entirely different traditions in American playwriting—the anti-rationalist avant-garde, and traditional mainstream realism.

Shepard's *4-H Club*, produced by the Unit on 9 September 1966 at the Cherry Lane Theatre, depicts the fairly frenzied activities of three young men, Joe, Bob, and John, living together in their lower East Side apartment. The play, an unabashed satire of the idyllic pastoral culture of 4-H Clubs, is based on Shepard's own experiences living with Charles Mingus, Jr. and the "events in the kitchen of the all-male apartment they shared."⁶⁹ The three characters jump up and down on the garbage strewn across their apartment and play games of domestic order, making coffee, sweeping, and eating apples. Yet the drinking of the coffee ends with the smashing of cups, the sweeping is thwarted by scattering of the swept piles, and the apples become a metaphor for bombs and warfare.

In terms of the play's structure it is evident that Shepard was following

his process of "action writing," which he based on the "action painting" of Jackson Pollack.⁷⁰ But it is equally evident that Shepard is attempting to discover the rhythms of character and emotion. Stephen Bottoms notices that Shepard, in this early play, "frequently allows his fascination with the rhythmic potential of words to take precedence over all other considerations." This is because Shepard was mimicking the jazz improvisations and their "tendency to shift tempo with bewildering rapidity," which explains the lulls and frenzies of his "wild-boys-at play sections" in *4-H Club*, as well as in *Cowboys #2* and *Red Cross*.⁷¹

4-H Club is also about the "void in the center of these young men's lives." As Martin Tucker notes, "they can banter, hit each other in buddy play, but when the traffic of the noise becomes still, they cannot bear to hear the sound of their own loneliness."⁷² This separation from the world was manifested in its staging at the Cherry Lane, as described by Bottoms:

This avoidance of the unknown is illustrated most vividly in *4-H Club*, which was first presented at the Cherry Lane Theatre by Albee's Playwrights Unit, and so takes advantage of using a larger stage area than was available in most of the ad hoc Off-Off spaces. The text specifies that the tiny kitchen set be placed in the "extreme upstage left" area of an otherwise deserted stage space. The whole stage is to be lit with equal brightness, and the audience is thereby constantly aware of the an unexplored expanse beyond the flimsy walls that the characters inhabit. The action of the play is crammed into a corner, and though the men come and go through a door at the back of their set, they never venture out into the space beyond it. They remain tuned in on each other and away from the wild world and its savage, man-eating mandrills.⁷³

In terms of Shepard's own growth as a playwright, he was beginning to take advantage of the possibilities of professional production. In the program for *4-H Club*, Shepard was now given a single billing and a large "bio," with reviews cited from the *Village Voice*, *Time* magazine, and the *New York*

Telegram.⁷⁴ The Unit had clearly helped Shepard make his mark on the New York theatre, and he now had a sense of what a real theatre space could do for a play.

It should be noted that this move from the lofts and church spaces of off-off Broadway to a larger off Broadway professional theatre, designed specifically for the performances of plays, was an important move for all the Unit playwrights. In Shepard's case it was a very useful change and provided him with an opportunity to learn how to use a larger theatre space. For other Unit transfers, particularly in the case of the New Playwrights Series at the Cherry Lane Theatre of Theatre 1966, including Shepard's *Up To Thursday*, Wilson's *Home Free*, and Foster's *Balls*, or in the case of Doric Wilson's *And He Made A Her* (Theatre 1962), which had transferred from the Caffe Cino, this move was not as successful (see Michael Smith's comments on page 134). Many of the plays which had such tremendous success in a tiny intimate space like the Cino, with an 8 foot by 8 foot performance area, simply became lost in the larger more formal space. Yet, while not entirely successful in every case, the move to a professional theatre was an important learning opportunity for playwrights who had never experienced a space designed specifically for play production.

Sam Shepard's experiences as a New York playwright stand in stark contrast to those of A.R. Gurney. Gurney was in Boston "teaching at MIT trying to support little children"⁷⁵ and was far removed the New York downtown theatre scene. He had graduated from Yale and was struggling to support a growing family. Gurney admits, however, to seeing much good theatre at the Theatre Company at Boston, where he was exposed to Albee, and the absurdist, who he believes were not only a great influence in his writing but on the entire generation of playwrights coming of age in the

1960s:

Albee contributed to the seeding of American writing, but there was a tremendous help from Europe; Beckett was coming in and Pinter and Genet and Ionesco. They gave off and off-off Broadway a little class, because Americans have always been a little nervous about the theatre; and we celebrate anything English that comes over. To have a play done off-Broadway or off-off Broadway—if Beckett was being done and Pinter was being done and these were writers who were critically acclaimed in Europe—it lent a kind of aura to the works of American writers.

Gurney, while impressed by writers like Beckett, Pinter, Ionesco, and Genet, remembers seeing their work and thinking, “God, I could never write anything like that.” Gurney was more affected by writers in the tradition of the American comedy of manners than “any experimental line.”

Yet Gurney’s *The Rape of Bunny Stuntz*, produced at the Cherry Lane as a Playwrights Unit production on 13 November 1965, presents a darker vision than most of his plays, and even Gurney admits that he was influenced by the “terseness and purity” of Pinter’s language and by Beckett’s experimentation. In the play, the title character holds sway over the audience as if it were at a PTA meeting with Bunny as its newly elected leader. She is all efficiency and expedience, smartly attired in her crisp suit, her heels click-clacking, and wearing an enormous name tag stating “Hi, I’m Bunny Stuntz.” The action of the play is Bunny’s slow transformation from a confident leader to a haunted victim, as a strange young man in a leather jacket, waiting in the darkness just offstage, takes over and ends her life.

The play’s darkness, unusual for Gurney’s work, was similar to many plays produced at the Unit, particularly in its first few years. Gurney attributes this to Albee’s *Zoo Story*, which he saw himself in a “good production” at the Theatre Company of Boston, but also as a reaction to the 1950’s, stating:

Well, you have to remember how the fifties were, coming as

they did right after the War and the Korean War, kind of almost a coda on World War II—no one wanted to talk about violence or think about violence or think about anything but being cozy. And so it was a world of Doris Day, bland music, and then we all sensed, many of sensed that . . . like the character of Peter in *The Zoo Story*—there is the other side. We're human. We know we have our darkness, we know bad things happen. So I think the playwrights had an instinct to play with that theme. The encroachment of the unpredictable, the dark, and the evil in the ostensibly comfortable and easy life of the 1950s.

Other writers confirmed Gurney's uneasiness with the 1950s—in particular, Harvey Perr, author of several plays at the Unit, including *Upstairs Sleeping*, wondered how anyone could be nostalgic for an era that saw the advent of McCarthyism.⁷⁶

Gurney was very pleased with Unit's production, which he felt succeeded because there was little interference from the producers. He felt the Unit was special because the writer was allowed "to find his own distinctive voice" and because there weren't "a lot of people trying to impose their voice on me." Gurney was particularly pleased with Gnys's direction of his script:

I thought he was the greatest. I had never worked with a professional director; he seemed to know exactly what he was doing. A lot of people later on, when I got to know the theatre more, would roll their eyes and didn't think he was that good. But for my point of view I thought he was great. He taught me a little about cutting. He'd say, you don't need to say that, you've already said that. And if there were a lot of cuts, it was because Chuck said they should go. That's one of things that playwrights have got to learn at the top is cutting, and he was wonderful about that. We never fought.

In addition, the Unit production values were "first rate," and having a play produced at the Playwrights Unit for Gurney also meant an introduction to the world of the New York theatre, which he subsequently became a part of, both as a playwright and as a theatre-goer.

Over the next few years, from Theater 1967 through Theater 1971 there

were several significant plays produced at the Playwrights Unit including Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little*, which has been discussed earlier, and Mart Crowley's *The Boys In The Band*. However, the Unit's output, because of finances and a change in the nature of off-off Broadway, had begun to diminish. By 1965, off-off Broadway had been discovered and many of its playwrights had, in Amiri Baraka's words, "sold out," and had moved into television and films. Playwrights were also focusing on other developmental organizations like the O'Neill Playwrights Conference or the new plays division at the New York Shakespeare Festival. According to John Guare, the success of *Boys In the Band* and *Dames At Sea* had ended the off-off Broadway movement, and the Unit's activities had become somewhat redundant.

The Unit was also, perhaps, the victim of ABW's extraordinarily busy schedule of producing, as Barr relates:

The Playwrights Unit was but one of the activities during the explosion of the Sixties. Most of the decade we had a play Off-Off-Broadway, a play Off-Broadway (at one time two of these at once); and a play on Broadway for almost the entire period. This seemingly mad rush of producing plays was not compulsive. The plays existed; the dance companies existed; and it was part of the excitement of the time that pushed us on. The United States, as a nation, was growing up. People had begun to recognize art as part of their lives. . . . We felt that the theatre, as presented by our new, young playwrights, was as exciting a moment in art history as the advent of abstract expressionism in paint. It was for the Theatre to catch up to the other American arts, so we dug in. (266)

Tied up in producing decisions with so many shows, neither Albee, Barr, or Wilder were able to monitor the Unit activities as closely as they would have liked. Gnys complained of this shortly after his dismissal as manager of the Unit, stating: "It's one thing to sign a check. It's quite another to take the time to come down here and get involved in the work itself."⁷⁷

In spite of the tensions that were developing between Gnys and ABW—tensions which were based partly on ABW's growing financial problems—there were several important plays that did receive production in the period between Theatre 1967 and 1971. More importantly, the Unit's method of play development, of moving plays directly, if possible, to production, and then producing the playwright's next work, became the *modus operandi* for Playwrights Horizons, the Unit's direct descendant. Not only did Bob Moss, who managed both organizations, learn how to produce new plays under Chuck Gnys, he brought many of the Unit's playwrights to Playwrights Horizons, including Edward M. Cohen, A.R. Gurney, Jr., Steven Jacobson, Jonathan Levy, Philip Magdalany, Teresa Marffie, Tom McCormack, James Prideaux, David Shumaker, and Tom Sydorick.⁷⁸

But during Gnys's management of the Unit, the most important production was Crowley's *The Boys In The Band*. After receiving the script from Janet Roberts at William Morris, Barr admitted having some misgivings about the play, thinking it too risky for off-Broadway, but also felt it was "hilariously funny for a first play." Barr relates the reaction of his then partners:

Clinton disliked both the subject matter and the play; Edward thought the play was sentimental, melodramatic, and poorly constructed. He was also aware that it had similarities to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, including the games at the party, the scaling away of illusions, and the continuous drinking. Clinton refused to have anything to do with it, and insisted we remove his name from the production. . . . Edward, on the other hand, agreed to meet with Mart to discuss his reservations about the play, which he did. Crowley ignored them, but Albee and I decided to go ahead with the play anyway, at the Playwrights Unit. (320)

According to Barr, Robert Moore, who was then playing Jack in Albee's *Everything In The Garden* on Broadway, agreed to direct, and assisted

Crowley in "editing and rearranging the overlong text."

Barr also relates how Peter Harvey's set was constructed of photographs: the bookcases, windows, and some of the furniture were life-size photographs, "so that with a real couch and one or two real small tables, a very elaborate, realistic interior was created for very little money." (321) The actors themselves provided their own clothes, so the Unit production of *The Boys In The Band* cost about \$250. Barr called the play an "uncontrollable hit" with lines that "stretched around the block onto Sixth Avenue."

Barr was under tremendous pressure to move the play, but was ambivalent about producing it off-Broadway, attributing its success at the Vandam Street theatre with "word of mouth in the homosexual world." (321) The first obstacle Barr had to overcome was Edward Albee, as he relates:

Edward was very much opposed to my moving the play to an Off-Broadway house. He did not like the play. He felt I would be hurt by it, and was generally opposed to the whole operation. When I suggested that we do it non-profit at the Unit, turning all the proceeds over to our non-profit corporation, he once again refused, feeling that the commercialism was opposed to the principles of the Unit. Now, I wanted to produce the play. My goal in going Off-Broadway was to discover and present new playwrighting (sic) talent, and here was a built-in natural. The problem became acute: Edward was so violently opposed to the project that I was seriously concerned about our future relationship. If I persisted in going on with the Crowley play, Edward might exercise his option of not going on with me. I can say truthfully that had I been forced to make a choice I would have continued with Albee, dropping *The Boys in the Band*. (322)

However, Albee was not Barr's only problem: he had neither a theatre nor the money to move the play; he was also in competition with several producers who were "breathing down Crowley's neck with money, and the promise of a theatre." Barr had to move quickly.

Barr had "one of our most serious talks" with Albee, who "calmly, but

emphatically, reviewed his objections to the play," but left the decision up to Barr. The money came from Charles Woodward, and Theatre Four fell into Barr's lap, as a show there had just closed. Albee was "philosophical" about Barr's decision to do the play, but "watched the whole move uptown with some trepidation." Woodward and Barr persuaded Crowley to trim the text a bit more, and in Barr's words "we plunged ahead." (322)

Barr used the same previewing technique he had used in opening *Virginia Woolf* on Broadway, except that on opening night the entire audience was invited. Barr made "a little warm-up speech," during which he pointed out the absence of the press, and "the audience relaxed." The evening was a success, as Barr relates:

It was quite an opening night. Cliff Gorman came flying down the stairs with his show-stopping line: 'Who do you have to fuck to get a drink around here?' and the riot began. The audience loved it, and immediately spread the word. The reviews were almost unanimous. While some found the play sentimental, dishonest and melodramatic, and a steal from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, most felt as Clive Barnes did: 'One of the best acted plays of the season.' . . . Even John Simon and Martin Gottfried liked it, so we were really off and running. (324-325)

The play sold out, continued to sell out, and became a smash hit. Barr took the unusual step of raising the off-Broadway price of the tickets from \$5.95 to the unheard-of \$10 (because the "ice" on the tickets from scalpers had raised them to \$25.00 anyway). Barr believed that between the stage production and the film he made a 3,000 percent return on his investment in the play.

In 1969, with the money from *Boys In The Band*, and the later benefit performances of *The Front Page*, Barr was able to finance the move from the Unit's old location on Vandam Street to its new home across the street from La Mama theatre company on East Fourth Street. One of the first successes that Barr had at this new location was ANTA's (the American National

Theatre and Academy) invitation to bring Philip Magdalany's *Watercolor* and *Criss-Crossing* to its theatre on Broadway.

The production, both at the Unit and on Broadway, was directed by Charles Gnys and was Gnys's sole production on Broadway. The costs for rehearsals and performances were estimated at \$33,074.92, and its production and operating budget at \$31,043.43.⁷⁹ While the costs were not high for Broadway, the ANTA production budget was much higher than ABW's normal production costs off-Broadway and at the Unit. The play received encouraging reviews (see pages 178-179) but not enough to keep it running beyond its limited engagement. It was becoming clear that Barr could not finance plays like Magdalany's, which garnered critical acclaim but no commercial success, without another Albee hit. Typical of his irrepressible optimism, Barr sought to expand the Unit's activities to Broadway in the midst of what must have been a rapidly darkening financial picture.

By fall of 1970, Gnys was gone, and the Unit was being run by Robert Moss (who had directed several plays there), and Bruce Hoover, a professional stage manager. While Gnys had to justify his management decisions to ABW's uptown office, ABW was now concentrating on Albee's *All Over* and had left the Unit almost entirely to Moss's and Hoover's management. Though this provided Moss and Hoover with an extraordinary opportunity to expand and develop their own methods of new play development, it was evident that without ABW's strong oversight, the Unit began to drift in its mission toward playwrights.

Moss and Hoover issued a newsletter/manifesto about the Unit, later published in *Backstage* magazine, which described the Unit and its future goals:

The sole concern of the playwright at the Unit is to develop,

refine, sharpen and exercise his craft. The Unit provides him with a theatre in which to make his growing mistakes. When a production is staffed, the most experienced and talented professionals are encouraged to bring their knowledge to bear on the new script. The playwright is exposed to the best talent available so that his experience will be the most intense, the most abrasive, and hopefully, the most beneficial.⁸⁰

The newsletter, which was the first to come out of the Unit, delineated several new positions regarding the production of plays, including a discussion of the importance of revisions and the concept of each performance at the Unit as being "another step towards a finished work." Gone was the idea, so cherished by Barr and Albee, that plays selected for the Unit were finished enough for production.

The newsletter noted the upcoming productions and announced the formation of an acting ensemble "to create an atmosphere of mutual trust which will permit actors and playwrights a free and open exchange of ideas." The playwrights were expected to work with the ensemble in a sort of Open Theatre fashion, using areas of "fantasy, the occult, dreams, mysticism, myth, and ritual" to create "theatrical events that do not attempt to mirror everyday life experiences, but rather become the instrument for an outpouring of both unconscious modes of expression." The newsletter explained the use of readings: "The Unit will be conducting unrehearsed, informal readings of new plays, for the playwright to be able to hear what he has written."⁸¹

Following this newsletter, another was sent out advertising three new fall productions at the Unit. It was clear that by this point Moss and Hoover were scrambling to deal with changes of production based on a lack of funds, and in the case of Edward Cohen's *Breeding Ground*, an inability to find a director for his play. More importantly, the newsletter contained this blurb:

In 1963, when Richard Barr, Edward Albee, and Clinton Wilder

founded The Playwrights Unit, they believed that the play belonged to the playwright. That is still true, but in order for a playwright to realize his work, he needs the collaboration of a director. Therefore, The Unit has begun sponsoring a Directors Workshop. We have invited twenty directors to work on projects of their own choosing and to meet once a week for a joint work and bull session. We have encouraged our member playwrights to sit in whenever possible, in hopes of beginning new partnerships and getting new ideas. The Unit hopes to stimulate innovative thinking about the theatrical experience and to encourage experiment.⁸²

In the same newsletter, Hoover and Moss boasted that 300 new actors had auditioned for the Unit, 40 new directors had been interviewed, and over 200 new scripts had been read by "Mssrs. Barr, Albee, Woodward, Hoover and Moss." The newsletter also mentioned funding from several new sources of amounts ranging from \$2.00 to \$15.00.

While on the whole these two newsletters are very positive and show that as of October 1970 there were no plans to end the Unit, they also show a weakening of the playwright's prerogative. With the addition of an acting ensemble and a director's workshop, and the somewhat ominous statement on readings, the Playwrights Unit seemed to be moving toward the model of new play development still current in 1998. These changes came on the heels of the Unit's growing need for funds and its need to produce another "hit."

It is hard to believe that Albee or Barr would have knowingly approved these changes—particularly Albee with his dislike of actors and directors "helping" the playwright write the play. And in fact, with the growing casting crisis (discussed in Chapter 4) for *All Over* and the subsequent financial pressure when that show closed, it was nearly impossible for Albee, Barr, or Woodward (since Wilder had left the partnership) to keep abreast of the Unit's activities. In spite of these problems, the Unit's emphasis still seemed to be on playwrights and new work, even if

the vision of the Unit was being compromised by the weaker role writers were to have in the future.

But for all the excitement and energy of the Playwrights Unit Newsletters, there was a dark cloud hovering over the Unit's precarious existence, and that cloud was ABW's production of Albee's *All Over*, which opened on 28 March 1971 and closed 1 May 1971 after 40 performances. ABW narrowly avoided closing *All Over* after its opening night by a voluntary pay cut in the salaries of its stars and by an emergency loan from the Theatre Development Fund. It was obvious to both Barr and Albee, by *All Over*'s second night of performance, and in spite of the play's emergency extension, that they had been unable to bring this difficult play to Broadway with any success. *All Over*'s failure represented a pattern they could not escape—whether because of critics, the audiences, and perhaps, Albee's own idiosyncratic dramatic style. Barr brings this anecdote to bear on the play's closing:

We left the Martin Beck Theatre not waiting to see the second night and wandered up Eighth Avenue in silence. After a block or two, I turned to Edward and said: 'What did we do wrong?' Then I cried! All of my instincts and training told me that this play was superb—head and shoulders above any written by an American in many years; that the cast chosen had performed with impeccable taste; that the direction by Gielgud, and the startling set by Rouben Ter-Arutunian were consistent with Albee's intentions; and yet, we were obviously going to fail. Albee, who was not much more composed than I, tried to calm me, but there was no reasonable answer to the question. . . . The next morning, after a sleepless night, I discovered I was almost autistic. Speech, such as it was, came in gasps. My friend Antony Constantine, called Edward, who came over at once. He sat by my bed trying to help me absorb the emptiness. My doctor put me on sedation, and then did the same for Edward (we had the same doctor). (331-332)

The failure of the play was made more poignant by Barr's relentless

optimism; it is difficult to believe that he didn't know *All Over* would fail. He truly thought that Albee's writing would finally win over the critics and the audiences—as it had with *Virginia Woolf*. His account of Albee's failed play represented much, much more than one more closing on Broadway. It was a final chapter of the ten year reign of Edward Albee as America's most important playwright. The failure of *All Over* ended not only this part of Albee's varied and important career as a writer in the theatre, but signaled the end of a possible playwrights theatre on Broadway—and with that, the end of Broadway as a venue for serious American drama.

The Unit's development process, having started with *Way Out At the York*, a single playful evening of avant-garde theatricality, had ended with a nearly fully functional play development organization, replete with a stable of playwrights, directors, and actors—all gathered to offer their services, gratis, to serve the needs of new plays. Though the failure of *All Over* was a concession to the reality of Broadway tastes, the Playwrights Unit had served its purpose admirably. With Bob Moss's gentle theft of the its mailing list, his adoption of its generosity of spirit toward new playwrights, and his subsequent creation of Playwrights Horizons, the Unit had indelibly changed the nature of new play development in the United States. Though the Unit had been altered over the years as the reality of developing new plays by new playwrights became more difficult, it provided a paradigm for how difficult new plays, quite often experimental in nature, could move to professional production and remain faithful to the vision of the playwright. It is a model that serves today.

Notes

¹Edward Albee, "Edward Albee Talks About What Does A Playwright Do? - Playwriting Is Not A Collaborative Process," *New York Theatre Review* 2 (October 1978): 13.

²Richard Barr, "B'way? Yes, Indeed," *New York Times*, 2 December 1973, Section 2, 10.

³Richard Barr, "The Playwright's The Thing," *New York Herald Tribune*, 9 January 1966, 25.

⁴Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, "A Springboard for Dramatists," *New York Herald Tribune*, 18 August 1962.

⁵Lanford Wilson, tape recording of comments at "A Tribute To Edward Albee," a conference held at the City University of New York Graduate Center, 21 November 1997.

⁶Lanford Wilson, telephone interview with author, New York, N.Y., 27 March 1995.

⁷Paul Zindel, tape recording of comments at "A Tribute To Edward Albee," a conference held at the City University of New York Graduate Center, 21 November 1997.

⁸Richard Barr, *You Have to Hock Your House: The Story of a Producer*, unpublished memoir, Edward Albee Theatre Collection, 267. Subsequent references to this source will be cited in text.

⁹John Guare, tape recording of comments at "A Tribute To Edward Albee," a conference held at the City University of New York Graduate Center, 21 November 1997. Subsequent comments are from this source, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰Thomas Morgan, "Angry Playwright In A Soft Spell," *Life* 62 May 1967, 90A; see also William Flanagan, "Albee in the Village," *New York Herald Tribune*, 27 October 1963, magazine, 27; and Sidney Fields, "A Long, Long Walk to the Typewriter," *New York Daily Mirror*, 13 October 1960, 28.

¹¹Wilson, comments at "A Tribute To Edward Albee."

¹²John Guare, "Guare On Albee: A Figurehead for a Generation of Playwrights," *The New Theater Review* 15 (Fall/Winter 1996): 24.

¹³Paul Zindel, comments at "A Tribute To Edward Albee."

¹⁴Terrence McNally, "In Conversation with Terrence McNally: Edward Albee," *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 22 (Summer 1985): 22.

¹⁵Press release by Howard Atlee, dated 16 April 1961, *Way Out At the York Clippings Folder*, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

¹⁶Joseph Cali, interview, March 9, 1997.

¹⁷McNally, 17.

¹⁸Steven Drukman, "Terrence McNally," in *Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*, ed. Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1996), 336.

¹⁹John L. DiGaetani, *A Search for a Postmodern Theater: Interviews with Contemporary Playwrights* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 225.

²⁰Terrence McNally, *This Side Of The Door*, unpublished playscript, restricted materials #7680, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

²¹Terrence McNally, electronic mail to author, 7 March 1998.

²²Megan Terry, to Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Edward Albee, 30 March 1964, Richard Barr/Clinton Wilder Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Playwrights Unit, Correspondance 1960-1969, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

²³Megan Terry, in Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman, eds., *Speaking On Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996, 244.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Megan Terry, to Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Edward Albee.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, *The Off Off Broadway Book* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), xix.

²⁸Sandra Schmidt, "Cafe Theatre: And He Made A Her," *Village Voice* 30 March 1961.

²⁹Tish Dace, "Doric Wilson," In K.A. Berney, ed., *Contemporary American Dramatists* (London: St. James Press, 1994), 645-646.

³⁰Wunderlich, 16.

³¹Edward Parone, to Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Edward Albee, 9 October 1963, Edward Parone Papers, held by author.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Wunderlich, 17.

³⁴Lee Kalcheim, interview with author, New York City, NY, 3 March 1998.

³⁵McNally, email correspondence.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Kalcheim, interview.

³⁸Jean Claude van Itallie, letter to Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder and Edward Albee, Richard Barr Clinton Wilder Papers (*Tmss-1978-22), Box 1, Folder 12, Playwrights Unit, Playwrights Unit Fact Sheets, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

³⁹Judith Granite, interview with author, New York City, 14 May 1995.

⁴⁰Jean Claude van Itallie, *War and Four Other Plays*, (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1967), 8.

⁴¹Rhea Gaisner, "Jean-Claude van Itallie: Playwright of the Ensemble: Open Theater," *The Serif* (Winter, 1972): 9, no. 4, 16.

⁴²Theatre 1965 Playwrights Unit/Musical & Revue Unit House Rules and General Information, Village South Theatre, October 1964, Michael Kasdan Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, The Ohio State University, 3. Alix Jeffrey took photographs of only the first two years of the Unit's productions.

⁴³Edward Parone, to Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Edward Albee.

⁴⁴Lee Kalcheim, *Match Play*, undated photograph of ABW Playwrights Unit production; Leroi Jones, *Dutchman*, undated photograph of ABW Playwrights Unit production; Jean Claude van Itallie, *War*, undated photograph of ABW Playwrights Unit production; Lee Kalcheim, *Match Play*, undated photograph of ABW production at the Provincetown Playhouse,

Alix Jeffry Photographic Archive, Harvard Theatre Collection and Michael Kasdan Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, The Ohio State University.

⁴⁵James Hatch, "Amiri Baraka," *Artist and Influence 1985*, Hatch Billops Collection, Inc., New York, N.Y., 7.

⁴⁶Hatch, 7.

⁴⁷Hatch, 7.

⁴⁸Edward Parone, "Reflections on *Dutchman*," in Gary Vena and Andrea Nouryeh, *Drama and Performance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 882.

⁴⁹Vena and Nouryeh, 882.

⁵⁰Vena and Nouryeh, 883; and Edward Parone, interview with author, New York City, 14 March 1995.

⁵¹Baraka, 187-188.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Hatch, 12.

⁵⁴Paul Nadler, "American theatre and the civil rights movement," 1945-1965, Diss., City University of New York, 1995.

⁵⁵The following discussion is based on the Theatre 1965 Playwrights Unit/Musical & Revue Unit House Rules and General Information, Village South Theatre, October 1964, Michael Kasdan Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, The Ohio State University.

⁵⁶John Guare, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, 28 March 1995.

⁵⁷Ellen Oumano, *Sam Shepard* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 28.

⁵⁸Oumano, 36.

⁵⁹Oumano, 37-38.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 38; Martin Tucker, *Sam Shepard* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 33-35.

⁶¹Sam Shepard, *Up To Thursday*, typed manuscript, Restricted Materials #7593, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

⁶²Stephanie Gordon, telephone conversation with the author, May 5, 1998.

⁶³Oumano, 38.

⁶⁴Stephen J. Bottoms, *The Theatre of Sam Shepard: States Of Crisis* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27.

⁶⁵This and subsequent quotations from Wilson, interview.

⁶⁶This and subsequent quotations from Guare, interview.

⁶⁷Glenn Loney, "Launching Pad For New Drama: The Playwrights Unit," *After Dark* (November 1970) 12:7, 30.

⁶⁸Loney, 30.

⁶⁹Bottoms, 26.

⁷⁰Oumano, 44.

⁷¹Bottoms, 34.

⁷²Martin, 46.

⁷³Bottoms, 45.

⁷⁴Program for Sam Shepard's *4-H Club*, undated, typed mimeograph copy, Michael Kasdan Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, The Ohio State University Library.

⁷⁵This and subsequent quotations from A.R. Gurney, interview with author, New York City, 3 April 1996.

⁷⁶Harvey Perr, interview with author, New York City, 8 April 1996.

⁷⁷Glenn Loney, "Launching Pad For New Drama: The Playwrights Unit," *After Dark* (November 1970) 12:7, 28.

⁷⁸Andre Bishop, *Plays From Playwrights Horizons* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 1987), 316-320.

⁷⁹Budget for Playwright Unit at the ANTA, undated mimeograph, Michael Kasdan Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute.

⁸⁰The Playwrights Unit Newsletter, postmarked 1970, before 23 October; Playwrights Unit clipping folder, Billy Rose Theatre Collection; see also "Playwrights Unit Project," *Backstage*, 15.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²The Playwrights Unit Newsletter, postmarked 23 October 1970, Playwrights Unit clipping folder, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Chapter VI.

Conclusion:

The Playwrights Unit and Play Development Today

The Albee\Barr\Wilder Playwrights Unit set an extraordinarily idealistic standard for new play development. It would be nearly impossible, and perhaps not wise for play development groups to imitate slavishly the Unit's important features—full play production, extraordinarily talented performers, directors, and designers, and the direct sponsorship of well-known and seasoned producers (not to mention the sponsorship of a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright). The Unit did not last long because it was, in fact, too idealistic a venture. But it is important to recognize that the Unit offered a spectrum of highly desirable features, which provides a useful guide toward better play development today.

The reasons why the Unit would not work today are many. Few American theatres are financially able to sustain a production season that focuses solely on new plays by new playwrights. At best, most theatres produce one or two new plays and have a reading series of new work—plays which are rarely produced. Even at developmental theatres specifically geared toward the development of new plays, full productions are severely limited, with the remaining scripts receiving readings, staged readings, and mini-productions.

Universities with established playwriting programs, like the University of Iowa, Yale School of Drama, and New York University, have come closest to this ideal situation, where difficult or unusual plays have strong productions with talented performers. Most universities, however, have

limited budgets. Rarely are new plays a focus of their mainstage season, student actors are not the equivalent of professionals, and, in America in the 1990s, the growing conservatism of the general populace has had a stifling effect on the most adventurous university theatre. While there are many new playwriting programs across the country, particularly MFA programs, too often the focus is on producing readings and staged readings—and these are simply not the same experience as full productions with the attendant elements of design, direction, and rehearsal. The important schools mentioned above, which have produced many important playwrights, are the exceptions which prove the rule.

Often the reason given for the paucity of new play productions is the unavailability of funds, but as the Unit demonstrated, it is possible fully to produce new plays with fine professional actors, directors, and designers at a minimum of cost. More than a lack of funds, there seems to be a poverty of imagination. If it is truly important to the American theatre that new plays and new playwrights be seriously explored and promoted, then it is necessary to produce those plays in full, albeit minimal, productions. The Unit demonstrated that it was of the utmost importance that writers see their work fully staged if they were able to grow as playwrights.

That being said, the plays produced at the Unit took advantage of a very special time and a very special place: New York's off-off Broadway in the 1960s. There was a plethora of writing talent from which to choose, and producing theatre was much less expensive than it has become. There was also an artistic community which was feeding itself through art and performance. By the 1990s, the up and coming playwrights of the New York theatre community have been scattered to its four boroughs—and to the regional theatre. Playwrights, directors, actors, and other theatre artists who

in the 1960s would have congregated in Greenwich Village now live in Queens, Brooklyn, Astoria, and even such exotic locations as Hoboken, New Jersey.

Albee, Barr, and Wilder could drop into the Cino or to La Mama if they wanted to find new voices to present at their Unit. These days that kind of embryonic talent lurks in one of hundreds of tiny theatres that not only fill Manhattan, but the other boroughs and other parts of the country as well. The lure of film and television has seduced the most promising graduates of such famous drama schools as Yale, NYU, and Iowa. The playwrights that come out of these programs, if they write for the theatre at all, write only a season or two until they are snapped up by film and television. They have to make money to pay for the expense of their graduate educations. It is a rare writer who goes to Hollywood and returns to the theatre.

The nature of off-off Broadway has changed as well; what was once a theatre community creating art for its own sake has been transformed by commercial pressures to become a showcase for talent to be exploited. In an Equity Showcase Code production in New York City, it is difficult to create a theatrical work of art when every member of the cast, crew, its director, and playwright, is, in essence, auditioning as solo artists. The competitiveness between theatre artists (and artists of every ilk) for tiny amounts of funding has proven to be divisive and threatens the exchange that is so important to developing artists of every medium. The generosity and sharing that went on between off-off Broadway playwrights, as described by John Guare and Lanford Wilson, has been replaced by competitiveness and cynicism.

Many New York theatres which produced new work in the past have discontinued their new play programs and have focused on producing revivals of plays imported from England or from the regional theatres which

have a proven record of commercial success. Most theatres are producing new plays by playwrights who have already established a name for themselves rather than attempt work by writers of less renown. New playwrights are under tremendous pressure to give up percentages of royalties or options in return for production, and are under equal pressure to change or rewrite their plays based on the needs of producers, directors, actors, and dramaturgs. None of these pressures were present at the Unit, until its very last year.¹

The other change in the play development process since the Playwrights Unit has been the growth of the American regional theatre, which has supported a enormous "industry" of new play development—though again, much of that development has been primarily the type that relies on a lengthy process of readings and staged readings. As discussed in Chapter Two, the seemingly endless rounds of play competitions, readings, writer's conferences, and new play development programs have resulted in very few playwrights of note, very few important plays, and a process that seems to feed on itself. Play development has fallen in love with itself, an odd rite of "new age" self-discovery ("Let's heal this play!") rather than a process resulting in craftsmanlike work which, through the fire of production, takes chances with innovative form and content. Plays that go through this process become much like the bland commercial fare of television and popular film. In fact the play development process has become very similar to the film development process, in which plays are rewritten by "teams" of directors, dramaturgs, artistic directors, etc., rather than by individual playwrights.

The demise of the Playwrights Unit itself was brought on by the force of commercial concerns in the American theatre. Albee's failure to find an

audience for *All Over* signaled the end of the New York audience's willingness to tolerate any kind of experimental work on Broadway. The Unit's struggle for funding in its last few years illustrated the major foundations' apathy to the dearth of new non-musical drama on Broadway. Barr was unable to convince these funding sources that without the kind of financial support that was being given to regional theatres, Broadway would dwindle as a source of important new plays. What has resulted from this lack of financial backing is a fairly slipshod network of new play development which is inefficient in bringing new plays to national attention. Even if a play has a strong life in several regional theatres, unless it has a strong New York production, it rapidly disappears from the national consciousness.

James Prideaux, one of the Unit playwrights who sustained a professional career as a playwright and screenwriter, when asked about opportunities available to playwrights today, simply exclaimed, "I don't know how they do it." Without the generosity of producers like Edward Albee, Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, and Charles Woodward, it is practically impossible for an unknown playwright of talent and ambition to make a life in the professional theatre. The Unit was special not because it became an institution of alternative theatre like La Mama or Theatre for the New City, but because it took the raw talent of off-off Broadway theatre and gave it a mainstream soapbox. It made valid the very important experimentation and stretching that these artists were attempting, so that they could to break the death grip of conventional commercial theatre. It was as if a Broadway producer like Rocco Landesman went down to Ludlow Street, which is one of New York's off-off Broadways in the 1990s, and established a professional workshop, open to the public, to celebrate the playwrights and other theatre artists of Nada or of Dixon Place, two of the many adventurous theatres

downtown today.

The Unit demonstrated that it was important for playwrights to fail, over and over and over, in order that they might learn their craft. If, as Harold Clurman once said, the manure of failed plays provides the fertilizer for the theatre's best writing, then it is important to emphasize the process of building a body of work that will sustain that author for years to come. The Unit also demonstrated the importance of full productions—even if there were only two pages of genius to a script—because this was how its playwrights learned the importance of collaborating with other theatre artists on a production. Playwright after playwright interviewed for this dissertation emphasized the necessity of seeing a play on its feet, of being able to change that play, and observe what those changes caused in the play's action and structure.

One of the repeated complements regarding the Unit was its use of extraordinarily talented, professional actors. Over and again, Unit playwrights emphasized the importance of having the finest performers available in order to see their plays in the best light. While the generosity of these actors is to be commended, it was more a clever bit of wheeling and dealing on the part of Barr, rather than any extraordinary altruism on the actors' part that made this possible. Barr knew how important a producer he was considered, particularly after the success of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and having worked with some of the finest actors on the American stage, including Orson Welles, he understood the value of using actors of this caliber to test new material.

Another of the Playwrights Unit's important traits was its eclecticism. It was very important to mix playwrights writing in more traditional ways with avant-garde writers, and vice versa. The rigid wall of mutual disdain

between writers who write for the commercial theatre and those who write for non-commercial, avant-garde theatre, was harmful in the 1960s and remains harmful today. It is important for writers of all schools of playwriting to cross-pollinate, to have a sense of how various styles of writing, linear/nonlinear, realistic/antirealist, can meld with and inform each other, rather than having such rigid boundaries.

With all this said, it is important to acknowledge that the best play development organizations, such as South Coast Repertory in California or Minneapolis PlayLabs in Minnesota, or a writing program such as the MFA in playwriting at the University of Iowa are providing playwrights with these opportunities to see a great variety of plays fully staged. And these play development organizations deserve recognition for their extraordinary and important work. However, the vast majority do not or can not commit to a full production of a play, or to find talented actors, directors, and designers willing to commit to new work.

In these cases, the Playwrights Unit still serves as a model; the closer to a full production, even a minimal one, the better. It is important to find the very best actors and not to relegate the new plays to the studio theatre if that is at all possible. Do at least one new play on the mainstage, and don't commit to doing readings of a new play unless there is serious interest in producing it. There is a sliding scale of optimal new play development with full productions being best, and endless readings and staged readings being less useful. Even if it is not possible to develop new plays in the most ideal fashion, it is important to acknowledge that the ultimate goal of play development is move new plays toward full production in the theatre.

To provide a contemporary example of what I am speaking about, I offer this personal experience I had as a playwright working in new play

development. In March of 1998, I was fortunate enough to have a reading of a play I had written, *Men Dancing*, performed at Primary Stages, an important New York theatre for the development of new work. The reading was presented under the aegis of Daryl Roth Productions, the co-producer of two Pulitzer prize-winning plays, Albee's *Three Tall Women* and Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*. Through Ms. Roth's influence, the cast featured Broadway veteran Joel Grey, as well as other Broadway and off-Broadway performers Elizabeth Franz, Justin Kirk, Liz Larson, and Carlton Carpenter, among many others.

The experience was a thrilling one, but also extraordinarily useful in comparison to the several readings, staged readings, and University productions that I had seen of my play. In particular, with actors of the caliber of a Joel Grey, I was able to see, in this instance, how the father's role in the play could be expanded, given variety and depth. I was able to discern whether the character of Aaron, a young man in great distress, was developed sufficiently to sustain the interest of an audience. I had a tremendous sense of how powerful the play could be with the right actors. It was also clearly evident where the play had rough spots, where the actors did have not enough to work with, and the action of the play faltered. I had seen professional actors, equity actors, perform the play before, but never actors whose experience and talent equaled that of the performers at the Primary Stages reading. Talented actors give an extraordinary clarity to the moments where a play excels, and made evident where the play is lacking in depth or inventiveness.

I raise a discussion of my play *Men Dancing*, because, oddly enough, as I have been writing about and researching the history of the ABW Playwrights Unit, I have simultaneously been going through a lengthy

development process with this play—a play which I wrote as a reaction to the pain and confusion surrounding my father's illness and subsequent death from AIDS during the 1990s. I found out about the Playwrights Unit from director and playwright Edward Cohen while I was working on the first professional reading of *Men Dancing* at Jewish Repertory Theatre. Cohen had the dubious distinction of being the last playwright produced by the Unit in 1971. As I researched this dissertation, which ostensibly focuses on the trials and tribulations of professional new play development, I was experiencing it for the first time myself.

I became particularly sensitive to the commercial pressures of the process, even within the so-called non-commercial theatre; because not-for-profit theatres are suffering the same financial burdens as their for-profit colleagues. As government and foundation funding has dried up, it has become increasingly risky to attempt new work. The development process, which, as it was first practiced at the Playwrights Unit, was established to free the writer from the constraints of commercial pressure, to allow the plays to take wing and soar into new areas of form and content, has become the very process by which the wings of plays are clipped, so that they may meld harmlessly with the social and moral “values” of subscription audiences.

One experience I had, at an important developmental theatre in New Jersey, illustrates the difference between the Playwrights Unit developmental process and current methods of new play development. After a rigorous play selection process, consisting of many different play readers, and culminating with a review by its artistic director, *Men Dancing* had been chosen to take the full development route. I was delighted to receive the news that this theatre had decided to “process” my play. After several telephone calls back and forth with the artistic director, who was to direct the play, it was confirmed that the

first step in the process would be an informal reading of the script, without an audience. As I understood it, this meant the actors, director, and myself.

As it turned out, the reading included not only the actors and the director, but also the literary manager, several board members, and a former artistic director. I was intimidated, to say the least. I had already worked on the play with a director with whom I was quite satisfied, Edward Cohen, and, as had occurred in my past experiences, I would not be permitted to use this director at this particular theatre. While Megel turned out to be a sensitive and competent director, I still preferred to stick to Cohen, who had spent a great deal of time with me on the script. To add to my discomfiture, there were those added board members at the table.

The reading went quite well, and the discussion initially was wonderfully positive, exciting, and, I felt, nurturing. Then after ten minutes of that the discussion grew darker, with grave pronouncements about “unrounded” and “stereotypical” characters and comments which I felt questioned the general political correctness of the play. It is very important to note that all of this was done in a very warm, supportive way, and I could tell that the people sitting at the table were trying to help me with my play, to help solve its problems. The problem was not with the goals of these very kind and helpful theatre professionals, the problem was the process itself. It would have been more useful to simply work with the director and the actors and go onto the next step of the development process without sitting at the table with this enormous committee.

Several days after the reading, I sat down the director and we discussed these problems, along with other suggestions. I was reminded that this was my “only” play, and that it would be a mistake to try to produce it in New York too soon. The director had seen good plays fail because they hadn’t been

taken through the “process.” I was also informed that a production of my play would not take place for a very long time. First there would be a concert reading of the play at another New Jersey theatre, then a mini-workshop production, then perhaps an additional workshop, and then maybe, just maybe, sometime in the new millennium, I might actually see my play produced.

Since I certainly didn’t want to be shut out of the “process,” I felt I should take the comments I had heard very seriously and rewrite my play. But I couldn’t wait until the year 2000 for my play to be produced. Through a playwright friend, I discovered that the University of South Florida at Tampa was interested in doing new work. I contacted Denis Calandra at USF and, after reading my script, he offered me a full University production. I was thrilled! I went to work on my PTNJ-inspired revision, making my women characters “more rounded” and “correct,” and sent the play down to Tampa, now almost thirty minutes longer than it had been at the PTNJ reading.

The production, which had other problems—namely a added dance sequence between each scene—while certainly not a disaster, was much too long and ponderous. The women in the play, their characters now “fully developed,” had lost their edge, and took away from the father and son through-line so important to the play. The theatrical, dream-like sequences of the play, which had once been lovely, simple, and moving, became overwrought and bizarre. Worse, the play seemed bland, lifeless, and dull. But I was proud, I had gotten some depth in the women characters. I sent the play to Edward Cohen, my director in New York, feeling I had to cut the play a bit, but otherwise it was much more “correct.”

Ed reacted with horror; I had destroyed my play. Under the pressure of new play development, I had “solved” my play’s problems by ignoring my

own instincts and caving in to playwriting by committee. We immediately reverted to the original version of the play (thanks to the wonderful world of word processing). From there, Ed and I cut and trimmed the script, did two staged readings, one at HB Playwrights Foundation, the other at Ensemble Studio Theatre, and attracted our producer, Daryl Roth. Daryl then arranged for Ed to direct the reading at Primary Stages which featured Joel Grey. After that reading, Daryl requested (suggested) several changes to the script, and when they are done, the play will be produced in New York—I hope.

One particularly worrisome aspect of the current model of new play development which became evident in *Men Dancing's* journey toward becoming a play, is a love and fascination, by those individuals intent on helping the playwright, with the “development process.” This process becomes more important than the real goal of writing a play and having it produced in the theatre. Doric Wilson, a playwright who no longer allows anyone to “process” his plays, insists that the production process of play is its development process. Any process that is not geared to the full production of a new play becomes a sort of new age therapy session with everyone concerned, including the playwright, solving problems which don't necessary lead to a good play.

What would have happened at the Playwrights Unit if I had sent the play there? An educated guess would be that it would have been produced, with good actors, a fine director, and a minimal set for about five to ten performances. It would have been seen by an informed audience, including theatre professionals, i.e. producers, actors, directors, etc., and considering the track record of the plays produced at the Unit, it would have been produced thereafter in an off-Broadway Equity production, and then published—case closed. By this point I would be working on a new play, and having had an

Equity production of my first play, good reviews or not, I would be taken seriously as a professional playwright by the theatre community. My next play would be that much more likely to receive production in New York or the regional theatre.

Playwrights do not learn to “wright” plays by doing endless exercises in the air. Reading after reading after reading of new plays serve no purpose except to frustrate the authors. Where playwrights learn their craft is by watching their plays sink or swim, noting whether the audience is restless, and by experiencing the action and language of their plays in full production with the best possible actors, directors, designers, and theatre technicians. Only after several productions of plays do writers begin to have a sense of what works and doesn’t work within the theatrical world they create. Particularly in a world where playwrights continue to experiment with form and content, as they did at the Playwrights Unit, is it important to know how a play will work in full production. Bursting out of the stranglehold of realism, or at least worrying its boundaries, can not happen in readings or workshop productions; it can only happen with the commitment of a real theatre production.

The Playwrights Unit offered an enormously important first step into the professional theatre for the playwrights who were produced there. It validated their youthful experiments and provided a crucible where their talents could meet, meld, and stimulate each other’s growth as writers. It is not an understatement to say that Richard Barr, Edward Albee, and Clinton Wilder changed the very nature of American playwriting by promoting the works of these new writers—building on the extraordinary work of the Caffè Cino, La Mama, Theatre Genesis, and the Judson Poets Theatre. These same writers have become our mainstream playwrights, and have served as the

model for the next generation of writers. For this act of generosity, Barr, Wilder, and especially Albee should be commended and honored, not only as persons of the theatre, but as advocates of the very best in American art and culture of the late twentieth century.

Notes

¹Glenn Loney, "Launching Pad For New Drama: The Playwrights Unit," *After Dark* (November 1970) 12:7, 30.

Appendix A
Plays Produced at The Playwrights Unit
A Chronology

Note: The following list includes new short plays produced by ABW Productions, Inc. produced as part of their workshop *Way Out At The York*, and the *New Playwrights Series I, II, III, and IV*, since ABW included these plays in all lists regarding The Playwrights Unit. Most of the dates for these first productions are available in the play statistics catalog of the Cornell Room of the Billy Rose Collection at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, or in NYPL's clippings files for these scripts. All dates are for first performance only.

Theater 1961 (Richard Barr)

17 May 1961

Way Out At the York: 10 Theatre Pieces

Director: Roberts Blossom

Phase I:

Two Ears, by Roberts Blossom

Cast: Daniel Finkelstein
Roberts Blossom

The Abstract Wife by Ursule Molinaro

Cast: Mary Hara
Peggy Pope
Roberts Blossom

You by Roberts Blossom

Phase II:

Yes/Tomato Soup/Yes Suck by Roberts Blossom

Poems For The Theatre by Stephen Tropp

The Tourniquet by Ursule Molinaro

Cast: Mary Hara
Ruth Sorrell

Sets: Roger Sammis

Productions Managers: John Fodor and Donald Nation

Theater 1962 (Richard Barr & Clinton Wilder)

13 November 1961

The Theater 1962 Club/Playwrights 1962

The Audience by Michael Wilkes

Director: Richard Barr

Cast:	Paxton Whitehead	Usher
	Bruce Zahariadis	Little Boy
	Michele Farr	Little Girl
	Sam Kressen	Father
	Helen Page Camp	Mother
	John C. Becher	Drunk
	Donald Nation	Jack
	M.J. Grimaldi	Jill
	Vincent Romeo	Joe
	Jane Lowry	Jane

Sweet of You To Say So by Page Johnson

Director: Douglas Parkhirst

Cast:	Leta Bonyng	Grace Alice Wyandotte
	Alice Drummond	Miss Woman

The Blueberry Affair by Gudrun Powers

Director: Richard Barr

Cast:	Alice Drummond	Mrs. Moll
	Jane Lowry	Miss Belle
	Helen Page Camp	Mrs. Meg
	Sam Kressen	Tucker

And He Made a Her by Doric Wilson

Director: Richard Barr

Cast:	Vincent Romeo	Adam
	Paxton Whitehead	Silvadorf, an angel
	Harold Scott	Urhelancia, an angel of the Liberal Party
	Sam Kressen	Disenchantralista, an angel of the Protestors Party
	Jane Lowry	Eve, a feminine case

Production Managing Director: Helen Page Camp

Stage Manager: Donald Nation

Theater 1962 (continued)

11 December 1961

Playwrights 1962, Series 2

A Toy For The Clowns by Gene Feist

Director: Donald Davis

Cast:	Cass Elliot	Mamie
	Mylo Quam	William
	Arthur Anderson	Albert
	Alice Drummond	Elaine

Chit Chat On A Rat by C.S. Atherton

Director: Gene Feist

Cast:	Kathe Sloan	She
	Walter Flanagan	He

Prometheus Rebound by Lawrence Wunderlich

Director: Richard Barr

Cast:	Priscilla Morrill	Mary Doe
	James Kieran	John Doe
	Mylo Quam	Jack Doe
	Maria Tucci	Jill Doe
	Vincent Romeo	Prometheus
	M.J. Grimaldi	First Man
	Donald Nation	Second Man

Production Managing Director: Helen Page Camp

Technical Managing Director: Richard d'Anjou

Stage Manager: Donald Nation

Assistant Stage Manager: Merrily Mossman

Theater 1963 (Richard Barr & Clinton Wilder)

1 January 1962

Playwrights Series III

Ex-Miss Copper Queen On A Set of Pills by Megan Terry

Director: John Strasberg

Cast:	Nancy Berg	Copper Queen
	Adelaide Klein	B.A.
	Kay Michaels	Crissy

This Side of the Door by Terrence McNally

Director: Martin Fried

Cast:	Estelle Parsons	Hebe
	Randy Garfield	Edmund
	William Traylor	Henderson

Stage Managers: David Smith, Rilla Bergman

Electrician: Tom Shoesmith

Properties: Kim Rezutko

29 March 1963

Playwrights Series IV

Like Other People by Jack Owen

Director: Bill Penn

Cast:	Paula Trueman	Little Mother
	Brandon Maggart	Colin, the Boy Friend
	Brenda Lesley	Bea, the Daughter
	Sean Garrison	Sandy, the Son
	Eddie Kenmore	Sergio, his friend
	Sam Kressen	Daddy Poor

Stage Managers: Ed Aldridge

Assistant Stage Manager: David Smith

Production Secretary: Linda Feinfeld

4 performances

Theater 1964 (Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: Edward Parone

17 November 1963

A Party For Divorce by Lee Kalcheim

Director: Bob Livingston

Cast:	Nicholas Pryor	Barney
	Leslie Stark	Phil
	Rebecca Dark	Jane

Stage Manager: Chas. Kindl

24 November 1963

The Plumb Line/Running Scared by Jan Holm

Director: Word Baker

Cast:	Carrie Nye	Kitty
	Louis Edmonds	Guy
	Monroe Arnold	First Plumber
	Laurence Kabat	Second Plumber
	Wonci Yee	Su Shen
	Louis Edmonds	Evan Conrad

1 December 1963

Pigeons by Lawrence Osgood

Director: Lawrence Osgood

Cast:	Margaret Hamilton	First Woman
	Hortense Alden	Second Woman
	Jean Bruno	Third Woman

Stage Manager: Martha Newell

A Room in Hotel Babylon by Edward Evans

Director: Glenn Cress

Cast:	Maria Karnilova
	Clyde Ventura

Stage Manager: Charles Kindl

Two performances (2 & 5 P.M.)

Theater 1964 (continued)

8 December 1963

I Was the Red Hot Pepper Queen by Page Johnson

Director: James Welch

Cast: Alice Drummond
Don Molinary

Music: Jay Thompson

Stage Manager: Martha Newell, Charles Kindl

Two performances (2 & 5 P.M.)

10 December 1963 (Special Workshop)

Better Love Next Time by Lee Kalcheim

Director: Lee Kalcheim

Music: William Weeden

Lyrics: David Finkle

22 January 1964

War by Jean-Claude van Itallie

Director: Michael Kahn

Cast: Jerome Dempsey Older Man
Gerome Ragni Younger Man
Jane Lowry Woman

Two performances (3 & 5 P.M.)

12 January 1964

The Empty Room by Eric Hughes

Director: William Berger

Cast: Roscoe Lee Browne
Augusta Dabney
Katherine Gabrielson
James Karen
Morgan Paull
Anna Van der Heide

Furniture by Carse Berger

Theater 1964 (continued)

12 January 1964

Dutchman by Leroi Jones

Director: Edward Parone

Cast:	Al Freeman, Jr.	Clay
	Jennifer West	Lula

Stage managers: Otis Bigelow, Martha Newell

Lighting: John Dodd

19 January 1964

(The First Playwrights Series)

The Rook by Lawrence Osgood

Director: Joseph Hardy

Cast:	Robert Dryden	Alf
	Estelle Omens	Edna
	Paul Savior	Rico
	Jessica Walter	Adele

The Four Minute Mile by Arthur Hadley

Director: Stephen Aaron

Cast:	Marian Seldes	Woman
	Adam Kennedy	Man

Sets and lighting: Robert Darling

Stage Managers: Otis Bigelow, Larry Hall, Larry Randolph

Theatre Managers: Lawrence Wunderlich, John Dodd

Five Performances

2 February 1964

9 To 5 To 0 (Part I - A Mild Dose) by Lawrence Wunderlich

Director: Robert Haddad

Cast:	John Wallowitch	Mack, A Pianist
	Carmine Stipo	Carl
	George Irving	Beel
	Alan Kass	First TV Voice
	Bill Pierson	Second TV Voice
	Jane A. Johnston	Ash
	Will B. Able	Molo

Stage managers: Otis Bigelow, Patrick Craigle

Sound: John Foder

Lighting: John Dodd

Theater 1964 (continued)

9 February 1964

The Fire-Eaters by James Paul Dey

Director: Hal George

Cast: Ruth Mann
Frank Salvino*The Glass Bottom Boat* by James Paul Dey

Director: James Paul Dey

Cast: Joel Stuart
Ruth Mann

16 February 1964

The Trial of Pontius Pilate by David Graeme

Director: Stephen J. White

Cast: Roberta Adams
Roy Adelburg
Tamsen Allen
Robert Kya-Hill
James Luisi
Edward McCloskey
Stan Moore
Edward Seamon
Jean Sorel
Robert Sullivan
Jack Welsh

23 February 1964

God Bless America Three One-Act Plays by Tom Oliver*The Meeting*

Director: Harry Feihe

Cast: Jeanne Schlegel
Willis (Bill) Townsend
Nancy Wilder
Katherine Gregg
Don Lochner
Naomi Ben Sherwood

Theater 1964 (continued)

God Bless America Three One-Act Plays by Tom Oliver (continued)

While The Iron's Hot

Director: Daniel Landau

Cast: June Miller
Eric Spiros
Harbey Donegan
Chauncy Howell
Morris Miller

See/Saw

Director: John Stix

Cast: Richard Ward
Edward Vilella

1 March 1964

The Engagement by Ursule Molinaro

Director: Robert Haddad

Cast:	Jane Lowry	Miss Nimbletoes
	Grayson Hall	Miss Pancha
	Jeana Belkin	Miss Herzchen
	Patricia Ripley	Miss Testa
	Michael Bradfor	The Fiance

Music: Stanley Walden

Set: Rich Hoard

Stage Manager: Richard Nesbitt

Lighting: John Dodd

Theater 1964 (continued)

8 March 1964

The City Scene: Part II - Conerico Was Here To Stay by Frank Gagliano

Director: Melvin Bernhardt

Cast:	Ray Stewart	Yam
	Rose Marie long	Female Voice
	Frank Savino	Male Voice
	Aida Berlyn	Woman
	Avery Schreider	The Blind Man
	Melinda Dillon	The Girl withthe Cello
	Joseph Gimpel	The Boy with the Eye Patch
	Lawrence Adams	His Friend
	Jaime Sanchez	Jesus
	Bruce Feld	Another Friend

Lighting: John Dodd

Sound: James Reichart

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

12 April 1964

A Musical Review in Progress

Director: William Penn

Cast:	James Albright
	Gloria Blezzard
	Marshall Breeden
	Carlton Carpenter
	Ann Fraser
	Barbara Gilbert
	Ben Keller
	Richard Roman
	JoAnne Worley

Musical Director: David Shire

Theater 1964 (continued)

19 April 1964

A Penchant For Listening by Lorees Yerby

Director: Denis Deegan

Cast: Denis Deegan
Joe Tunnell
Kevin McCarthy*The Golden Bull Of Boredom* by Lorees YerbyCast: Ruth McDevitt
Deniel Reed

Assistant Director: Carol Lobravico

Lighting: John Dodd

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman,

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

26 April 1964

Walk With Me A Folk Fable in one Act by Carl Gabler

Director: Richard Altman

Cast: Grayson Hall Lady
Alan Oppenheimer Man
Arne Weiner Grengari
Sy Travers Ali Pasha
Eric Tavares Raj Shajit
Bryna Wilson Yat Ling

Choreographer: Robert Haddad

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Lighting: John Dodd

Theater manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Theater 1964 (continued)

3 May 1964

The Night Little Girl Blue Made Her Social Debut by Harvey Perr

Director: Edward Parone

Cast:	Jennifer West	Leila Loveless
	Chris Medearis	Reuben Sampson
	Rosemary Forsyth	Clara
	Stephen Brooks	Victor
	Susan Browning	Constance Straight
	Clinton Dunn	Abel

Setting: Thomas Wendland

Production Assistant: Carol Lobravico

Lighting: John Dodd

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

10 May 1964

Seduction by Stuart Richard Townsend and John Wallowitch

Directed: Robert Haddad

Cast:	Carol Bruce	Diane Philibert Houpfle
	Clyde Ventura	Felix Krull

Book and Lyrics by Stuart Richard Townsend

Music by John Wallowitch

Decor: Albert Sharp

Costumes: Audrée

Do I Dare Disturb The Universe by Stuart Richard Townsend

Director: Stuart Richard Townsend

Cast:	Lilyan Wilder	Marian Christie
	Roy Shuman	Waiter
	Hope Cameron	Eva Flynn

Assistant Director: Robert Mariano

17 May 1964

Match Play by Lee Kalcheim

Directed: Edward Parone

Cast:	Avery Schreiber	Mr. Gilman
	Tony Musante	Marty
	Rosemary Forsyth	Jill

Theater 1965 (Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: None Listed In Program

11 October 1964

Mr. Altschuler's Tree by Tom Oliver

Director: Richard McPhee

Cast:	Vivian Hernandez	Iris
	David Hurst	Mr. Altschuler
	Angelo Gnazzo	Mister
	Al Fann	Coal
	Carlos Carrion	Raoul
	Andy Quirk	Tony
	Michael Fischetti	Joe
	Norman Dallas	The Others
	Judith Gero	
	Jeanne Graham	
	Harold Oringer	
	Morton S. Silverman	

Setting: Marshall Arisman

Sound Faith Frenz

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

18 October 1964

Don't Call Us, by Lee Kalcheim

Director: Bob Livingston

Cast:	Ben Hammer
	Randy Gaynes
	Mike Shea
	Mara Landi

Assistant Director: Joan Pryor

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Theater 1965 (continued)
 Managing Director: Charles Gnys

9 November 1964

The Folding Green by Howard Moss

Director: Warren Enters

Cast:	Nancy Cushman	Elena de Cordovan Barbridge
	Helen Noyes	Ramona
	Clinton Anderson	John, A Figure
	Alice Beardsley	A Woman
	Joel Thomas	Dr. Lawrence Hawley
	Robert Kirk	Donald Ashberry
	Janet Sarno	Cora Ashberry
	Janet Dowd	Teresa Jones
	Gwyda Don-Howe	Felicity

Settings: Thomas Wendland

Costumes: Cynthia Pennell

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

16 November 1964

Upstairs, Sleeping by Harvey Perr

Director: Jered Barclay

Cast:	Charlotte Jones	Esther
	Lee Steele	Sam
	Evelyn Russell	Frieda
	Barry Woloski	Seymour

Birthdays at Noon by Harvey Perr.

Cast:	Louise Latham	Willa
	Barry Woloski	Seymour (Honey)
	James Coco	Angie Marco (Sweetie)
	Evelyn Russell	Frieda Marco (Sugar)

Production Assistant: Frank Marsh

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Theater 1965 (continued)

23 November 1964

The Burial Committee by Otway Crockett

Director: Melvin Bernhardt

Cast:	Jonathon Wood	Jack
	Ralph Kaplan	Asiatic
	Richard McKenzie	Chips
	Henri Lysen	Mess
	Steve Jentis	Bosun

Up To Thursday by Sam Shepard

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Lee Kissman	Young Man
	Harvey Keitel	1st Man
	Richard Mansfield	2nd Man
	Stephanie Gordon	Terry
	Mimi Levin	Sherry
	Robert F. Lyons	Larry
	Kevin O'Connor	Harry

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

29 November 1964

You Can Take Off Your Hat Now, Herbert by Stuart Richard Townsend

Director: Stuart Richard Townsend

Cast:	Sue Lawless	Vivian
	Ted Pugh	Herbert

The Breathers by Stuart Richard Townsend

Cast:	Bruce Kelsay	The Man
	Nadyne Turney	The Intruder

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

6 December 1964

Mirrors for Small Beasts by Ursule Molinaro

Director: Robert Haddad

Cast: Matthew Tobin
 Susan Willis
 Don Potter
 Parker McCormick

After The Wash by Ursule Molinaro

Cast:	Charles McArthur	Mr. Top
	Sue Lawless	Goody Flannel
	William Shust	Mr. Bottom
	Fiddle Viracola	Baby Doll

Settings: Thomas Wendland

Costumes: Charles Tomlinson

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

13 December 1964

What Color Goes With Brown? by Jerome Max

Director: Walt Witcover

Cast:	Flora Elkins	Isabel Sicklick
	Hal England	Maynard Epp
	Steve Decker	Marvel Epp
	Anita Dangler	Mrs. Sigmund Epp
	Helen Scourby	Vera Sicklick
	Maria Rio Lewis	Badonna Hilton
	Ed Hall	The Waiter

Assistant Director: Lee Roscoe

Designer: Patrizia Von Brandenstein

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

20 December 1964

Who's Judy and The Orientation

Director: Andre Fin

Cast: Eve Collyer
 Patrick Hines
 Joel Stuart
 Joseph Whiteacker

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

10 January 1965

Hunting The Jingo Bird by Kenneth Pressman

Director: Charles Maryan

Cast: Michael Shea
 Steven Mencher
 Vincent DeTrinis
 Gene Scandur
 Lawrence Pressman
 Robert DeTrinis

Production Assistant: Susan Ault

Settings: Michael Devine

Sound: New Sound Associates

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

24 January 1965

The Temporary by Bill Amidon

Director & Designer: Carl Williams

Cast:

Ed Stevlingson	F. C. Sklavmeister
Elaine Hunter	Miss Ohrenschmerz
Rosemary Tory	Melanish Fundament
Deeda Hymes	Mrs. Corpulata
Louis Beachner	Arnold Tatty
Elizabeth Wilson	Miss Poaberapy
Alice Drummond	Miss Stroak
Herb Weber	Myron
Frank Lygrise	The Temporary
Carl Williams	Mac

Production Assistants: Kevin Moriarity, Pearl Broder

Costume Managing Director: Cynthia Pennel

Sound: Bill Amidon

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

31 January 1965

No Trespassing by Lanford Wilson

Director: Milton Katselas

Cast:	Burt Brinkerhoff	Alexander
	Warren Finnerty	Daniel

Assistant Director: Dale Whitt

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

7 February 1965

The Doris Plays by Jean-Claude van Itallie*It's Almost Like Being*

Director: Joseph Chaikin

Cast:	Sharon Gans	Doris
	James Barbosa	Rock
	Barry Woloski	Bud
	Paul Boesing	Knockefeller
	Joyce Aaron	Billie

I'm Really Here

Director: Sydney Schubert Walter

Cast:	Paul Boesing	Rossano
	Joyce Aaron	Doris
	James Barbosa	Elevator Man
	James Barbosa	Tourists and People of Paris
	Valerie Belden	
	Isabelle Blau	
	Sharon Gans	
	Barry Woloski	

Assistant Director (for Chaikin): Rhea Gaisner

Sound tapes: Gary Harris

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

14 February 1965

The City Scene: Part I - Paradise Gardens-East by Frank Gagliano

Director: Melvin Bernhardt

Cast:	Linda Segal	Sis
	Charlotte Jones	Fat Lady
	Jack K. Harmon	Ace Window Gate Man
	John Bados	Ace Burglar Alarm Man
	Gustav Sabin	Ace Soundproofing Man
	William Shust	Brother
	Willy Switkes	Man on the Ledge
	John Bakos	Voice from the Street

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

21 February 1965

To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza

Director: Edwin Patrick Aldridge

Cast:	Igors Gavon	Balladeer
	Eugene R. Wood	Him
	Mary Farrell	Her
	Frank O'Brien	News Stand Man
	Virginia Jefferson	Lady
	James Cohen	News Stand Man
	Fran Anthony	Lady
	Jeffrey Siggins	Wally Pantoni

Assistant Director: Warren Lyons

Setting: Robert Sessions

Lighting: Carol Rubinstein

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

14 March 1965

AM by Otis Bigelow

Director: Michael Kahn

Cast: Alice Drummond
Leonard Frey

A Musical Review In Progress

Director: Bill Penn

Cast: John Becher
Clairborne Cary
Carlton Colyer
Igors Gavon
Linda Harris
Ben Keller
Jayme Mylroie
Jo Anne Worley

Musical Director: Natalie Charlson

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Manager & Lighting: Walter Cavalieri

Stage Manager: Rilla Bergman

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1965 (continued)

4 April 1965

9 to 5 to 0 (A Neofarce in Three Doses) by Lawrence Wunderlich*Part II - A Stiff Dose**Part III - A Fatal Dose*

Director: Robert Haddad

Cast:	John Wallowitch	Mack, a pianist
	Ronny Graham	Molo
	Ronn Hansen	Carl
	Bruce Blaine	Beel
	Patti Karr	Ash
	Gertrude Corey	Hannah
	Barry Dennen	Hiram
	Matthew Tobin	First TV Voice
	Don Potter	Second TV Voice
	Scott Glenn	Dave

Musical Director: John Wallowitch

Production Designer: John Boyt

Assistant Designer: Cynthia Pennell

Choreography: Mavis Walters

Production Stage Manager: Skip Rognlien

Theatre Manager: Lawrence Wunderlich

Stage Managers: Rilla Bergman, Fred Reinglas

Staff Photographer: Miss Alix Jeffry

Theater 1966 (Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: Charles Gnys

9 September 1965

4-H Club by Sam Shepard

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	John Fink	John
	Kevin O'Connor	Bob
	Paul B. Price	Joe

Production Stage Manager: Mac McGinnes

24 September 1965

Good Day by Emanuel Peluso

Director: Ben Shaktman

Cast:	Frank Langella	The Young Man
	Joel Stuart	Bianco, A Servant
	Nancy Marchand	The Old Lady

Production Stage Manager: Mac McGinnes

13 November 1965

The Rape of Bunny Stuntz by A.R. Gurner, Jr.

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Hellena Westcott	Bunny Stuntz
	Harry Spillman	Howie Hale
	Rusti Moon	Wilma Trumbo

Production Stage Manager: Nikos Kafkalis

10 April 1966

The Great Career directed by Charles Dizenzo

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	R. G. Brown
	Logan Ramsey

Theater 1966 (continued)

15 May 1966

A Song For All Saints by James Lineburger

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Joyce Aaron	Ann Putnam
	John Lovelady	Stage Manager
	Michael Levin	Leroy
	Elaine Stritch	Estelle
	Gerome Ragni	Howard
	Marion Jim	Sumiko
	Catherine Carotenuto	Claque
	Fred Forrest	
	John Heuer	
	Patricia Heuer	
	Barbara Leeds	
	Lynne Prather	
	Basil Ronchak	

Production Stage Manager: Mac McGinnes

Assistant to the Director: Joseph Hunter

Assistant Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

16 June 1966

Postcards by James Prideaux

Director: Richard Barr

Cast:	Paula Trueman	Margaret
	Wyman Pendleton	Leonard

Production Stage Manager: Mac McGinnes

Theater 1967 (Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: Charles Gnys

8 September 1966

And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little by Paul Zindel

Director: Rocco Bufano

Cast:	Ruth White	Catherine Reardon
	Kate Harrington	Mrs. Kelly
	Glynn Turman	Delivery Boy
	Elizabeth Moore	Ceil Reardon
	Elizabeth Wilson	Anna Reardon
	Harvey Keitel	Policeman

Production Stage Manager: Mac McGinnes

Lighting: Sean O'Brien

Assistant Stage Manager: Marcia Merrill

Production Assistant: Lynne Prather

29 September 1966

Pelican by David Shumaker

Director: Richard Altman

Cast:	Antonio Fargas	Tom Fisher
	Patricia Falkenhain	Edwina Fallowfield
	Arthur Anderson	Wink Drybutter

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

Lighting: Sean O'Brien

Production Assistant: Robert Stevenson

Theater 1967 (continued)

27 October 1966

Halloween by Leonard Melfi

Director: Melvin Bernhart

Cast:	Kevin O'Connor	Luke Lovello
	Kathleen Maguire	Margaret Moon

Assistant Director: Rilla Bergman

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

Lighting: Sean O'Brien

House Manager: Kenneth Daniel

15 December 1966

The Martyrization of Hilda by Warren Wexler

Director: Jacques Levy

Cast:	Viveca Lindfors	Hilda
	Sully Boyar	John
	Robert Malcolm	Guide One
	David Rosenbaum	Guide Two
	Michael Elias	Erich
	Linda Carroll	Old Woman
	Ed Setrakian	Voice
	Charles Richetelle	Figure in Black
	Susan Wyler	Krista
	Brett Smiley	Morgan
	Philip Haris	Rolff
	Harris Yulin	Jerzii

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

Lighting: Sean O'Brien

House Manager: John Heuer

Theater 1967 (continued)

12 January 1967

The Club Bedroom by Louis Auchincloss

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Jessie Royce Landis	Mrs. Ruggles
	Dorothy Sands	Mrs. Miles
	Constance Ford	Elmina Ruggles

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

Lighting: Sean O'Brien

Production Associate: Russ Kaiser

House Manager: John Heuer

9 February 1967

Come Quickly by Ian Wallace

Director: Harvey Medlinsky

Cast:	John Colenback	Chip
	Bill Hinnant	Wally

Designer: Peter Harvey

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

Lighting: Sean O'Brien

Technical Assistant: Charles Suttles

House Manager: John Heuer

Theater 1967 (continued)

23 March 1967

Little Fears by Emanuel Peluso

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Judith Granite	First Woman
	Paul Sparer	First Man
	Nancy Marchand	Second Woman
	Joseph Gallison	Second Man

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

House Manager: John Heuer

29 April 1967

Afternoon Is A Sugar Cube by Tom Oliver

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Christopher Wines	The Young Man
	Rod Nash	Messenger
	Vincent Milana	Eric
	Gene Scandur	The Boy
	Richard Thomas	Henry
	Darryl Wells	The Youth
	Billy King	Jimmy
	Rusti Moon	Mother
	George Linjeris	A Perfect Stranger
	Chet Doherty	Father
	Marvin Peisner	Doctor
	Ronald Willoughby	Ministerical
	Judith Granite	Femaluscious
	Lisa Richards	June

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Costumier: Marcia Merrill

House Manager: John Heuer

Theater 1968 (Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: Charles Gnys

September 1967

Needs by Steven M. Jacobson

Director: Robert Moss

Cast:	Ronald Bishop	Arthur
	Jane Cronin	Belle
	John Kuhner	Roger

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Michael MacDonald

Costumes: Tom Pazik

Press Representative: David Rothenberg

30 November 1967

Lemonade by James Prideaux

Director: John Desmond

Cast:	Jane Rose	Mabel
	Eugenia Rawls	Edith

Designer: Charles Murawski

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Michael MacDonald

Press Representative: David Rothenberg

23 January 1968

The Boys In The Band by Mart Crowley

Director: Robert Moore

Cast:	Kenneth Nelson	Michael
	Frederick Combs	Donald
	Cliff Gorman	Emory
	Nicholas Cortland	Larry
	Laurence Luckinbill	Hank
	Chuck Daniel	Bernard
	Robert La Tourneaux	Cowboy
	Peter White	Alan
	Keith Prentice	Harold

Designer: Peter Harvey

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Press Representative: David Rothenberg

Theater 1968 (continued)

22 February 1968

The Golden Fleece by A.R. Gurney, Jr.

Director: Jered Barclay

Cast:	Barbara Baxley	Betty
	Joseph George	Bill

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Press Representative: David Rothenberg

3 April 1968

The Undertaking by David Trainer

Director: Chuck Gnys

Cast:	Diana Webster	Alice
	Louis Beachner	Claude
	Michael McCarthy	Morris
	Jeremiah Sullivan	Peter

Sets and Costumes: Robert R. Troie

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Press Representative: David Rothenberg

25 April 1968

The Palace At 4 A.M. by Howard Moss

Director: Chuck Gnys

Cast:	Ruth Ford	Queen
	Paul Roebeling	Edward
	Paul Sparer.	Paul Sparer

Production Manager: Mac McGinnes

Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Press Representative: David Rothenberg

Theater 1968 (continued)

9 May 1968

The Autograph Hound by James Prideaux

Director: Barry Plaxen

Cast: Judith Granite
Katherine Bruce
Rudy Bond

Production Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Theater Manager: Richard Drew

Theater 1969 (Richard Barr, Charles Woodward, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: Charles Gnys

26 September 1968

Witness by Terrence McNally

Director: Kevin O'Connor

Cast:	Robert Drivas	Young Man
	Richard Marr	Man
	James Coco	Window Washer
	Marion Paone	Miss Presson

Set and Costumes: Robert Troie

Production Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Lighting: John Patrick Dodd

Sound: David Walker

Theater Manager: Richard Drew

Assistant Stage Manager: Larry Ziegler

Production Assistant: Eileen Ellman

26 September 1968

Saltflowers by Tom Oliver

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Crystal Field	Mrs. Wood
	Richard Marr	Mr. Wood, The Beggar
	Bill Gerber	Richard Tuttle
	Leon Russom	Hal
	Diane Kagan	Maggie
	Billy King	The Boy

Production Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Set and Costumes: Robert Troie

Theater Manager: Richard Drew

Assistant to the Managing Director: Richard Lipsett

Production Assistant: Hidde Maas

Theater 1969 (continued)

24 October 1968

For Breakfast, Mr. Sachs by Kenneth Pressman

Director: Robert Moss

Cast:	Al Settimio	Charles
	Daniel Keyes	Mr. Sachs

Designer: Don Padgett

Production Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Theater Manager: Richard Drew

Assistant to the Managing Director: Richard Lipsett

8 January 1969

American Roulette by Tom McCormack

Director: Richard Lipsett

Cast:	David Daniels	Charles
	Jacqueline Brookes	Hillary
	Paul Reid Roman	Sam

Designer: Peter Harvey

Production Stage Manager: Lynne Prather

Theater Manager: Richard Drew

Movement Consultant: Rhoda Levine

Assistant Stage Manager: Paige Bossi

Press Representative: Henry Luhrman

Theater 1970 (Richard Barr, Charles Woodward, Edward Albee)
 Managing Director: Charles Gnys

26 September 1969

Electric Ice by Tom Sydorick

Director: Richard Lipsett

Cast:	James Greene	Man
	Patricia O'Connell	Woman
	Curt Dawson	Ensemble
	Jeanne De Baer	
	Gary Dontzig	
	Garry George	
	Kathleen Miller	
	Patricia O'Grady	
	Arnold Wilkerson	

Sets and costumes: Don Padgett

Lighting: Carol V. Hoover

Sound and Music: David Walker

Production Manager: Lynne Prather

Assistant to the Director: Sharon Rupert

Production Assistant: Greg Mayrer

31 October 1969

Criss-Crossing by Philip Magdalany

Director: Charles Gnys

Cast:	Lee Goodman	Adolph
	Robert Reiser	Augustus
	Patrick Baldauff	Arnold
	Judith Granite	Barbara
	Cathryn Damon	Constance
	Patricia O'Connell	Catherine
	Mary Louise Wilson	Carlotta

Theater 1970 (continued)

31 October 1969

Watercolor by Philip Magdalany

Director: Charles Gnys

Donald Warfield	Andrew
Peter Lazer	Benjamin
Jacqueline Brooks	Diane
Kate Wilkinson	Edith
Jennifer Salt	Gloria

Designer: Peter Harvey

Sound Tapes: David Walker

Production Manager: Lynne Prather

Stage Manager: Greg Mayrer

Production Associate: Richard Lipsett

20 February 1970

The Saving Grace by John Tobias

Director: Pirie MacDonald

John McCurry	The Prologue
Edward L. Gordon	The Wino
Rod Perry	Mandesilo
John Esposito	The Cop
Madeline Miller	The Girl
Donald Symington	Osgood Whitelaw
Edward L. Gordon	Moon
Patricia Ripley	Miss Barker

Designer: Robert Troie

Production Manager: Lynne Prather

Stage Manager: Gregory Mayrer

Production Associate: Richard Lipsett

Assistant to the Director: Doris Baizley

Theater 1970 (continued)

28 February 1970

The Survival of St. Joan by James Lineberger

Director: Charles Gnys

Story & Lyrics: James Lineberger

Designer: Peter Harvey

Lighting: Charles Cosler

Production Stage Manager: Gregory Mayrer

Production Assistant: John Beven

10 May 1970

Vinyl Visits An FM Station by Ronald Tavel

Director: L.M. Von Rhau

Music: W.S. Folwell

Cast:	Lani Miyazaki Ryland	Hanoi Hanna
	Marshall H. Efron	Scume
	Barton Heyman	Mr. Public
	Richard Bright	Victor
	Norman Thomas Marshall	Cutter
	James Manis	Slicer
	W.S. Folwell	G.I. Joseph
	Dolores Bauer	Saint Barbara
	Harvel Tavel	Member

The Cremation by Paul Zindel

Director: Melvin Bernhardt

Cast:	Alice Drummond	Technician
	John A. Coe	Visitor

Sound: James Reichert

Cat: Mary Jarett

Theater 1970 (continued)

10 May 1970

The Fault by Kenneth Pressman

Director: Robert Moss

Cast: Richard Henderson

James Storm

First Member

George Addis

Second Member

John Merensky

Third Member

Robert Reiser

The Pledge

Patricia Bower

The Ordeal

Producer: Lynne Prather

Production Stage Manager: Gregory Mayrer

Sets and Lights: Philip Gilliam

Costumes: Zoe Brown

Technical Assistant: John Beven

Theater 1971 (Richard Barr, Charles Woodward, Edward Albee)
 Managing Directors: Robert Moss and Bruce Hoover

17 August 1970

Fra Lorenzo or The Cardinal Sins by David R. Slavitt

Director: Edward Payson Call

Cast:	Neil Flanagan	Fra Lorenzo
	Warren Pincus	Capelletto
	Elliot Levine	Montecchio
	Bruce M. Kornbluth	Prince Escalus
	Victor Giganti	Servants
	Marshall Adams	
	Chandler Young	
	Rosaline	Lynda Myles
	Lady Capelletto	Sue Lawless
	Giuletta	Alix Elias
	Romeo	Michael Durrell
	Nurse	Maureen Sadusk
	Second Nurse	Sue Lawless
	Papal Emissary	Robert Eckles

Scenery: William Leet

Costumes: Clifford Capone

Lighting: David Adams

Stage Manager: Stephen McCorkle

Assistant to Mr. Leet: Mark Moss

Assistant Stage Manager: Sandy Hamilton

Assistant to Mr. Adams: Mary Sterling

Production Manager: Gregory Mayrer

House Manager: Richard Henderson

Theater 1971 (continued)

23 December 1970

Master of the Blue Mineral Mines by Jonathan Levy

Director: Robert Moss

Cast:	Donald Gantry	Andrew
	Elizabeth Franz	Ellen
	Mary Doyle	Diana
	Nicholas Martin	Sammy
	William Robertson	Woodrow Wilson
	Louis Galterio	Morgan, the butler
	Dawn Gray	Mary, the maid

Scenery: Donald Padgett

Costumes: Linda Fisher

Lighting: Rick Nelson

Bruitage: Walter Caldon

Music: Fritz Kreisler

Production Manager: Gregory Mayrer

Stage Manager: J. Kevin Hanlon

Assistant Stage Manager: Melanie Ray

Lighting Associates: Elisabeth Eaton, Charles Atlas

Electrician: Dan Kruger

Ballet Consultant: Natalie Richman

8 January 1971

The Thrilling Life of a Circus Performer Will One Day be Yours by Tessa Marffie

Director: Michael Cannon

Cast:	Corlis Taylor	X
	Elizabeth Eis	Y
	Shirley Stoler	Crystal
	Barbara Spiegall	Sonny
	Marilyn Chris	Maddy
	Shelby Leverington	Joy

Production Associate: Mark MacCauley

Theater 1971 (continued)

15 January 1971

Adjunct by Michael Carton

Director: Joseph Cali

Cast:	Robert Shea	Jeremy
	Herb Davis	Henry
	Mary-Michel Stock	Isabel
	Michael Durrell	Matthew

Consequence by Michael Carton

Director: Joseph Cali

Cast:	Jane Cronin	Sapphia Shoemeadow
	Robert Shea	Gerard Dearth
	Mari Lyn Henry	Marion Mountjoy
	Herb Davis	Thomas Thomas

Stage Manager: Melanie Ray

Electrician: Stephen McCorkle

22 January 1971

Cakes with Wine by Edward Cohen

Cast:	Helen Verbit	Blossom Kaufman
	Ruth Gilbert	Rose Kaufman
	Bernie Passeltiner	Itchy Kaufman
	Marilyn Chris	Ida Kaufman
	Nicholas Gould	Milton Kaufman
	Willy Switkes	Maxie
	Stanley Brock	Moe Seligson
	Marty Greene	Sholom Weinstock
	Irwin Rosen	Benny Abrams
	Marilyn Chris	Esther Markowitz

Production Associates: Melanie Ray, Mark MacCauley

Theater 1971 (continued)

3 February 1971

California Wine by Laird Koenig

Director: Richard Altman

Cast: Conrad Bain
 John Braden
 Carolyn Coates
 Jeff Conaway
 Harry Eno
 Nancy Franklin
 Cynthia Harris
 Marijane Maricle
 Jered Mickey
 Gene Rupert
 Don Warfield

3 March 1971

The Judgement, The Guest And The Zodiac by Michael Carton

Director: Byron Ringland

Cast: Roy London	Stephen
Jane Cronin	Violet
Leonard Hicks	Alexander

Scenery: Richard Fuhrman

Lighting: Roger Morgan

Costume Coordinator: J. Kevin Hanlon

Assistant Stage Manager: Joanne Sabel

Scenery Construction: Marc Moss

Stage Manager: William Boyd

Electrician: Tom Carter

Production Manager: J. Kevin Hanlon

Theater 1971 (continued)

No date

The Pledge by Michael Valenti/Kenneth Pressman

Director: Robert Moss

Cast: Alan Palmer

Dick Bonelle

Dan Kruger

Conn Fleming

John Canemaker

Martin Rivera

Philip Killian

Bruce Cheney

Roger Brown

Joseph Pichette

Edmund Gaynes

Pamela Hall

Brothers of the Order

The Scribe

The Second Brother

The First Brother

The Leader

The Pledge

The Ordeal

Conductor: Abba Bogin

Designer: Donald Padgett

Costumes: A Christina Giannini

Choral Master: Joyce Mike

Assistant Stage Managers: Jo Sabel, Suzy Ayres, and Mark MacCauley

Lighting: Art Grand

Stage Manager: Melanie Ray

Assistant to Mr. Moss: Lou Galtario

Production Manager: J. Kevin Hanlon

Standby for The Ordeal: Lynn Olver

Theater 1971 (continued)

14 April 1971

Breeding Ground (3 Plays) by Edward M. Cohen

Directors: Larry Maxwell, Peter Frisch

Bumper to Bumper

Cast:	Vera Lockwood	Mommy
	Jack Hollander	Daddy
	Richard Niles	Benny
	Nicholas Gould	Buster

Rats

Cast:	Alyce Sylva	Isabel
	Nicholas Gould	Fat Philly
	Donna Ellwanger	Margaret
	Keith Fox	Leo

Sitting Shiva

Cast:	Carol Schlanger	Dora
	Richard Niles	Marvin
	Rose Hoffman	Beadie
	Jack Hollander	Sol Kaplan

Designer: Larry Maxwell

Lighting Design: Richard Beard

Production Stage Manager: Lyn Oliver

Properties: Jo Sabel

Assistant Stage Manager: Robert J. Solomon

Productions Assistants: Donna Ellwanger and Susan Stein

Set Construction: Stephen McCorkle and Marc Moss

Production Manager for the Unit: J. Kevin Hanlon

Appendix B
Photographs from the Playwrights Unit

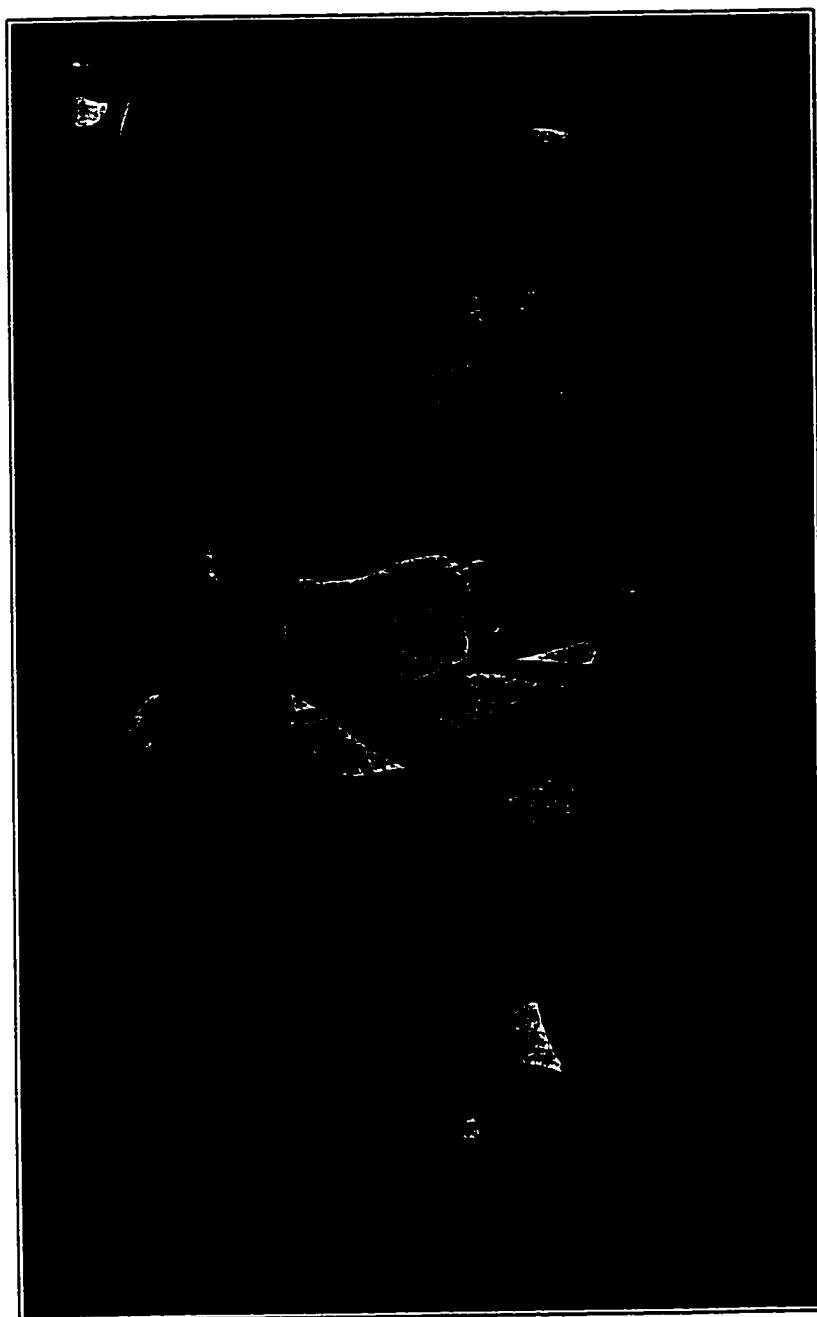


Plate 1. Clinton Wilder, Richard Barr, and Edward Albee (left to right) on the set of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* at the Playwrights Unit (Village South Theatre).

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Courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection
The Houghton Library



Plate 2. (left to right) Edward Albee, Clinton Wilder, and Richard Barr
in front of the Playwrights Unit (Village South Theatre).

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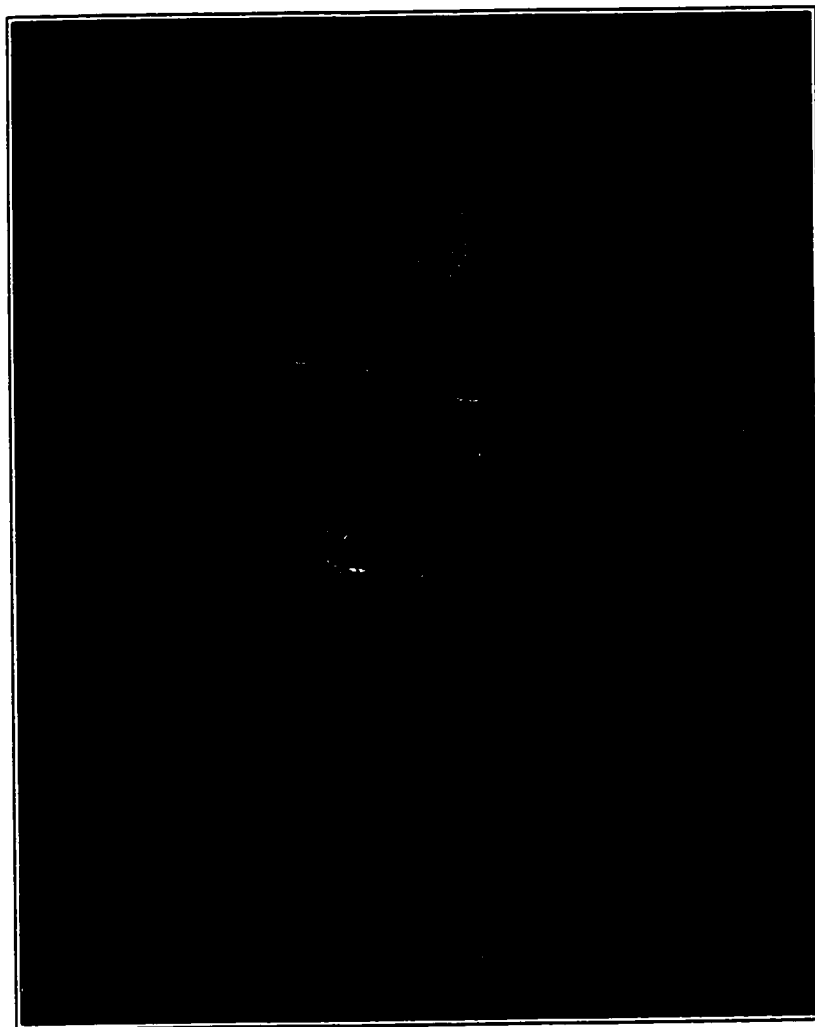


Plate 3. Charles (Chuck) Gnys
Courtesy of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

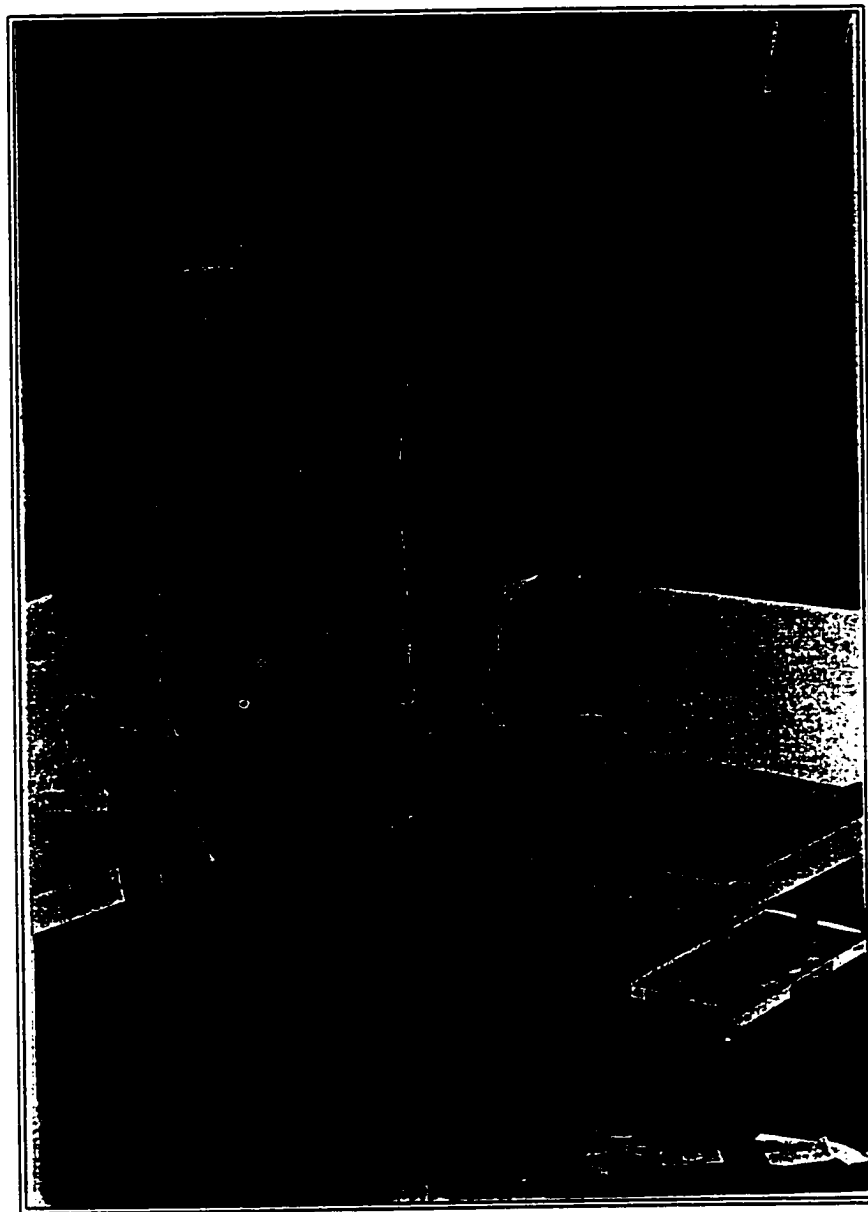


Plate 4. Philip Sterling and Rebecca Darke in *Party For Divorce* by Lee Kalcheim presented by Theater 1967 at the Provincetown Playhouse, on 11 October 1966.

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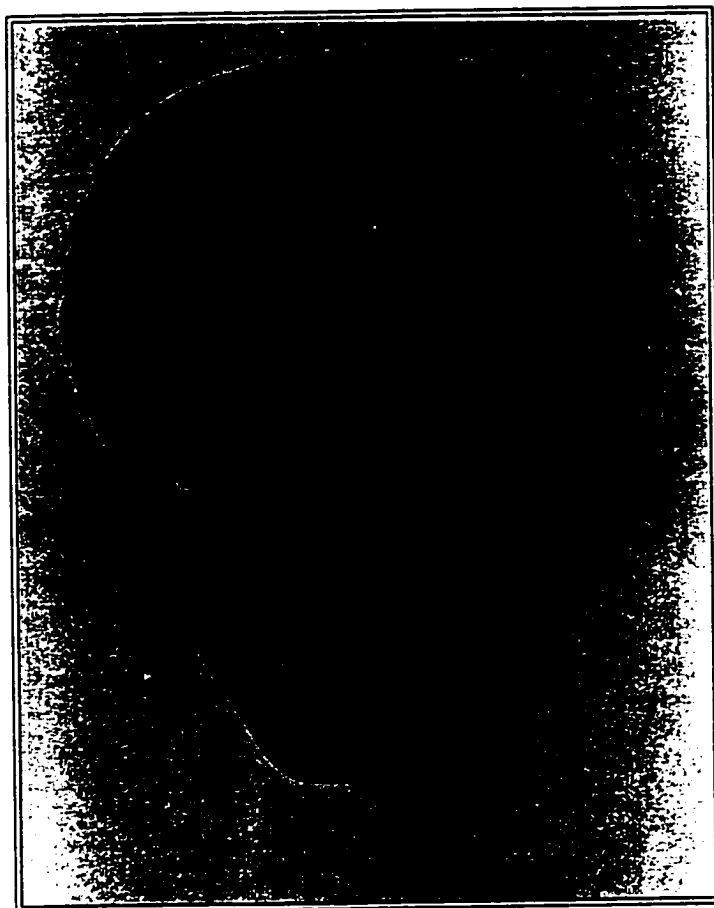


Plate 5. Lee Kalcheim

Courtesy of the Michael Kasdan Collection
of the Jerome Lawrence & Robert E. Lee
Theatre Research Institute
The Ohio State University



Plate 6. Jerome Dempsey, Jane Lowry, and Gerome Ragni in Jean Claude van Itallie's *War*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on 23 December 1963.

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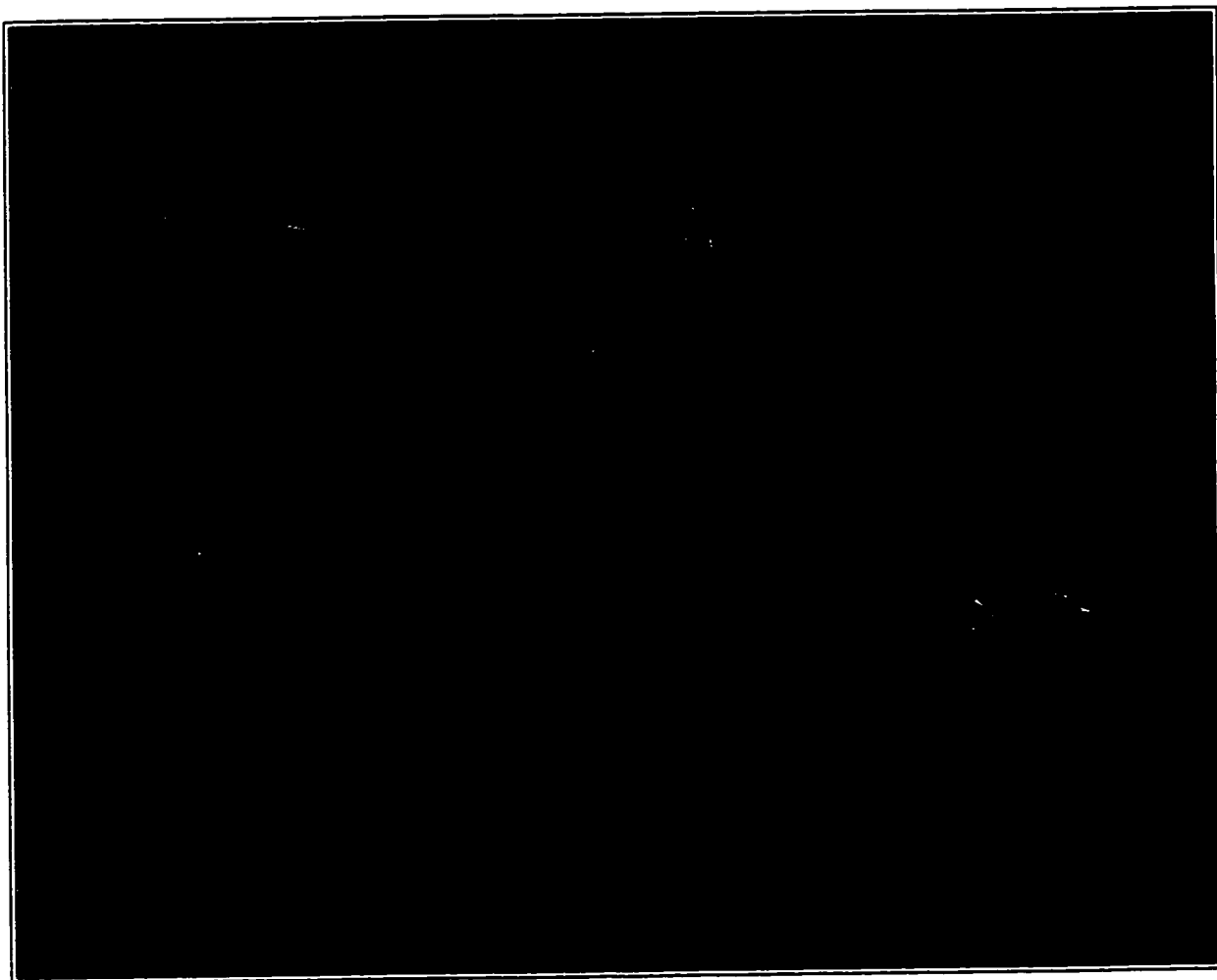


Plate 7. (left to right) Gerome Ragni, Jane Lowry, Jerome Dempsey, Michael Kahn, and Jean Claude van Itallie on the set of Jean Claude van Itallie's *War*.

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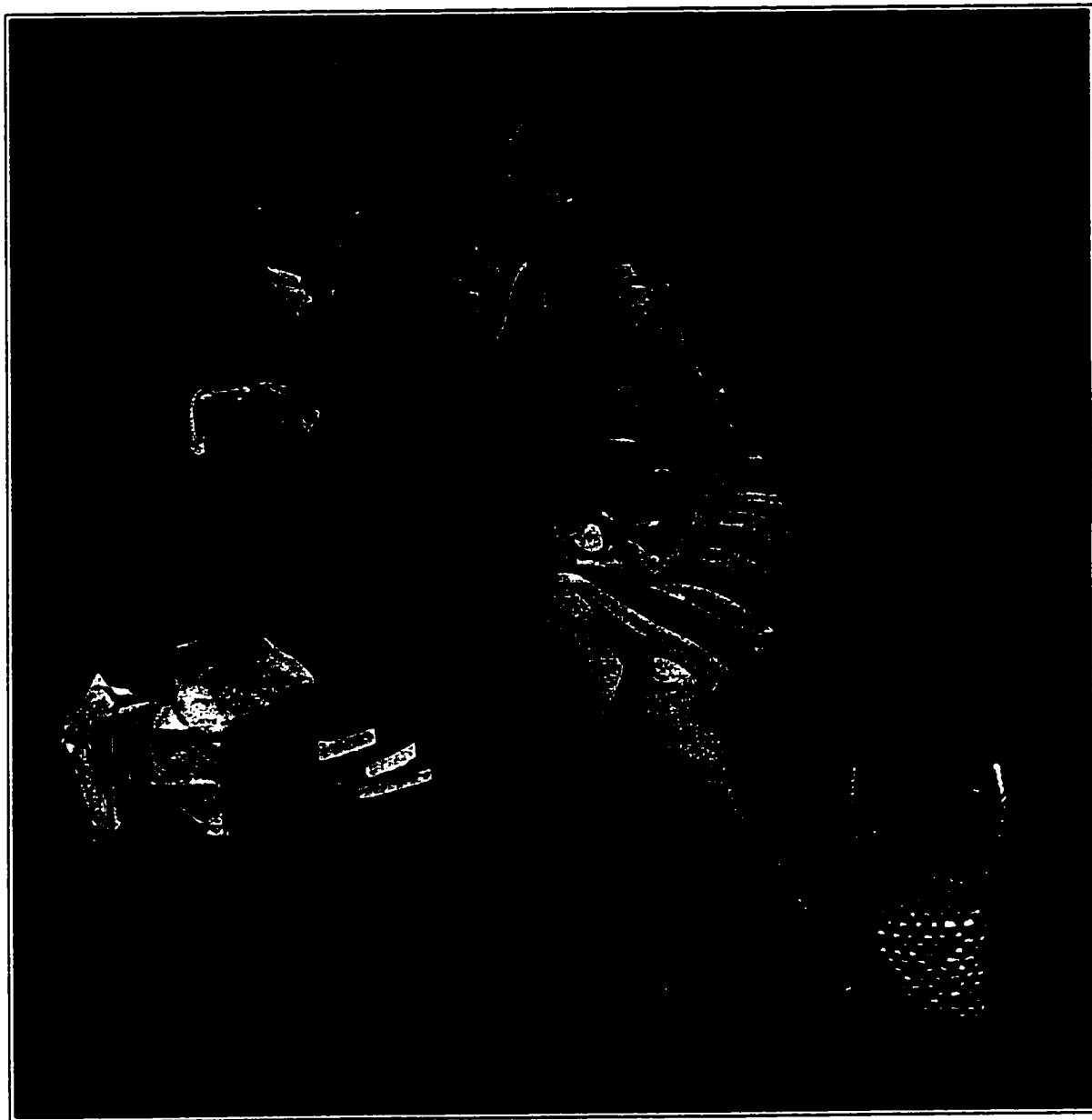


Plate 8. Al Freeman Jr. and Jennifer West in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on 12 January 1964.

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Plate 9. (left to right) (standing) Amiri Baraka, Edward Parone, (seated) Al Freeman, Jr., Jennifer West, and additional cast members on the set of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* at the Playwrights Unit.

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Plate 10. Tony Musante and Rosemary Forsyth in Lee Kalcheim's *Match Play*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on 17 May 1964.

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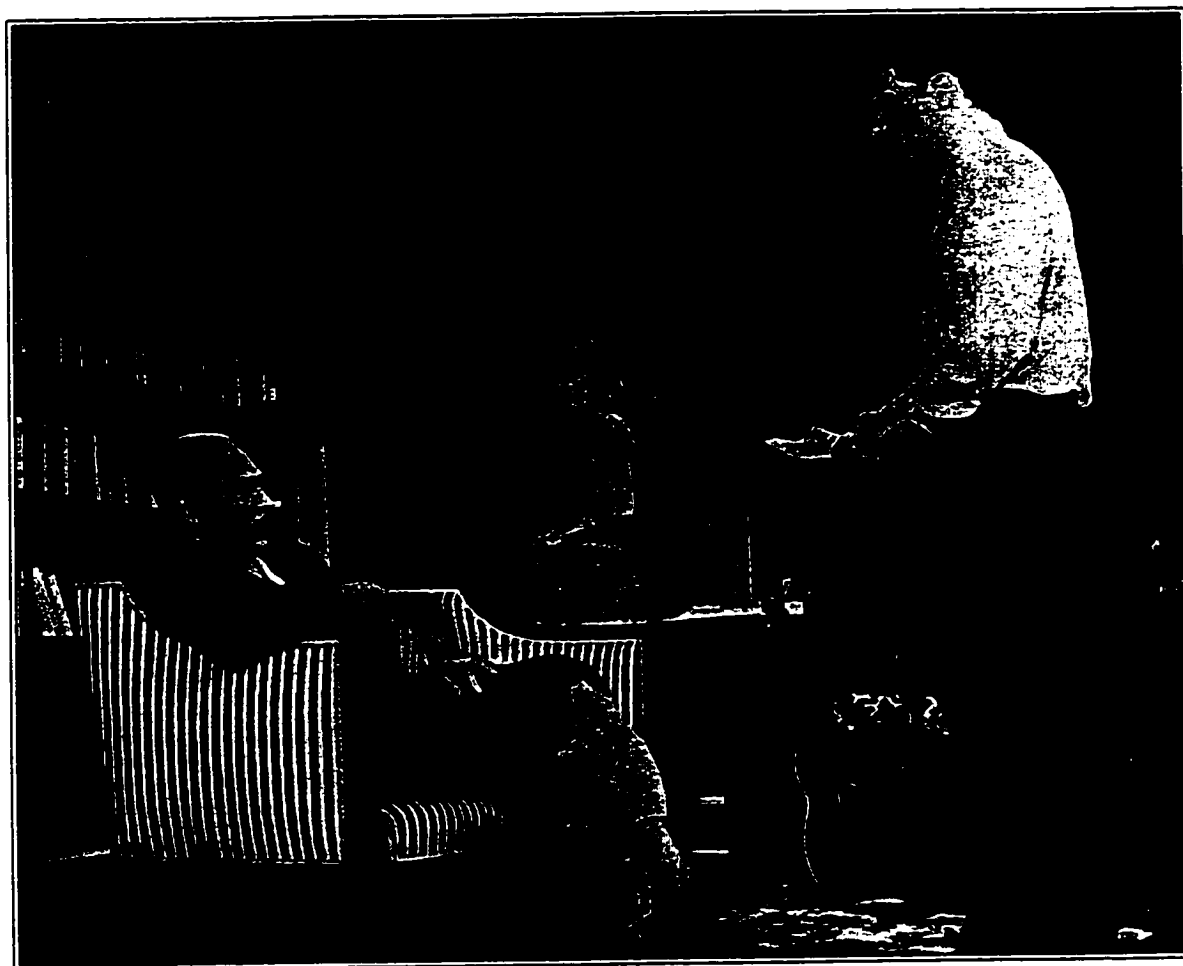


Plate 11. (left to right) Rudy Bond, Tony Musante and Beverly Ballard in Lee Kalcheim's *Match Play*, presented by Theater 1967 at the Provincetown Playhouse, on 11 October 1966.

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Plate 12. (left to right) Lanford Wilson, Paul Foster, and Sam Shepard at the Cherry Lane Theatre—publicity photo for New Playwrights Series I.

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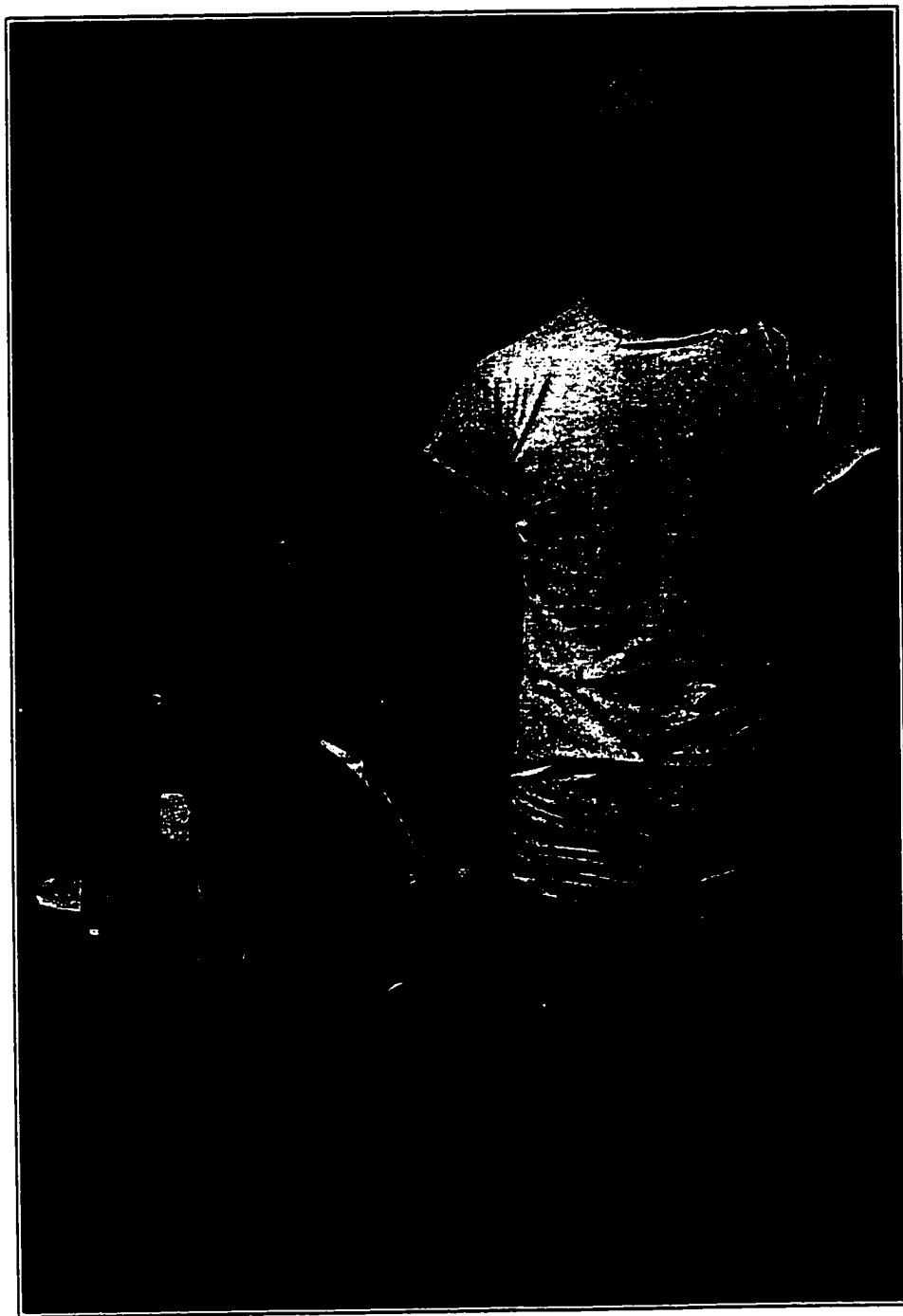


Plate 13. (left to right) Mimi Levine, Robert F. Lyons, Lee Kissman in Sam Shepard's *Up To Thursday*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on 23 November 1964.

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Plate 14. (left to right) Mimi Levine, Stephanie Gordon, Sam Shepard, Harvey Keitel, Lee Kissman, Richard Mansfield, Robert F. Lyons, Kevin O'Connor on the set of Sam Shepard's *Up To Thursday*.

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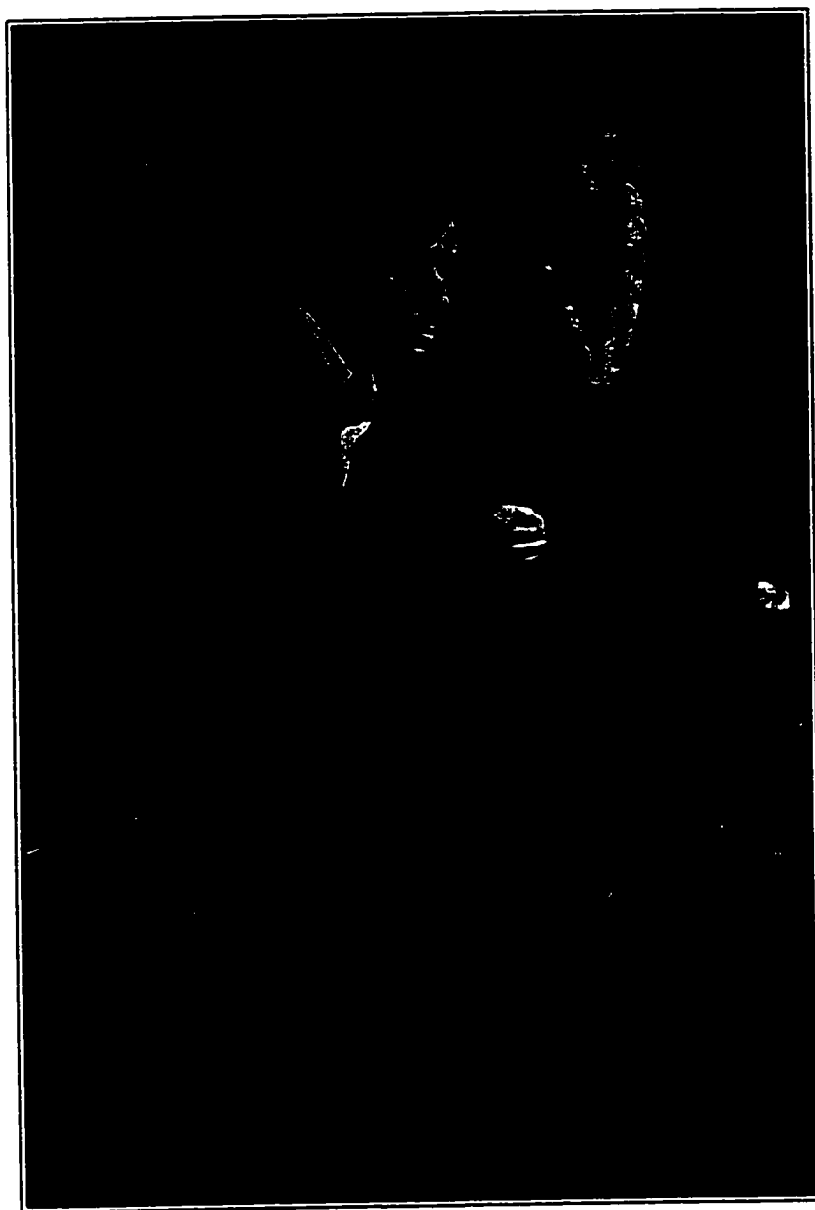


Plate 15. Burt Brinckerhoff (Alexander) and Warren Finnerty (Daniel)
in Lanford Wilson's *No Trespassing*, produced at the
Playwrights Unit on 31 January 1965.

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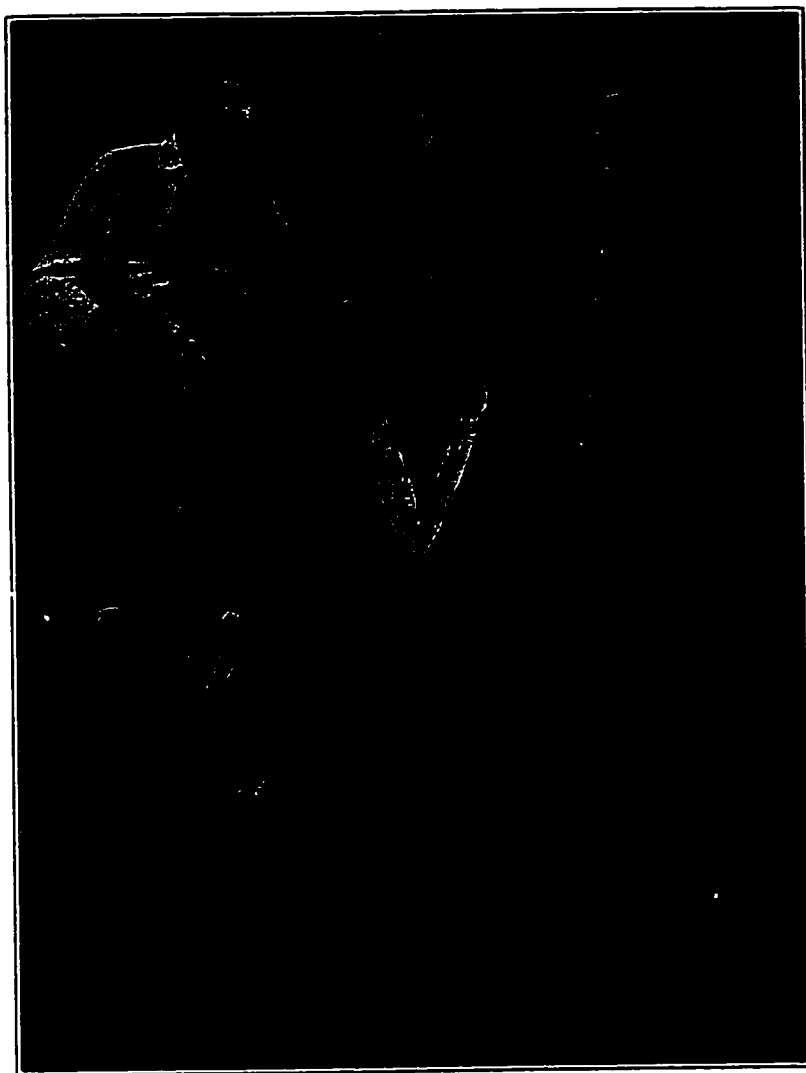


Plate 16. (top row, left to right) Milton Katselas (director), Dale Whitt (assistant director), Lanford Wilson (playwright), (bottom row, left to right), Burt Brinckerhoff (Alexander) and Warren Finnerty (Daniel) on the set of Lanford Wilson's *No Trespassing*.

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Plate 17. (left to right) Paul Boesing (Rossano), Joyce Aaron (Doris), and Sharon Gans in Jean Claude van Itallie's *I'm Really Here* presented at the Playwrights Unit on 7 February 1965.

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Plate 18. Eugene R. Wood (Him) and Mary Farrell (Her) in John Guare's
To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza, produced at the
Playwrights Unit on 21 February 1965.

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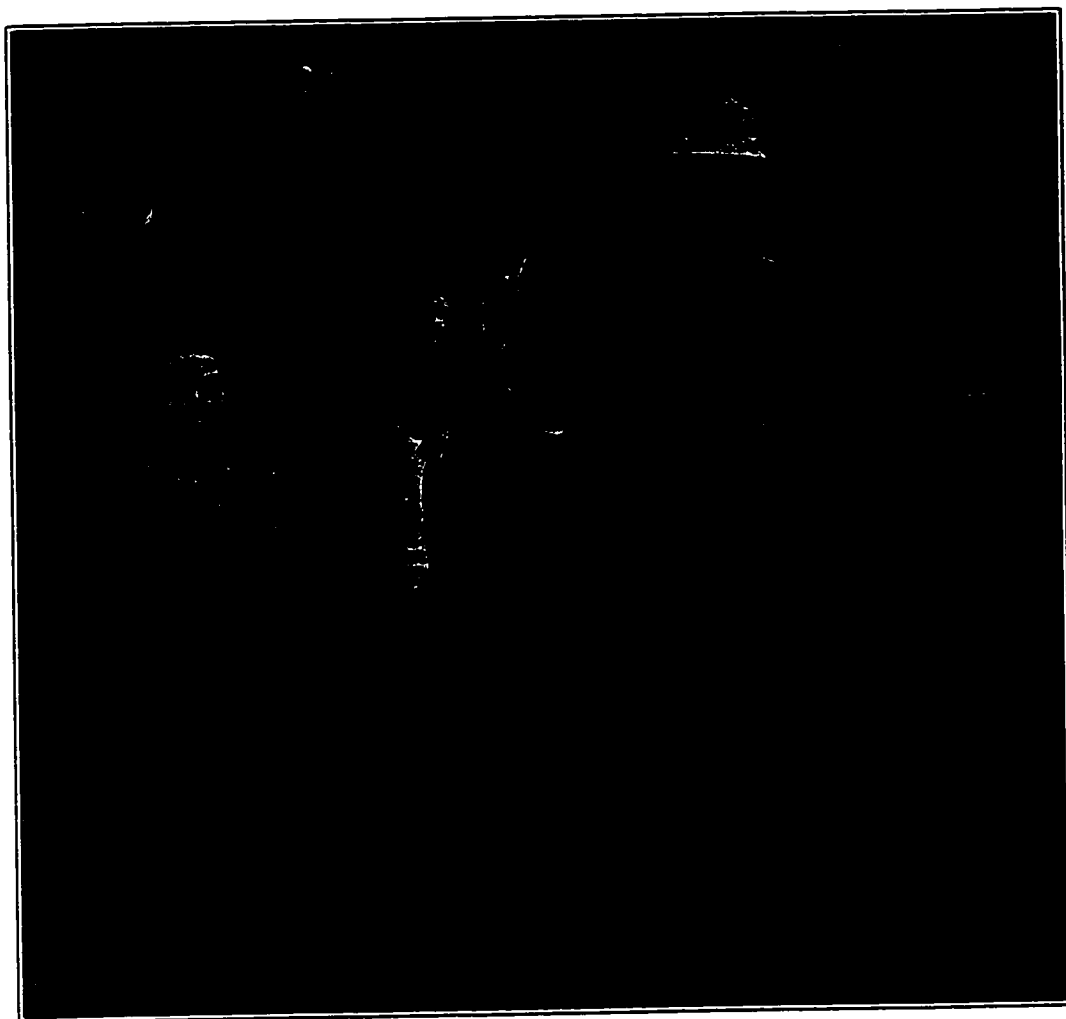


Plate 19. (left to right) Edwin Patrick Aldridge (director), Mary Farrell (Her), John Guare (playwright), Eugene R. Wood (Him), Jeffrey Siggins (Wally Pantoni), and Igors Gavon in John Guare's *To Wally Pantoni We Leave A Credenza*.

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Plate 20. Scene from Sam Shepard's *4-H Club*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on 9 September 1965.

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Plate 21. (left to right) Paul B. Price (Joe), Charles (Chuck) Gnys (director), Sam Shepard (playwright), Kevin O'Connor (Bob), and John Fink (John) in Sam Shepard's *4-H Club*.

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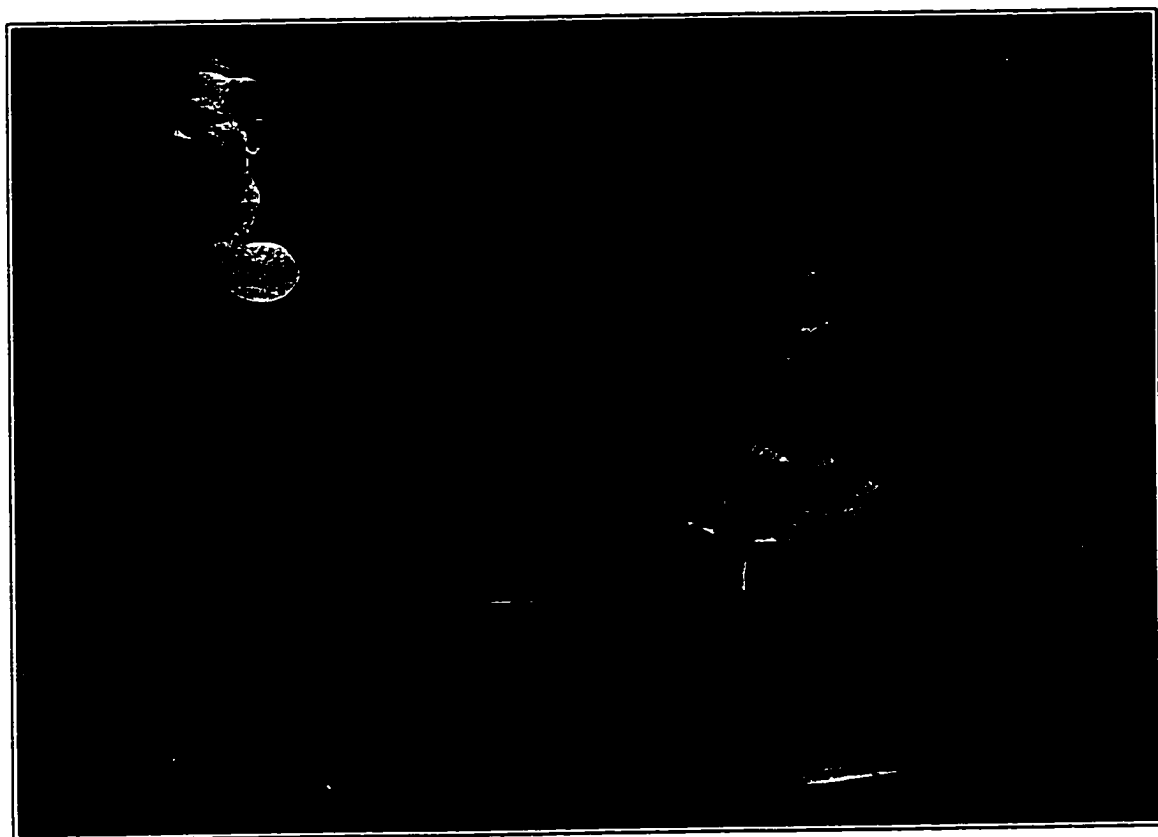


Plate 22. Harry Spillman (Howie Hale) and Hellena Westcott (Bunny Stuntz) in A.R. Gurney Jr.'s *The Rape of Bunny Stuntz*, produced at the Playwrights Unit on 13 November 1965.

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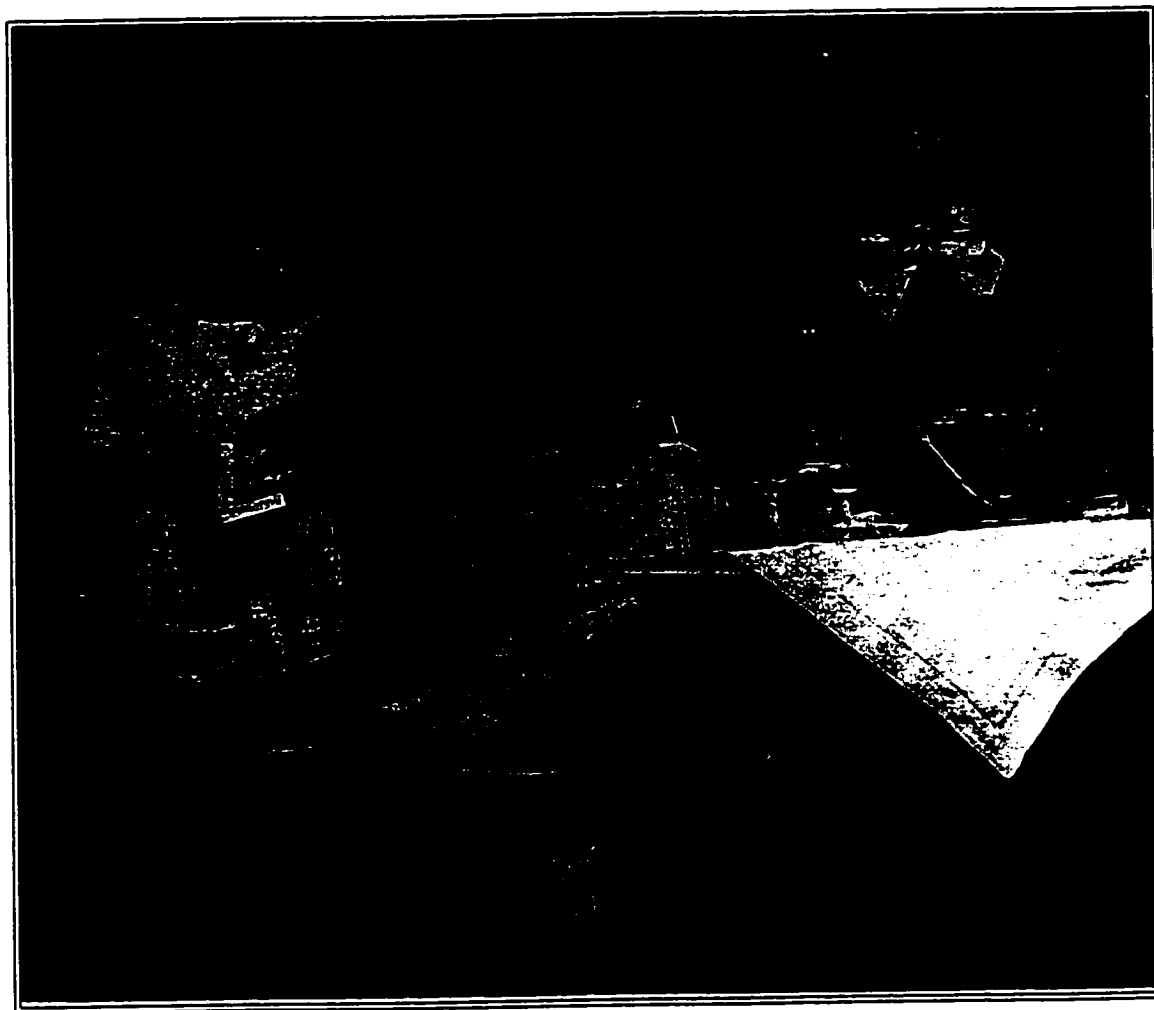


Plate 23. (left to right) Ruth White, Elizabeth Wilson, and Elizabeth Moore in Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little*, produce at the Playwrights Unit on 8 September 1966.

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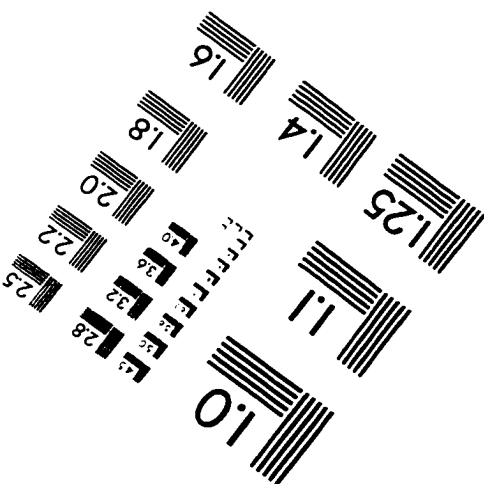
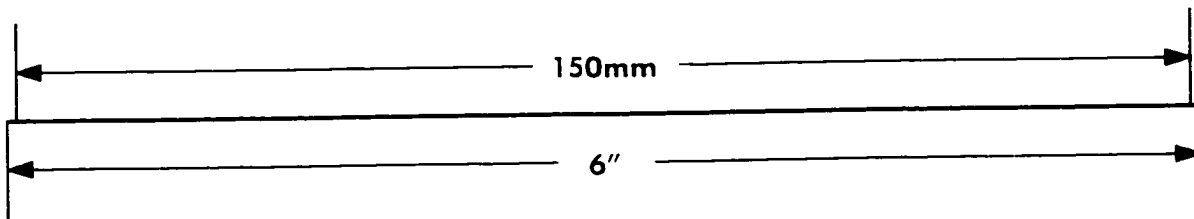
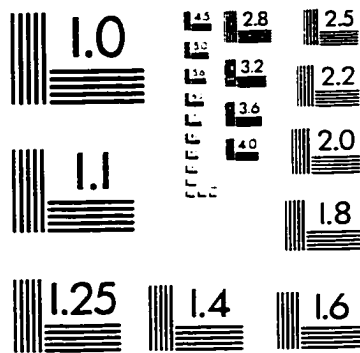
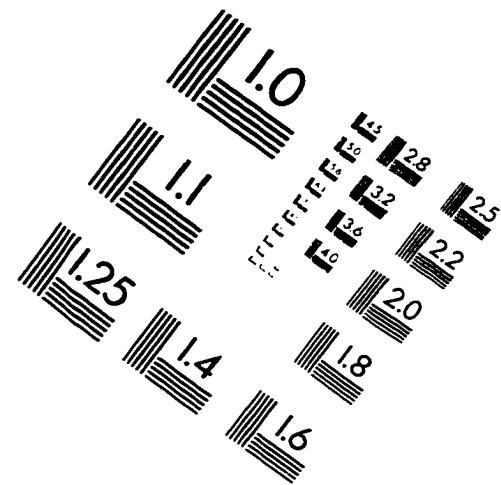
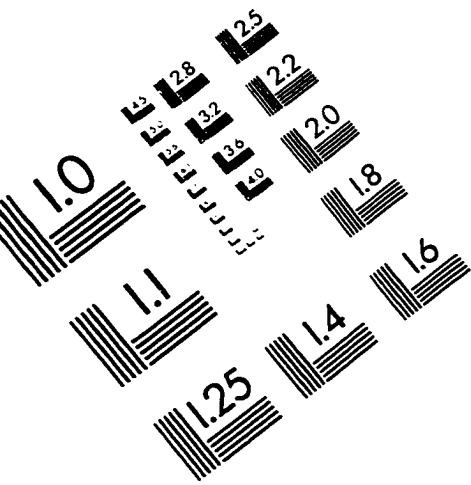
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