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More Than Entertainment:
The American Theatre Wing During World War II

by

Robert C. Roarty

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

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18 April 2002
Date

Dr. Judith Milhous
Chair of Examining Committee

18 April 2002
Date

Dr. Pamela Sheingorn
Executive Officer

Dr. Jane Bowers
Supervisory Committee

Dr. Marvin Carlson
Supervisory Committee

Dr. Samuel L. Leiter
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

MORE THAN ENTERTAINMENT:

THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING DURING WORLD WAR II

by

Robert C. Roarty

Advisor: Professor Judith Milhous

Shortly after the start of the Second World War, a group of women associated with the American theatre dedicated themselves to helping the victims of the European conflict. To accomplish their humanitarian goals, they created the American Theatre Wing War Service, a privately funded war relief agency. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the United States's entry into the war as an active combatant, the organization refocused its efforts on programs designed to aid America and its people as they waged a two-front war. The American Theatre Wing established programs that provided entertainment and comfort to the armed services of the Allied nations, both in the United States and overseas. It also worked closely with government and other agencies to bring war-related propaganda to the men, women, and children on the home front.

The various contributions made to the war effort by the women and men of the

theatrical industry through this organization have, for the most part, been overlooked by both social and theatre historians. This paper catalogues the major programs established by the Theatre Wing, and includes details on both its entertainment and propagandistic efforts. This study further attempts to interpret the Wing's endeavors in terms of the larger social, political, and economic forces at work in the nation during the war.

Acknowledgments

The process of writing a dissertation would, at first glance, appear to be a solitary pursuit. However, it is quite the opposite. It is a collaborative process. Accordingly, I would like to express my appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee for all of their ideas, suggestions, and patience. I am especially grateful to the chairperson of the committee, Dr. Judith Milhous. Her encouragement and support were invaluable.

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Contents

Introduction

The American Theatre Wing began its service to the theatrical community and the nation in 1940 out of concern for the millions of people adversely affected by the cruelty and destruction that characterized the Second World War. At first, the Wing only undertook the task of bringing comfort and care to the civilian victims of the war. Later it focused its programs on the well-being of the average American citizen, the industrial workers who built and maintained the machines of war, and the men and women in uniform who actually risked their lives in combat. During the war years, the American Theatre Wing brought together to work on war-related projects, on a scale never before seen, the actors, actresses, directors, playwrights, critics, musicians, stage hands, designers, costumers, electricians, painters, and builders who make the Broadway theatre such an important American institution. These men and women of the theatre created a national service organization that materially benefitted the United States in one of the most critical periods of the nation's existence.

Today, the Wing is best known as one of the sponsors of Broadway's annual salute to itself, the Antoinette Perry "Tony" Awards. Its membership, once measured in the thousands, now averages about 150 and includes some of the most powerful members of the theatrical industry. It continues to run a number of community service programs, including "Introduction to Broadway," a program that attempts to show young people that theatre can be a truly special experience, the "Theatre-In-Schools" program, which puts performers, directors, and other theatre professionals into New York City classrooms, and

the "Working In The Theatre" seminars, bringing together audience members, students, and professional theatre practitioners to share perspectives on the art and business of the stage. In addition, through its grant and scholarship programs the Wing has given millions of dollars to young artists with the hope that they will bring new ideas and new life into the profession, keeping the theatre vital and evolving. In all its current activities, the Theatre Wing reaches out to others, using the talents of the men and women of the theatre to make a positive contribution to the future of the entertainment industry and the nation.

It is unfortunate then, that, apart from a few brief paragraphs in the books that chronicle the Tony Awards, the early history of the Wing has been substantially neglected by theatre and social historians. In part, the reason for the oversight is a shortage of the artifacts and historical documents that represent the Wing's past. Nearly all of the wartime records of the Wing were destroyed in what can only be labeled a regrettable set of circumstances. According to Jan Stenzel, the American Theatre Wing's current Director of Programs and Special Events, most of the organization's records compiled during the war years were entrusted to the personal care of an individual. During a subsequent change in that person's primary residence, the files were lost or abandoned. Without those important records, the task of compiling a thorough, accurate, and detailed history of the organization's war years is a formidable one. Regardless of the difficulty, it is an important mission, and this study attempts to construct that account, using a variety of primary and secondary sources that have been found in public, private, and government archives.

Theoretical Foundation and Historical Context

Before the 1960s, theatre historians tended to consider the history of the theatrical art primarily through the production record of great plays, the biographies of the most noted actors, directors, managers, and playwrights, the historical records of particular theatre groups, or by tracking transitions in the dominant aesthetic mode. In contrast, more recent scholars have redirected the focus of their examinations by looking closely at the role played by theatre in the larger social and political context. Theatre historians in the past looked at how theatre serves as a mirror, reflecting the society that surrounds it. Today they seek to understand how it contributes to the course and pace of social evolution. They explore theatre's complex and constantly shifting relationship with the political, economic, and cultural configurations that make up the society of any particular age. In short, we now see theatre as much more than a passive meditation on society. We regard it as a dynamic, socially constructive force. The result of this wider perspective on the relationship between theatre and society is a greater appreciation for the ways that cultural change can be understood as a "multidimensional set of interactions,"[1] a negotiation between the society in which an artist works, and the artist's social, political, and aesthetic consciousness.

Bruce McConachie's examination of American melodrama during the nineteenth century, *Melodramatic Formations*, is an excellent example of this trend in theatre historiography. In this work, McConachie effectively argues that the popular melodramas

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[1] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986), 8.

of the period both reflected class realities, and helped to create and sustain the social, economic, and political transformation of the rising lower and middle classes that characterized the century in the United States.[2]

Erika Fischer-Lichte's article, "Theatre and the Civilizing Process," also employs this new methodology. In her essay, Fischer-Lichte looks at the way the actor's body "promotes and ridicules modes of behavior both common and uncommon for the time." Although her particular interest is the actor, her approach to the study of that one facet of theatre and its relationship to culture and society is part of this larger trend in the historiography of the theatre. Like McConachie and many others, she suggests that throughout history, "The stage has proved to be a highly appropriate arena for representing or propagating norms and ideas crucial to a given society."[3]

With these precedents in mind, the current study will examine how the Wing's activities both mirrored wartime America and contributed to the sometimes temporary, sometimes permanent, social and political changes that accompanied the nation's total war effort. It will not only look at the ways the American Theatre Wing's wartime record reflects the issues and concerns of the general population, governmental and military powers, and the entertainment industry during this period of national crisis, but also how the Wing and the women and men who organized, managed, and volunteered for its

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[2] Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992).

[3] Erika Fischer-Lichte, " Theatre and the Civilizing Process," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 19-36. For similar examples of this new historiography, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), and John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds., *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990).

programs, as well as the programs themselves, helped to shape the wartime home front environment. Like the print, radio, and movie industries, the theatre, through the American Theatre Wing, had a material effect on the nation and its prosecution of the war. An awareness of the many roles assumed by the women and men of the Theatre Wing during the Second World War adds significantly to understanding the overall function of theatre in this decisive period in twentieth century America.

While some of the American Theatre Wing's work has the performance elements of script, actor, director, scenography, and audience, we can label a substantial portion of their work as social welfare work. In the context of this study, the term "welfare work" does not apply only to the care and concern given to refugees and other victims of war-related circumstances. Rather, the term refers to a broad range of programs that sought to ease the physical and emotional burdens of the wartime population and provide material and spiritual support to those whose lives had been seriously disrupted by the war.

The Wing was also deeply involved in the dissemination of wartime propaganda which sought to encourage the complete cooperation of the American public with the mobilization plans of federal, state, and local governments. The Wing likewise promoted a number of war-related initiatives conducted by a variety of public and private service agencies. For the purposes of this study, propaganda will be defined in rather all-inclusive terms. According to American political scientist Harold D. Lasswell, "Propaganda in the broadest sense is the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of

representations."[4] In the preface to his book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Jacques Ellul offers a slightly more specific definition based on the formulations of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. "Propaganda is the expression of opinions or actions carried out deliberately by individuals or groups with a view to influencing the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups for predetermined ends and through psychological manipulations."[5] In both cases the meaning of the term is found in the idea that specific information is being transmitted to a target audience with the intention of altering behavior and/or thoughts. In the case of the Wing, the modifications were intended to encourage behaviors that supported the American and Allied war efforts, arouse patriotism in the citizenry, galvanize animosity against the enemy, or improve morale.

In looking at the American Theatre Wing's propagandistic performance programs, this inquiry will not attempt to evaluate the success of those programs based on their artistic, box office, or critical accomplishment. For the women and men who created, administered, and volunteered in them, aesthetic, financial, or critical considerations were of little concern in light of the threat to the nation posed by the world conflict. In this study, the principal measure for the evaluation of any of the Wing's wartime activities will be the apparent success of the endeavor when measured against its stated goals.

Finally, it must be noted that the very nature of propaganda is such that it is

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[4] Harold D. Lasswell, "Propaganda," in *Propaganda*, ed. Robert Jackall (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 13.

[5] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), xii.

extremely difficult to accurately judge its effectiveness in quantitative terms. Ellul suggests that, apart from broad generalizations about its success, it is impossible "to establish precise measurements of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of propaganda."[6] Ellul argues that since propaganda works at the level of fundamental belief, seeking to change an individual's deepest and innermost thought process, it is, from any objective point of view, not practicable to identify precisely the source of any significant change in a person's outlook or behavior. There is also, according to Ellul, a time delay between the act of propaganda and the effect it may have on the individual, which adds to the difficulty of judging its effectiveness. How can one tell with exactitude what actually caused the shift in a person's attitude? It is, then, substantially subjective evaluation criteria that will used to judge the Wing's influence on the American war effort.

This examination of the American Theatre Wing's early years focuses primarily on the activities which were based in the New York area. As America's foremost economic, media, and cultural center, New York and its surroundings were particularly important to the nation during the war. The many and diverse war welfare projects created and sustained by the American Theatre Wing in New York were the paradigms for similar programs created in Philadelphia, Cleveland, San Francisco, and elsewhere. The New York programs are also the most readily researched, since the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has in its collections a significant portion of the existing historical materials dealing with all of the Wing' activities during the war. Those documents, as might be expected, deal primarily with the activities of the Theatre Wing in New York.

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[6] Ibid. 259-262.

Thus, this study's concentration on the Broadway-based chapter of the group provides the most comprehensive review of their contributions to the overall war effort. The accomplishments of other divisions will be noted, but not fully explored.

In the present study, the American theatre's responses to the national crisis are scrutinized. This examination is, in that respect, part of a large number of similar historical studies that examine other forms of American media that were involved in the total war effort. For example, Maureen Honey's book, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (1984), is a laudable investigation into the print media's active participation in the transmission of home front propaganda. Honey focuses on serialized fictions published in several monthly magazines that catered almost exclusively to the American woman. In the stories she examines, she finds clearly identifiable evidence of the close cooperation between publishers, authors, and the Writers' War Board aimed at influencing the public's wartime activities.[7] According to Honey, they carefully inserted propaganda into fictional stories in an effort to "subtly encourage readers to take war jobs, conserve rationed goods, plant victory gardens, and take other constructive steps by featuring patriotic characters with whom the reader could identify and by lacing escapist, privatized fantasies with references to the real world of national struggle."[8] At the same time, and sometimes in the same stories that encouraged

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[7] The Writers' War Board was created two days after Pearl Harbor by Rex Stout, the author of the Nero Wolf mystery novels. It served during the war as the clearing house for writers from all disciplines and genres who, working closely with the government, wished to use their skills to contribute to the war effort.

[8] Maureen Honey, *Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 45.

the American woman to step beyond her traditional role in society, Honey found elements of propaganda intended to remind women of the temporary nature of both the emergency and the solution. Once the war was over, the subtle message ran, they would expect women to return happily to their conventional roles as stay-at-home mothers and wives. The result of Honey's examination is a new and much richer appreciation of the government's influence on wartime culture and the media's willing participation in the government's propaganda campaigns. Her study also helps to explain some of the gender turmoil that accompanied the nation's total war effort, as well as the unrest associated with women's resistance to the notion that they should surrender their newly found freedoms and return to the way things were before the war.

In a similar manner, Alvin Goldfarb's 1996 article dealing with the influence of the Writers' War Board on radio programs is a cogent analysis of one aspect of radio's service to the national cause.[9] He proves that the producers, writers, and talent working in radio also participated in the government's attempt to frame the American people's intellectual and emotional response to the war. Goldfarb achieves this end by documenting the federal administration's use of several wartime radio programs to shape the public's reaction to the horrifying reports of the Nazi atrocities committed against Europe's Jewish population. K. R. M. Short's *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (1983) provides an even broader analysis of radio's role in helping to both mobilize the home front population and provide indispensable amusement.

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[9] Alvin Goldfarb, "The Holocaust on the Air: The Radio Plays of the Writers' War Board," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 8:2 (Spring, 1996): 48-58.

In the area of motion pictures, film historian Robert Fyne provides a critical assessment of the nature and caliber of the many contributions made to the war effort by the various West Coast studios in his book, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II.*[10] Fyne marks a high degree of cooperation between the film industry's War Activities Committee, the Office of War Information (OWI), and President Roosevelt's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP). This wartime collaboration lasted until July of 1943, when the BMP was shut down by Congress and the OWI became the government's primary liaison with the movies. Fyne's investigation shows that the major movie studios and the moguls who headed them were anxious to preserve the abundant profits generated by escapist entertainment films. In order to do this, they made, at the government's request, propaganda shorts and war-related feature films that the administration considered to be vital contributions to national education and morale.

In each work the author points to specific examples which establish that a strong partnership existed between the government and the artists and media producers of the period. These scholars also note that most often those who cooperated with the authorities were "individuals whose self-interest combined with a sincerely felt belief that their work was non-manipulative because they were helping the nation to survive."[11] In reality, of course, the efforts of those who controlled wartime media were entirely manipulative, but because the goal of their efforts was patriotic in nature, they easily

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[10] Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994).

[11] Honey, *Rosie the Riveter*, 46.

overcame any sense of guilt that may have accompanied their attempts to shape the attitudes and actions of the general public. What may have been considered unethical or inappropriate in a time of peace was, in wartime, acceptable and was even praised as being patriotic. The historians who have studied the modes of mass communication during the period have effectively documented the nearly complete and the often enthusiastic cooperation of publishers, broadcasters, writers, producers and advertisers in the overall program to shape American thought and control wartime behavior. As this study will demonstrate, many of the Wing's activities reflected the same high level of cooperation with federal, state, and local authorities.

In addition to works that focus on a particular element of popular culture, several general social histories survey a broad spectrum of cultural evidence in the attempt to understand more fully the evolution in American society that resulted from the wartime home front environment. Included in this genre are such important works as Paul Fussell's *Wartime: Understanding Behavior in the Second World War* (1989), A. A. Hoehling's *Home Front, U.S.A.* (1966), and John Morton Blum's 1976 tome, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II.* These books look at many aspects of American society and culture and interpret the differences between the ideals of behavior and thought suggested by the government's many war agencies and the multifaceted public response to the total war effort.

Unfortunately, most of these historians and critics have ignored one aspect of that era's American popular culture: the theatre. In the period between the two world wars, many considered the American theatre to be at its height, even though it was suffering

from the added competition of movies and radio, the effects of the Depression, and the steadily increasing cost of production. According to New York drama critic Brooks Atkinson, "In the Twenties and Thirties and part of the Forties the American theatre was aggressive, intelligent and dynamic, and it pioneered many forms."[12] Similarly, German playwright Ernest Schwarzert, in an article written for the *New York Times* in 1941, described the American theatre as "intensely alive . . . in the process of rebirth."[13] Thus, with the approach of war, it was fitting that the nation's leaders had lofty expectations concerning the theatre and its possible contribution to the nation's overall plan to check the ruthless aggression represented by Hitler, Mussolini, and the Imperial Japanese military.[14]

One of the earliest calls to the arts community for action against the Axis nations came more than a year before the United States officially entered the war. Poet, playwright, Librarian of Congress, and then head of the government's Office of Facts and Figures, Archibald MacLeish addressed an audience that included playwright Robert E. Sherwood, actor Alfred Lunt, actress Lynn Fontaine, and composer Irving Berlin. In the keynote speech delivered at the tenth annual *New York Herald Tribune* Forum, MacLeish encouraged the members of all of the arts to join the "mobilization for the defense of

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[12] Brooks Atkinson and Albert Hirschfeld, *The Lively Years: 1920-1973* (New York: Association Press, 1973), 5.

[13] Ernest Schwarzert, "A German Looks at the Drama," *New York Times*, 26 January 1941, sec. 9.

[14] In a way the government's high expectations regarding theatre are ironic. Just a few years earlier, the federal government killed the Federal Theatre Project, based primarily on its fear that the film and theatre industries were sanctuaries for communists and communist sympathizers.

democracy."[15] MacLeish pressed the assembled actors, artists, and musicians to recognize that "fascism, whether we like it or not, is a fighting cause; and only a fighting cause can conquer it." Faced with what he perceived to be American complacency in light of the ongoing European conflict, he reminded the members of the arts community that "Democracy to conquer it [fascism] must become again a fighting cause." Although the American Theatre Wing was not created in direct response to MacLeish's call to arms, the Wing, as the professional theatre's primary war welfare organization, did indeed make democracy its "fighting cause."

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the American declaration of war, former President Herbert Hoover outlined what he believed theatre's roles would be in the upcoming years of conflict. Remembering the theatre's many contributions to home front morale in the First World War, Hoover exhorted dramatists to provide inspiration to a public he thought would urgently need spiritual reinforcement. At the same time, Hoover recognized theatre's capacity for escapism and amusement. "The land of make believe drives our cares into hiding," he declared; "more importantly it inspires the great emotions which carry us over the crisis of war."[16] In a remarkable comparison for a Midwestern man raised as a devout Quaker, Hoover added, "through the church and drama, lie the highest of all inspirations."

The expectations for the immediate future of the American theatre were not only a

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[15] Archibald MacLeish, quoted in "M'Leish Urges Mobilization Here to Create 'Democracy in Action'," *New York Times*, 24 October 1940.

[16] "Theatre's War Aid Praised by Hoover," *New York Times*, 1 February 1942.

topic of American interest. In March of 1942, Italian critic and historian Paolo Milano put forward his hope for the American theatre in the midst of the world conflict. While his perspective was necessarily prejudiced by his close relationship to the tragic events in Europe, Milano was still generally optimistic about the future, and particularly the role reserved for the American theatre in the formation of that future. "There lies over Europe a cultural blackout, a totalitarian blackout," he said.[17] "The American theatre will be the only free and living theatre in the world. And, because of circumstances which stem both from this country's tradition and from the uninterrupted immigration of intellectuals, it is, or could soon be, a *supernational theatre*." To Milano and the other refugees who sought protection and creative freedom in the United States, the American theatre would soon, by default, be the world's theatre. Broadway would be the one remaining theatrical site where they could imagine and bring to life a world free from tyranny. Milano concluded, "It is the American theatre that can create on the stages of the United States a prefiguration of that universal culture which a war-torn world expects of this country."

Despite the seeming vitality of the American theatre, and the expectation that it would play an important role in the century's second great war, scholars have rarely acknowledged its contributions to America's wartime efforts. Social historian Richard Lingeman briefly contemplates the character of wartime drama in his book, *Don't You Know There's A War On?* However, he deals almost exclusively with the professional production record of the New York commercial theatre during the war years, and after

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[17] Paolo Milano, "A Free Theatre for a Free People," *Theatre Arts*, March 1942, 206-207. Milano's emphasis.

noting a few exceptions, concludes that "Broadway failed to mirror the larger real-life drama convulsing the world." Lingeman records that several attempts were made early in the war years to put serious war themes on stage, but observes that "most appeared briefly, then beat a hasty retreat, routed by the withering fire of the critics."[18] Lingeman further concludes that the professional theatre was primarily interested in profits and amusement. He states, "It appeared that Broadway, becoming increasingly prosperous as war money flowed into the box office, became more and more escapist as the war went on."

Theatre historians have also evaluated the role of the theatre in the war years, but even among these scholars the record yields disparate views. For example, theatre scholar Peter Bauland found the early war years uniformly devoid of successful war-related dramas. Referring specifically to the 1941-42 New York season, Bauland reports that "most productions were either of farcical and musical froth totally oblivious to world events and which, for once, the public was too serious minded to patronize, or else of preposterously contrived war and anti-Nazi plays."[19] John Gassner, the eminent critic and scholar, expressed a similarly negative opinion of the theatrical scene during the period. While noting that the American theatre "enjoyed a freedom from interruption, censorship, or anxiety found nowhere else on the globe," he was unreservedly disappointed with what

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[18] Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's A War On?* (New York: Putnam, 1970), 289.

[19] Peter Bauland, *The Hooded Eagle: Modern German Drama on the New York Stage* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 140.

he saw as inadequate theatrical fare.[20] "Neither the war nor its issues evoked many plays that scaled the heights or plumbed the depths, while the general level of play-making was lamentable," he wrote. In a like manner, the *New Yorker* magazine's theatre critic Wolcott Gibbs characterized the war years as "a period of unprecedented confusion, anxiety, makeshift, bad taste and just plain nonsense on the American stage."[21]

Representing a slightly more positive perspective on the American theatre's wartime production history, Morgan Himmelstein, in his book, *Drama Was A Weapon*, concludes that most productions "at least touched on the war."[22] Himmelstein's view was subsequently reinforced by Samuel Leiter in an article published in the *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*. Leiter's survey, entitled "Theatre on the Home Front: World War II on New York's Stages, 1941-1945," is perhaps the most comprehensive catalog of Broadway and Off-Broadway's dramatized reflection of the wartime environment.[23] In it Leiter suggests that more than ninety plays were produced on Broadway during the hostilities that contained or referred to some aspect of the war. Appropriately, he also notes that in most of those dramas, the realities of the conflict merely serve as a backdrop to a traditional mystery, romance or adventure story, and in

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[20] John Gassner, introduction to *Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre* (New York: Crown, 1947), x.

[21] Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre," in *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States*, ed. Jack Goodman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 464.

[22] Morgan Himmelstein, *Drama Was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York, 1929-1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 212.

[23] Samuel Leiter, "Theatre on the Home Front: World War II on New York's Stages, 1941-1945," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 5:2 (Spring 1993): 47-70.

only an exceptional few are serious themes combined with effective dramatic craftsmanship. Ultimately, however, Leiter's perspective on wartime theatre is positive. In his examination, he observes that the American theatre "contributed extensively to the war effort." He concludes his observations by proclaiming that during the Second World War, the American theatre "responded to a national crisis in a way such as it never had nor ever would again." None of these studies, however, devotes adequate attention to the role of the American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc.; hence the need for this study.

The Approach of War

The Second World War can arguably be considered the single most important event of the twentieth century. Characterized by historian Louis Snyder as "one of the great tragedies of history," and by Stephen Ambrose as "history's greatest catastrophe," this conflagration took place between 1939 and 1945 and radically changed the course of modern social and political evolution.[24] Although fighting ended after only six years, the war had profound and lasting consequences, the most tragic of which were the estimated 55,000,000 civilian and military casualties.[25] The political world map was redrawn and, in the aftermath of the armistice, new nations were created in both Europe and the Middle East. During the war, the pace of innovation in science and technology grew

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[24] Louis L. Snyder, *The Making of Modern Man* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1967), 695, and Stephen Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II* (New York: Viking, 1997) x.

[25] My account of the war is drawn from serveral sources, including: James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: Morrow, 1980), Stephen Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II* (New York: Viking, 1997), and *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, ed. I. C. B. Dear (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1995). Only particulars that these sources do not share will be footnoted.

exponentially. The jet engine, rocketry, computers, radar, sonar, penicillin and other medical advances, and an increased number of uses for plastics were all results of wartime research. The creation of the atom bomb and its use at Hiroshima and Nagasaki revolutionized not only the science of war, but prompted an ongoing reevaluation of all of the moral implications contained in the application of international diplomacy and the resolution of regional or global conflict.

Many historians situate the causes of the Second World War in the treaties and agreements for reparations that concluded the First World War.[26] The punitive nature of those treaties put enormous strain on the defeated German nation. Economically, the world's great nations, including Germany, experienced additional stress due to the great depression that followed the end of World War I. The Wall Street collapse in the United States in 1929 was just one of the crises that contributed to the world-wide weakening of political and economic stability. As noted by historians Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, "The world slump engendered massive unemployment; the radical parties grew in size and created well-disciplined private armies."[27] In Germany particularly, unemployment reached record levels as the Weimar Republic, the postwar German government, attempted to survive inflation, assaults from both the right and the left, and the monetary demands of war reparations.

Long before the beginning of the war with Germany, a series of regional conflicts

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[26] Those who hold this opinion include James L. Stokesbury, Stephen Ambrose, Peter Duignan, and L. H. Gann.

[27] Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, *World War II in Europe: Causes, Course, and Consequences* (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 1995), 2.

undermined the world's already fragile stability. In 1921, the Japanese Army invaded the Chinese province of Manchuria. In 1923, Italian officers attempting to negotiate a peaceful solution to a border dispute between Greece and Albania were assassinated. In response, Mussolini, the Italian dictator, sent troops into Greece. When the Greeks appealed to the League of Nations, the Italians withdrew, but the European peace had been broken. In 1935, Italian forces invaded Ethiopia, then in 1936, the Spanish Civil War began. Finally, in 1937, the Japanese expanded their invasion of the Chinese mainland. In response to each of these regional conflicts, the world's democracies did essentially nothing but voice their concern.

In Germany, the political and economic turmoil that plagued that nation resulted in the rise of a new political party. The German National Socialist Workers' Party, more commonly known as the Nazis, came to power under Adolph Hitler in 1933. Drawing on German resentment of the 1919 Versailles Treaty, Hitler promised his people that Germany would rise again to its rightful position as the predominant European nation. He ordered massive government sponsored work projects, putting many of the previously unemployed to work and giving large, profitable contracts to German industry. To the delight of factory owners, he ordered the dismantling of all independent labor unions. Finally, to secure his power, he created a new German elite, the military, and forced them to pledge their allegiance to him personally rather than to the state. Then, in order to expand German territory, Hitler manufactured a series of international incidents which ultimately pushed the entire world closer to armed conflict.

In 1935 Hitler introduced military conscription, expanding his army far beyond the

100,000 man limit set by the terms of the Versailles Treaty. When the rest of the world did nothing in response, he was emboldened. In 1936 he sent his troops into the Rhineland, an area between Germany and France that, according to international treaty, was to supposed remain demilitarized. Again, the leaders of Europe's democracies took no action. The year 1936 was also when Germany and Italy, Europe's two fascist states signed a mutual defense pact that formed the Rome-Berlin Axis.[28]

Hitler then set his sights on Austria, a state that was plagued by civil war and near economic collapse. On 12 March 1938, Nazi troops marched into Austria, making the land of Hitler's birth a part of the German state. France and England lodged the requisite formal diplomatic complaints, but did nothing militarily to stop the German takeover.

Czechoslovakia was next on Hitler's list. Under the pretense of protecting a German-speaking minority located in the Sudetenland, on the border between Germany and the Czech republic, Hitler demanded that the area be turned over to German control. After several months of negotiations, posturing, and threats, the parties involved met in Munich to try to settle the matter. In a desperate attempt to avoid war, the Western powers, under the leadership of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, capitulated to Hitler's demands. By the end of September 1938, the majority of the Czech state had been divided between Germany, Poland, and Hungary. Again, Hitler's gamble had paid off. He was winning the living space (*lebensraum*) he wanted, and doing it without having to fire a single shot.

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[28] Japan would align itself with Germany and Italy by signing the Tripartite Pact in September 1940, completing the Axis alliance.

In Hitler's desire for territory, he turned his attention towards Poland. However, before he could move on the Polish state, Hitler had to secure his Eastern borders. In 1939, Germany and Russia, two traditional enemies, signed a non-aggression pact. Under the secret terms of the agreement, the two nations would divide up the Polish state. All that was left was for Hitler to demand concessions from the Poles. In an effort to blunt the German aggression, the French and the British publicly reaffirmed their commitment to defend the Polish nation if it were attacked by the either the Germans or the Soviets. Unfortunately, those statements had little or no effect on Germany's leader. On 1 September 1939, following Hitler's orders, German armor, infantry, and air forces crossed the Polish border. With that invasion, the Second World War began.

Organization

This study is divided into an introduction and five chapters. It is arranged according to several discrete organizational principles. The first chapter will be separated from the rest of the study by virtue of its chronology. It will divide the Wing's pre-Pearl Harbor activities, when the organization was primarily operating as a relief agency dedicated to providing assistance to the French and the British as they struggled to survive the Nazi assault, from the measures taken to benefit the American war effort following the nation's formal declarations of war against the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan. The following chapters are differentiated from each other by the nature of the audience for which each specific activity to be addressed was intended. Over the course of the war, the Theatre Wing created and ran an assortment of programs focused primarily on reaching

particular groups, including military service personnel, the industrial workforce, and the general home front population. Each group will be the subject of a chapter. The Wing's cooperative relationships with a variety of civilian and military groups will be examined in the final chapter.

1.

The Early Stages of War

The transition from the conditions of international threats and regional conflicts to a global conflagration involving the eastern and western hemispheres between 1939 and 1945 was sudden, but not unexpected. The collateral humanitarian crisis was just as immediate and just as compelling as the military predicament. Broadway's dynamic response to that rapid shift in the world's situation was the impetus for the creation of a distinctive welfare organization. This chapter will take a chronological look at the world as it plunged into war and examine the formation of the American Theatre Wing. The philosophies, programs, and purposes of the new theatre industry welfare agency will be scrutinized and its early activities outlined. This chapter will also recall briefly the theatre industry's World War I service group — the Stage Women's War Relief — a group that the American Theatre Wing cited as its direct predecessor and viewed as a model for its early relief work in World War II.

The War and the Wing Begin

With the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, and the subsequent declarations of war against Germany by France and England, the Second World War began. On 17 September, as allowed by the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, Soviet Russia joined the Nazis in the attack on Poland by crossing the Polish frontiers to claim a part of that land for itself. Although the Poles fought valiantly against the juggernaut of

the Nazi Wehrmacht on one front and a powerful Red Army on the other, they had little chance of victory. By 6 October, the Poles had surrendered. An estimated 600,000 Poles, combatants and noncombatants, were taken prisoner by the Germans, while the Russians captured another 200,000. France and Britain, both of which were bound by treaties to come to the aid of Poland if it were attacked, did little to stop the Germans, claiming, in part, that they were militarily unprepared for war. French forces made a brief foray into German territory in the midst of the Polish campaign, but withdrew on orders without a firing a shot. For their part, the British sent a force of nearly 400,000 to France, but failed to commit them to action. Both France and England withheld air support for the Poles, declaring that they did not possess adequate numbers of aircraft for an extended air war, although their combined air forces substantially outnumbered the German Luftwaffe.[1] Despite Hitler's wish to follow up his success in Poland by immediately moving westward against France, the German military leadership hesitated to mount new offensives during the heart of the European winter. The Russians, however, did not hesitate. As soon as they had taken control of the portion of Poland assigned to them by Non-Aggression Pact, the Soviet Army invaded Finland in 1939.

Stalin began the aggression by making territorial demands on the Finns, despite the fact that the two nations had previously signed a mutual defense treaty. When the Finnish leadership rejected those demands, the Russians attacked on 30 November 1939 with what seemed to be an overwhelming force. Against the might of 1,000 Russian tanks, nearly 800 aircraft, and more than 1,000,000 men, the Finns sent a combined regular army and

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[1] James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: Morrow, 1980), 76.

civilian reserve force of about 400,000. After three long, bloody, and costly months of struggle, the Finns negotiated a surrender settlement on 12 March 1940.

In the United States during these early months of the war, there was considerable debate over what the nation's political and military response to the conflict should be. To many Americans, the European war was just that, a European problem. Therefore, it required no American response other than a modicum of sympathy and a condemnation of the violence. This cynicism was due, in part, to the isolationist timbre of the times and was based to a large degree on the commonly held perception that the United States had only become involved in the First World War to satisfy the greed of American bankers and arms manufacturers. To other Americans, it was morally and politically necessary for the United States to contribute something to the fight against the aggression and brute force represented by the actions of both the Nazis and the Communists.

Aside from the national debate centering on America's relationship to the military and diplomatic issues of the day, there were many concerned citizens in the United States who wanted to respond in an unambiguous and charitable way to the collateral human damage that resulted from the German and Russian aggressions. Newly created war relief organizations such as Bundles for Britain, the United States Committee for the Care of European Refugee Children, and Finnish War Relief joined with the American Red Cross and a host of church related groups to provide solace and sustenance to victims of the war.

With the same spirit of volunteerism and concern for the welfare of others, some of the leading ladies of the American theatre met on Tuesday, 9 January 1940. Playwright

Rachel Crothers, producer Theresa Helburn, actresses Lucile Watson, Vera Allen, Gertrude Lawrence, and director Antoinette Perry gathered at 510 Park Avenue in New York to form another war relief group — an organization that would be staffed primarily by the women of the professional theatre. At that January meeting, the "Stage Women's War Zone Committee" was born.[2] According to a typed record of the meeting, each of those in attendance was given a list of women associated with the theatre industry which they were to contact and who, the founding members thought, might be sympathetic to their cause. For example, Theresa Helburn was to contact actresses Helen Hayes and Lynn Fontanne, and Mrs. George S. Kaufman, among others. Gertrude Lawrence, a British-born actress working in America, solicited a group of women including Mrs. Richard Rogers, actress Tallulah Bankhead, Mrs. John Golden, and Mrs. Gilbert Miller. The same memorandum names Lucile Watson as chairperson of the workroom committee which would undertake to gather or make clothing suitable for those European refugees who had lost nearly everything in the war. In addition, the War Zone Committee planned to solicit funds to send overseas to further aid victims. The introductory memo states that Watson was to ask for support from a circle that included Mrs. Maxwell Anderson, and actresses Ruth Gordon, Uta Hagen, Selena Royale, and Vivian Vance. A handwritten marginal note suggests that the workroom volunteers would have their first meeting on 15 January to plan a clothing production and distribution strategy.

By 17 January, when the *New York Times* published a brief article announcing the

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[2] Organizational memorandum of the "Stage Women's War Zone Committee," 9 January 1940. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

formation of the theatre women's service organization, the name of the group had evolved into the American Theatre Wing of the French and British Relief Funds. The new name indicated that the group had allied itself with two of the larger nationally organized war relief groups already in existence. The reasons for this alliance are not included in any of the extant documents, but it is possible to speculate. Having a connection to the international organizations may have been viewed by the women as a way of increasing the likelihood of their receiving support here in the United States. They may have believed that business donors, as well as individuals, might be more inclined to make substantial contributions to the theatre industry based relief group knowing they were the American affiliate of a larger multi-national effort. Their connection with the French and British Relief Funds also decreased the cost of operation for the women's organization. They could concentrate on making and repairing suitable clothing and leave the problems associated with overseas shipment and distribution to the parent organizations.

The *New York Times* article placed the theatre relief group's headquarters at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in a space donated by the British war service body, and listed the Wing's original officers and board members. The *Times* reported that Rachel Crothers was selected to serve as president, Lucile Watson as first vice president, and Theresa Helburn as second vice president. Antoinette Perry was appointed secretary and chair of the board of directors, actress Josephine Hull, treasurer, and actress Edith Atwater, assistant treasurer. In addition, the newspaper stated that three prominent actresses were selected to serve as chairpersons of various workers' committees. Katherine Hepburn was to coordinate the efforts of American workers, Gertrude Lawrence the British workers, and

Michelette Burani the French workers. The honorary board of directors named in the article included such theatrical notables as actresses Tallulah Bankhead, Katherine Cornell, Jane Cowl, Lynn Fontanne, Ruth Gordon, Helen Hayes, and Laurette Taylor. From the beginning the Wing's leaders were also the leading ladies of the stage.

This was not the first time that the women of the theatre marshaled their energies in support of war relief. In April of 1917, seven women with strong theatrical connections, and also under the leadership of Rachel Crothers, met to discuss how they might best come to the aid of the civilian and military victims of World War I. From that preliminary organizational meeting resulted a large gathering of theatre women held two weeks later in the Hudson Theatre in New York and the formation of the Stage Women's War Relief. The group's first meeting was highlighted by a congratulatory telegram from President Woodrow Wilson that said, in part, "It is a splendid thing for the women of the theatrical professions to ally themselves with the Red Cross work and the great work women can do in this time of war."[3] The Stage Women's War Relief society would serve as a model for the new war relief organization, so it is useful to briefly review their accomplishments.

Between 1917 and the end of the First World War, hundreds of volunteer women members of the Stage Women's War Relief worked tirelessly in the organization's Manhattan sewing workshop. During their spare time, the women made clothes, prepared sterile bandages for use at the front, and packaged toiletries and other personal items for refugees and wounded soldiers. Some of the women of the theatre industry planted, nurtured, and harvested fruits and vegetables on their upstate New York summer estates.

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[3] "Actresses in Tears Over War Appeal," *New York Times*, 14 April 1917.

The produce was then offered for sale in a fund-raising open market. Others held fashion show benefits, war relief concerts, and made several hundred pounds of home-canned strawberry jam to be sent overseas to soldiers. To benefit the women's service group and their various causes, special performances were given by a number of Broadway shows, including the productions of *General Post*, *He Didn't Want to Do It*, and an original entertainment written by Bayard Veiller and entitled *Theatre Impromptu, Miscast*. The women opened a Sunday-afternoon canteen on Lexington Avenue in Manhattan for the welfare of military personnel, marched in patriotic parades to demonstrate solidarity with the troops, and sponsored a plan to take fifteen American performers overseas to perform for Allied military personnel. On one occasion, the "hardest working women's organization in New York City"[4] staged a special concert held at the Metropolitan Opera House, which featured Lieutenant John Philip Sousa's combined naval bands, opera star Geraldine Farrar, and George M. Cohan, who sang his composition that became the anthem for the war, "Over There."[5] In 1918, toward the end of the conflict, the women of the theatrical profession created the Little Theatre, a small platform stage mounted on a fourteen-ton truck, which toured around New York City selling Liberty Loan war bonds with the aid of short variety-styled programs that featured such celebrities as Al Jolson, Billie Burke, Anita Loos, and Eddie Cantor. By the time the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, the Stage Women's War Relief had donated more than 1,800,000 articles of clothing to military and civilian personnel overseas, packed and shipped 10,000 cases of

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[4] "Stage Women's Relief," *New York Times*, 9 September 1917, sec. 7.

[5] "Farrar Gives a Benefit," *New York Times*, 6 May 1918.

medical supplies, assembled thousands of individual "comfort kits," and helped to defray the cost of the war by amassing and distributing nearly $7,000,000. In summary, the Stage Women's War Relief fulfilled all of the expectations of Crothers and the other founders. In the midst of overwhelming need they had "the determination to make the stage mean more than art and play a noble part in the world drama — a part of help and sacrifice that should last till this struggle is over and right is triumphant."[6] At the final meeting of the service group, held on 19 March 1920, Crothers concluded the work of the stage women more prophetically then she probably intended. "'At least we know this,' she said, 'that if we are needed again in a call which must supersede everything else in the world, we are here and ready — and if it comes after we ourselves are gone we shall leave it in the annals of the theatre that the trained imagination of the theatre can be used for serving humanity in more ways than entertaining.'"[7]

These same sentiments inspired the women of the stage in 1940, when three of the same women who founded the Stage Women's War Relief group — Crothers, Josephine Hull, and Minnie Dupree joined with a new generation of theatre women and created the American Theatre Wing of Allied Relief. Far from the common perception that the theatre and its practitioners were isolated from the realities of the world, the actions of these women came from their concern for humanity and their involvement in the social and political events of their day. With a treasury of three hundred dollars that came from

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[6] Rachel Crothers, "The War and the Women of Our Stage," *New York Times*, 27 May 1917, sec. 8.

[7] Rachel Crothers quoted in Brooks Atkinson, "Woman's Work," *New York Times*, 17 November 1940, sec. 8.

contributions by Crothers, Watson, Helburn, Allen, Lawrence, and Perry, the women, like their sisters in the earlier war, planned a sewing workroom to make and pack clothes, assemble medical supplies, and prepare toiletry kits for shipment overseas to civilian refugees. The sewing workroom and its production of supplies for refugees displaced by the fighting in Europe would eventually be supported by an army of more than 2,000 women volunteers. These women, representing costumers, ushers, dressers, actresses, and designers, not only collected and repaired used clothing, much of which was cast-offs from the wardrobes of some of Hollywood's and Broadway's leading stars, but also knitted and sewed new items of apparel for war refugees. With donations of cloth from fabric makers, and dress patterns and accessories from women's wear manufacturers and other clothing industry groups, the women of the Theatre Wing made over 50,000 items of apparel in their first year of operation. In addition, they refurbished approximately 20,000 articles of used clothing and, using donated toiletry items, assembled more than 500 personal hygiene kits for both men and women.[8]

It is tempting to conclude that the women of the stage elected to set up a sewing room solely because it was a welfare activity that drew upon skills traditionally attributed to women. However, that notion would be a mistake. While they may have indeed had such skills, some to a greater degree than others, this was a highly qualified group of women, many of whom were particularly respected for their accomplishments as producers, directors, and performers. It is more likely that they opted to begin their

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[8] Membership brochure, American Theatre Wing of the British War Relief Society, Inc., n. d. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

welfare work with the sewing and knitting projects because it had been a highly successful venture for the World War I relief group, and because they were acutely aware of the desperate needs of war refugees. Since the women were, from very early on, associated with British and French war relief agencies, they had direct knowledge of the precise needs of the refugees and considered those wants as they formulated their plan to contribute to the humanitarian effort. Moreover, as will be seen later in this chapter, the ladies put their substantial talents to fund-raising for refugee welfare as well, and through those efforts, expanded the range of their relief work.

The Spring Offensive

In April of 1940, the winter lull in the fighting on the European Front, a period christened the "phoney war" by the international press, came to an abrupt end with the Nazis' successful conquest of Denmark and Norway. On the tenth of May, the Nazis' next stage of their *blitzkrieg* or "lightning war" was unleashed against Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The main line of French defense, the vaunted Maginot line, was then flanked by the Germans, and the Nazis stormed through Northern France, heading for the heart of the French nation. The German attack pushed the British Expeditionary Force of about twelve divisions, originally positioned on the Belgium border, backwards into the coastal town of Dunkirk. It was only through the tremendous efforts of British seamen that approximately 335,000 of the more than 600,000 British and French troops stranded in the small port city were evacuated safely. Unfortunately, tons of critical military equipment were left behind by the retreating Allied armies.

On 5 June 1940, the Germans broke through the weak secondary French defensive lines and began to move toward Paris. Italy declared war on both Britain and France on 10 June, following agreements made between Hitler and the Italian leader Mussolini. To preserve life and limit the destruction of its cultural monuments, on 13 June, the French government declared Paris an open city, and the Germans entered it the next day. France formally surrendered to the Germans on 22 June, thus ending the first phase of the European war. The German gamble had paid off handsomely. The Nazis now controlled nearly all of western Europe. They had completely smashed the armies of France, Belgium, and the low countries and driven the English off the continent, forcing the British to abandon much of their military hardware in the process. To historian James Stokesbury, it seemed that "except for defenseless England, the war appeared all but over."[9]

The loss of France added to the confusion felt in the United States regarding the war. Congress had passed a series of neutrality laws in the middle of the 1930s that prevented President Roosevelt from taking any unilateral action to support the democratic nations of Europe against the forces of Fascism. Even if the nation could reach a consensus on an appropriate response to the war, the president's ability to act upon that consensus was restricted by federal law. Moreover, Roosevelt was in the middle of a reelection campaign and in order to win votes was promising to keep American boys out of any foreign wars. In the early half of 1940, a number of grassroots political organizations began to form across the country, each promoting its own specific agenda

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[9] Stokesbury, *A Short History*, 103.

regarding the American military relationship to the European war. Those who wanted the United States to remain completely neutral were termed isolationists. Leading the isolationist faction was the America First Committee with its premier spokesperson, famed aviator Charles A. Lindbergh. At the same time, there was a growing movement that felt that the American nation had to defend freedom against the bigotry, terror, and violence represented by the Axis powers. Those who championed some level of American involvement — and there was a wide gamut of support suggested, ranging from the merely symbolic to full military participation — were labeled interventionists. Interventionists who were politically active joined groups such as the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.

The debate over the nation's relationship to the war was carried into the theatrical arts. An article written for the *New York Times*, theatre critic Brooks Atkinson examined the role of theatre in time of war. He noted that in times when the very fabric of civilized discourse was being threatened, the men and women of the performing arts naturally questioned the value of their work. Responding to accusations made by poet, playwright, and Librarian of Congress Archibald McLeish concerning what he saw as the American art community's "indifference to the destruction of cultural morality in Europe," Atkinson stated that he believed that theatre had never before "been so earnestly concerned with matters of current importance." He added that "no one can say that the theatre has not understood from the beginning the meaning of Hitlerism, nor has it neglected to defend the democratic culture of the West." Calling attention to plays by Robert E. Sherwood, Elmer Rice, Sinclair Lewis, and Clifford Odets, Atkinson concluded that "no one can say that the

theatre, pursuing beauty with artistic detachment, has not understood the infamy of the Nazi assault upon the spirit of man."[10]

Although the larger entertainment community mirrored the nation by being split over the isolation/intervention controversy, theatre folk, almost unanimously favored some level of American support for the Allies. In part, this was due to close ties between Great Britain and the United States resulting from the extensive overseas exchange of English and American performers, directors, and playwrights. Leading personalities such as Irving Berlin, George S. Kaufman, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Ethel Merman, and Jack Benny spoke publicly for the position that some level of American involvement in the war against the German and Italian coalition was necessary.[11] Through newspaper ads, radio speeches, and their participation in large political rallies, these and other stars of stage, screen, radio, and nightclubs attempted to sway public opinion. In fact, some of the stage's leading interventionists were also strong supporters of the humanitarian aid being funded by the Theatre Wing.

The Theatre Wing's women volunteers worked steadily through the early half of 1940, and they did so without the benefit of a great deal of public acknowledgment or fanfare. However, in June they established a publicity department within the organization to bring the accomplishments of the group to the attention of the general public and to encourage larger donations of time, money, and materials. Along with the benefits of

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[10] Brooks Atkinson, "Where Theatre Stands," *New York Times*, 9 June 1940, sec 9.

[11] For more information on a specific example of this support, see my article "*Fun To Be Free*: Intervention Takes the Stage," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 9:1 (Winter 1997): 36-53.

expanded support for their activities that came with the increased publicity, a certain amount of controversy arose also. In November of 1941, after a number of very public presentations in support of intervention by some of the famous women also known to be leaders of the Theatre Wing, Rachel Crothers had to specifically deny that the Wing had any political agenda. Speaking to a women's arts organization, Crothers further stated that while there might be some individuals whose careers seemed to benefit from publicity associated with the war work, the organization had no other goal than to provide relief to those most affected by the conflict.[12]

The controversy over entertainers placing their considerable public influence at the service of political movements was not unique. Socially involved stars have always been accused of either "grandstanding" by looking to advance their career by associating themselves with popular public issues, or abusing their notoriety in service of a pet political project. It was probably true that some of the celebrities involved in the Wing's welfare activities did, in fact, benefit from the additional publicity connected to their work. However, the majority took part in the Wing's programs because of purely humanitarian concern.

On 7 June 1940, just two weeks before the French surrender, British playwright and actor Noel Coward and Canadian-born actress Mary Pickford visited the workroom at Rockefeller Plaza to thank the ladies of the Wing for their war relief efforts and to encourage them to continue with their work for the people of the Allied nations. With 150 workers looking on, Coward spoke "'as an Englishman,'" promising to spread the

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[12] "No Glamour in War Aid," *New York Times*, 5 November 1941.

word of their wonderful work overseas. Pickford "congratulated them on their 'wonderful spirit that has cured me of the jitters by showing how we can help the Allies to win.'"[13] Later in the month, the National Association of House Dress Manufacturers, Inc. donated $1,450 to the Wing to be used to purchase a fully equipped ambulance for the European Allies. Tallulah Bankhead, representing the Theatre Wing, accepted the check from the fashion industry organization at a well-publicized presentation ceremony. By the end of 1940, the Wing had raised enough money to pay for four ambulances and four mobile canteens.

Another type of Theatre Wing fund-raising event opened on 25 June 1940 when the Arthur U. Newton Galleries of Manhattan exhibited a series of watercolor paintings by the late eighteenth century English satirist Thomas Rowlandson. Admission to the show was set at five dollars for the opening gala and twenty-five cents each day after until the exhibit closed on 16 July. Proceeds went to support the Wing's sewing room activities. Attending the opening celebration on behalf of the theatre industry service organization were Vera Allen, Noel Coward, Jane Cowl, Tallulah Bankhead, Rachel Crothers, Minnie Dupree, Dorothy Gish, Helen Hayes, Ruth Gordon, Theresa Helburn, Josephine Hull, Gertrude Lawrence, Antoinette Perry, Mary Pickford, Mrs. Robert E. Sherwood, and Selena Royale.[14] As well as the art show, during the first part of the year the Wing sponsored a fund-raising skating party at Rockefeller Center, and under the leadership of actress Jean Dalrymple, held an "American Theatre Wing Day" at the New York World's

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[13] "Thanked for War Relief," *New York Times*, 8 June 1940.

[14] "Exhibitions of Art to Aid War Relief," *New York Times*, 25 June 1940.

Fair.[15] It is apparent that although the heart of the Wing's support force came from the theatre industry, the organization was reaching out to include the entire arts community as well as the general public. It is also clear that the women were keen to use every means possible to generate the funds needed to continue their important welfare work.

With the fall of France in late June of 1940, the name of the theatre industry service organization underwent another evolution. The group's affiliation with French War Relief ended and it was re-christened as the American Theatre Wing of British War Relief. The end of June also saw the formation of a men's division. Richard Whorf, who was then starring in *There Shall Be No Night*, Robert E. Sherwood's play dealing with the Russian invasion of Finland, was selected to serve as the chairman. Included among the original members of the men's detachment were such luminaries as Broadway producers John Golden, Gilbert Miller, Brock Pemberton, and Lee Shubert; theatre critics Ward Morehouse and Brooks Atkinson; playwrights Moss Hart, George S. Kaufman, Maxwell Anderson, and Robert Sherwood; scenic designers Robert Edmond Jones and Jo Mielziner; a host of actors including Alfred Lunt, Laurence Olivier, Clifton Webb, Walter Huston, and Eddie Dowling; and composer Irving Berlin. The addition of men of this caliber to the Theatre Wing added talent, financial vitality, and prestige to the women's energy and commitment to service. Since most of the power brokers on Broadway were men, having their cooperation and support meant that the work of the Wing would expand.

As will be noted in the subsequent chapters of this study, despite the appearance the

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[15] "Theatre Group Aids War Relief," *New York Times*, 28 July 1940.

men of the theatre industry, the women who founded the American Theatre Wing did not give up their governing roles. They continued throughout the war to be the guiding forces in the organization, holding six of the eight executive positions on the board of directors. In the opinion of Brooks Atkinson, the women's leadership was one of the reasons why the organization was so successful. In an article written in November 1940, he noted that at a meeting of the Wing's executive board that he was allowed to attend, the women "got through more business without waste, sound or lost motion than all the meetings of the [all male] Critics Circle since it was founded."[16]

Meanwhile in Europe, the Germans hoped to defeat England, the remaining defenders of western democratic civilization in Europe, with a massive bombing campaign that got underway in the summer of 1940. With an effective air force of over 1,800 bombers and nearly as many fighters, the Nazis initiated their strategy to "pound the British into submission."[17] Night after night through the summer and fall of 1940, Nazi bombers rained destruction on the island nation. In the major cities of England, most of which the Germans targeted, children were removed from their homes and sent into the countryside and other areas less likely to be attacked by the Luftwaffe. In the United States, the call went out from concerned citizens for a plan to bring large numbers of British children to America for the duration of the war. British parents, those who were concerned about the youth of their nation and who wanted to send them to the United

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[16] Atkinson, "Women's Work."

[17] Stephen Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II* (New York: Viking, 1997), 81.

States as a precautionary measure, quickly registered over 200,000 of their children with American relief agencies. The American Theatre Wing of British War Relief organized a special committee in July under the leadership of actress Selena Royale to aid in caring for the children of members of the British theatrical community. An article found in the 27 July edition of the *New York Times* reports that homes for twenty such children had already been found, including the "son and daughter of Patrick Worsley, head of the British Actors Equity Association."[18] The following day, the *Times* noted that the Wing would conduct an "Orchard Party" on Sunday, 4 August, to raise money for the children's transportation and care. The fete took place at the home of scenic designer Aline Bernstein in Armonk, New York, and was attended by Dame May Whitty, who represented the British Actors Orphanage Fund. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. agreed to provide substantial financial support by paying the transportation costs associated with the relocation of the children, which, according to the *New York Times*, could reach upwards of $30,000 annually.[19]

The summer of 1940 also saw the first Summer Theatre Donation Campaign conducted by the theatre industry service organization and the Actors' Fund for the benefit of the victims of war. The campaign provided twenty-six summer theatres in seven eastern states, plus the Peninsula Players of Wisconsin, with small coin boxes and a script for a pre-curtain speech to be delivered before their regularly scheduled productions.

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[18] "Sending British Children to Ireland Urged, There to Await the Arrival of Mercy Ships," *New York Times*, 27 July 1940.

[19] "Stage Group Plans War Relief Drive," *New York Times*, 14 August 1940.

Each theatre was encouraged to dedicate a week's worth of performances to the Wing's fund-raising program. The scripted speech, which is telling in its honest and open approach, is reproduced in full below. It recognizes that pleas for aid for the casualties of war were becoming commonplace, and thus it provides an insight into the general timbre of the times. Despite Crothers's later claims to the contrary, the Theatre Wing's plea for aid to help protect children does have an interventionist undercurrent.

> I know that when people appear in front of the curtain nowadays, the audience thinks, "Oh dear, here comes another speech, and then I'll have to dig in my pocket again." Well, you needn't be frightened this time. We'll call this an announcement instead of a speech, and if you have to dig, it will only be for a nickel or a dime unless you feel like giving more.
>
> This is American Theatre Wing and Actor's Fund week in all the summer theatres. The Theatre Wing is a branch of the British War Relief Society and represents men and women of the theatre, radio and screen, who since January 1940 have raised over $100,000 and sent $19,000 worth of supplies to the stricken civilians of Europe.
>
> We all know the time may come when there will be work for all of us to do here, but while the bombs are still falling in England and not here, England is still our first line of defense, and we cannot and will not let her down. The theatre people have worked hard and long to help in democracy's cause and now we are coming to you, the audience, to *help us* to help a little bit more.
>
> Our particular goal at this time is to purchase hostels for bombshocked

> English children, costing $200 a piece. When the ushers pass down the aisles with the coin boxes will each of you put in a nickel or a dime for the war-stricken children who must carry on and try to build a *good* new world after this terrible conflict is over?[20]

According to the final accounting of the 1940 summer campaign, a total of $1,639 was collected. The Gloucester Massachusetts Bass Rocks Theatre gathered a mere 78¢, while the Stamford, Connecticut, Community Theatre led contributions with a week's total of $138.41. The records also show that although the Theatre Wing sent out 364 coin boxes, only 136 were actually used for donations, while 228 were "destroyed without being used." The women of the Theatre Wing judged the summer fund-raising effort a success despite the relatively inconsequential amount of money collected and planned a second drive, one that would begin at the start of the new theatrical season and would collect small donations from Broadway theatre audiences. This plan required substantial ongoing support of the theatre owners and show producers, as well as the stars who would address the audiences before the curtain went up. Because the program reached its peak after December 1941, the success of this program will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

That first summer of the war, the Wing's efforts on behalf of the children of war-torn Europe took a more prominent position in all of their charitable activities. The Wing's workroom focused its sewing expertise on the production of clothing for children.

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[20] "Summer Theatre Campaign - 1940," American Theatre Wing of the British War Relief Society, Inc. 16 November 1940. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York. Emphasis in original.

Actress Helen Menken reportedly enlisted the aid of several New York area vocational schools for deaf-mutes to do part of the sewing. According to newspaper reports published at the time, materials used to make the childrens' clothing included "large donations from dress manufacturers, New York stores and private individuals." Altogether, the Wing's summer activities produced a total of nearly $25,000 in cash, more than 230 cases of clothing and bedding, and "an unestimated amount of food and material" which they converted into relief supplies and shipped to England. Additionally, the summer saw the creation of the first two subsidiary chapters of the Theatre Wing. Actress Gertrude Lawrence formed a small circle of volunteers at her home in Dennis, Massachusetts. Former actress Olive Wyndham created an auxiliary group in Southampton, Long Island that had as its headquarters the Four Fountains Studio. The Long Island group raised an impressive $6,000 and completed 128 garments between its establishment on 6 June and the middle of August. "Part of the money came from a lottery in which a diamond and emerald bracelet, and a sapphire ring, donated by Mrs. (Wyndham) Tyng, were the prizes."[21]

The summer's activities also included a new project, one that was more directly related to the theatrical background of the Theatre Wing's members. In Halifax, Nova Scotia, a port city serving as a major transportation point for Canadian wartime shipping, there was a "continuous stream of soldiers and sailors in the city seeking entertainment and a comfortable clubhouse." Isabel MacNeill, a representative of the Interallied Hospitality and Food Fund in Halifax, sent an appeal to the American Theatre Wing

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[21] "Stage Group Plans War Relief Drive."

seeking its assistance in finding costumes, lighting instruments, furniture, and other theatrical necessities for use by the men in producing dramatic entertainments as they waited for transportation overseas to the war zone. The Wing reacted to the request by successfully soliciting these materials from New York theatrical supply houses and sending them to the Canadians. Along with the stage equipment, the Wing sent a selection of autographed photos of stage and screen stars.[22]

The autumn of 1940 was a crucial period for England. The survival of the entire nation rested on the outcome of the critically important air war between the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force. It was, as historian Stephen Ambrose observes, "a titanic struggle for the highest possible stakes."[23] The Germans, beginning 24 August, were sending an average of 1,000 bombers per day against the RAF's approximately 600 fighters. Fortunately, England had a rudimentary but effective radar network and was able to intercept most flights of German planes before they reached their targets. However, enough Nazi bombers made it through the fighter defense to destroy large sections of England's leading cities.

The effects of the German air campaign were mitigated by the fact that many children had already been evacuated from the major cities, and the people of England not only withstood the bombardment with stoicism and fortitude, but united in spirit and action to carry on. The men and women of the American Theatre Wing, in response to the additional pleas for assistance coming from parents in London and other cities,

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II*, 79.

intensified their efforts to bring British children out of the war zone and into American homes and safety. By the end of September, sixty children of British theatrical families had been removed from England under the auspices of the Wing and were placed with American families or housed in group hostels for the duration of the war. The leadership of the Wing also sought to rescue the children of French theatre folk. However, they were frustrated in this quest due to the regulations imposed by the German victors in France. As a result, until the Nazis allowed such humanitarian aid, the sons and daughters of French theatrical workers would remain in that German-occupied nation.

By November 1940, the German bombing attacks on England were beginning to lessen in intensity. The British, it seemed, had withstood all that the Nazis could throw against them. It was largely due to the perseverance of the people and the efforts of the fighter pilots of the RAF that England survived. As Prime Minister Winston Churchill said at the time, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." Unable to defeat the English, Hitler turned his attention to the east and toward Russia. There, despite the Non-Aggression Pact signed between the two nations in August 1939, he saw an opportunity to take by force the *lebensraum*, or "living space" which he sought for the German people. During the winter of 1940, Hitler planned the invasion of the communist state. The attack itself would not come until the summer of 1941.

In the first major news article to relate and evaluate the work of the women of the Wing, theatre critic and Wing member Brooks Atkinson recounted the group's activities. He noted the output from the sewing workroom, the program to assist in the

transportation of children from the war zone, and the food and toiletries sent overseas. Atkinson further observed that the women of the Theatre Wing were paying the costs of "bringing to America about 100 refugee authors now awaiting assistance." According to the details supplied in the article, the Wing shipped to England over 1,000 warm coats acquired from a wholesale clothing manufacturer, 112 "as good as new" blankets donated by a New York hotel, and over 4,000 pounds of coffee. Atkinson's essay calls attention to the fact that the women of the Theatre Wing had cultivated a wide variety of funding sources in their efforts to provide relief to the victims of the European conflict. While corporate generosity was acknowledged, no donation was "more gratefully received than the $20 given by the cook of a celebrated actress, or the $1.97 that a seven-year-old boy raised by putting on two benefits or the $1 left one day by an unknown workman who dropped in."[24]

The public acknowledgment that the Atkinson article represented was accompanied by recognition and gratitude on a smaller and more private scale. By September 1940, the Wing was beginning to receive letters and telegrams from the men, women, and children who were receiving the goods sent overseas by the theatre relief group. In a letter sent from London and dated 9 September, a grateful writer notes, "We got a grand box from the American Theatre Wing. The clothes are just what we wanted — so if you could send some more cases for goodness sake do . . . so many of our people are bombed out of house and home. It is devastating how one loses everything in one fell swoop." A telegram from the British Soldier's, Sailor's, and Airmen's Families Association

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[24] Atkinson, "Woman's Work."

acknowledged the quality and timeliness of the outerwear garments it received and noted briefly, "Marvelous coats just arrived bitter weather." Furthermore, the Wing's efforts were recognized by the leaders of the British nation. A letter sent at the request of Queen Mary to actress, playwright, and British-born acting coach Constance Collier, noted "Her Majesty appreciates the splendid work they are doing to help Great Britain in her desperate struggle to save the liberty of the world."[25] During the winter of 1940-41, the Wing continued to work to provide necessary goods and services to the many victims of the Battle of Britain.

The next important finance-raising function sponsored by the Wing was a large rally held on 21 February 1941 at Radio City Music Hall and billed as a "Carnival for Britain." This entertainment and oratory spectacular was organized by the Men's Division of the Wing under the leadership of the men's new chairman, director and producer Gilbert Miller, and featured dozens of stars from stage, screen, radio, and nightclubs. Performers included in the entertainment were the Radio City Music Hall Corps de Ballet, the musical comedy team of Olsen and Johnson, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Danny Kaye, British songstress Gracie Fields, Ethel Merman, Bill "Mr. Bojangles" Robinson, and the color guard of the British War Veterans of America Society. Some of the famous personalities who addressed the assembly speaking on behalf of the Theatre Wing and war relief were Brock Pemberton, Helen Hayes, Fred Allen, Boris Karloff, and William. G. Van Schmus, the managing director of Radio City Music Hall. The articles and poems that were

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[25] All three examples of correspondence are taken from the program for the "Carnival for Britain," found in the American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

published in the souvenir program sold at the gala were written by such notables as Edna Ferber, Burns Mantle, Elmer Rice, and Russel Crouse. These literary contributions praised the British spirit in light of their national crisis, made wry observations on the similarities and differences between the U.S.A. and Great Britain, or paid tribute to American generosity. Jo Mielziner and Al Hirshfeld were among two of the graphic artists who contributed some of the many drawings used in the program.[26] According to the organization's 1940 report, the Carnival for Britain raised in excess of $40,000 in gross receipts, of which ninety percent was given to air-raid victims in England. The remaining ten percent was distributed among destitute British performers.[27]

Although more elaborate than most, the Carnival for Britain can be seen as one of the many interventionist rallies that enjoyed the talents of some of the nation's leading entertainers. While its stated purpose was to raise money for war relief, there was an underlying interventionist tone to the event. In the souvenir program, cartoon and articles praised England's courage and pledged American morale support, even if stopping short of suggesting military assistance. Again, the Theatre Wing was attempting to balance its activities between promoting humanitarian aid and a covert and subtle form of political advocacy.

A week after the successful Carnival for Britain, the Wing's reserve of funds grew as the result of another benefit performance. On Friday the 28th, theatrical producer Sol

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[26] Program from the "Carnival for Britain." American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[27] "Report for Year 1940," American Theatre Wing of British War Relief Society, n. d. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

Hurok presented what was billed as the Original Ballet Russe at the New York City Academy of Music, with a portion of the box office receipts going to assist the Wing and its war relief work. The sophisticated musical program was made up of three pieces, an "abridged version of the four-act ballet" *Swan Lake*; *Paganini*, a "fantastic ballet in three scenes" by Rachmaninoff that was based, in part, on the life of the great violin virtuoso; and *The Graduation Ball*, a one-act ballet by David Lichine.[28]

In the spring of 1941, the American Theatre Wing of British War Relief moved to new, more spacious headquarters, a move announced in an open letter that was published in the April 1941 edition of *Theatre Arts* magazine. In its new location, 730 Fifth Avenue, the Wing could expand its workroom activities. In that same letter, Crothers made a forceful plea for new volunteers. After reminding the reader of the success of the Stage Women's War Relief organization, she encouraged "everyone in the theatre" to understand the importance of the relief work that the Wing was pursuing. "The more we stand together through our 'Wing' — the less we scatter and dissipate our strength through all sorts of outside demands — the greater the power of the theatre will be for this great work." This sense of the Wing serving as a focal point for the war-related work of the theatrical community would be both a rallying cry and a source of conflict with other war relief organizations within the performing arts community when the United States entered the war after Pearl Harbor. The letter concludes by inviting non-professional theatre groups all across the country to join the important work of war relief

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[28] Program from the performance at the Academy of Music, New York, 28 February 1941. Personal collection.

and become associate members of the American Theatre Wing of British War Relief.[29]

In addition to the two benefits mentioned above, the Wing co-sponsored with British War Relief a series of performance/lectures dealing with Shakespeare and his works given by the renowned English actor Maurice Evans. Evans traveled extensively across the United States, including such places as Kansas City, St. Louis, Cleveland, New Haven, and Providence. He lectured and performed to audiences numbering from just a few dozen to crowds of more than 4,500. The result of Evans's appearances was more than $25,000 that was added to the other money funneled into war relief efforts.[30] Through the remainder of the year, the Wing sponsored fund-raising dinner dances, fashion shows, and theatre parties. It benefitted from a second summer theatre fund drive and continued to solicit donations from a variety of corporate and manufacturing sponsors.

In June of 1941, Hitler's armies began to implement Operation Barbarossa, the Nazis' plan to invade and conquer Soviet Russia. Until this time, because of the pact signed between Germany and the Soviets, Americans had, for the most part, considered the Russian Communists in the same light as the Germans: enemies of democracy and freedom. Suddenly, with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the American outlook on Moscow underwent a sea change. Now, like England, she was an opponent of German Fascism. Russia was another victim of the Nazis' desire to control all of western Europe, and was therefore a defender of the ideal of national sovereignty. Despite the fact that both the United Kingdom and the United States were fundamentally opposed to the

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[29] Rachel Crothers, letter to the editor, *Theatre Arts*, April 1941.

[30] "M. Evans, the Lecturer," *New York Times*, 23 February 1941.

socialist economic and political system, both nations suddenly regarded the Soviets as allies. Stephen Ambrose notes, "Churchill and Roosevelt took the commonsense view that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend.'"[31]

At the same time as they were volunteering to support the Wing and its activities, many of Broadway's leading personalities were becoming more deeply involved with the interventionist political action committees. At a time when the theatre began to doubt its relevance in light of the calamity that surrounded it, many in the professional theatre felt, as did Brooks Atkinson, that "the war is an integral part of the life we are living today, and the responses it awakens in our emotions are a test of our sincerity."[32] Some of those who split their time between their careers, the relief work of the Theatre Wing, and supporting a proactive position for the United States regarding the war were Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes and her husband, playwright Charles MacArthur, Burgess Meredith, and dancer Bill Robinson.[33]

America Enters the War

The Japanese attack on the naval and air force bases at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941 changed everything. With a force of more than 350 planes, all launched from aircraft carriers, Japan dealt a devastating blow to the U.S. Pacific fleet, sinking or

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[31] Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II*, 220.

[32] Brooks Atkinson, "War Now Going On," *New York Times*, 5 October 1941, sec. 9.

[33] These artists all took part in an interventionist rally held on 5 October 1941 that was sponsored by the Fight For Freedom political action committee. At the same time, they were either listed as honorary board members of the American Theatre Wing of British War Relief Society, or were active in the Wing's welfare programs.

severely damaging six of America's great battleships. As a result of the declaration passed by Congress the following day, the United States was at war in the Pacific. Two days later, war was declared on the Germans and the Italians in Europe, and the nation began the difficult process of gearing up its military to fight on two fronts. The debate between isolationists and interventionists as to the efficacy of American involvement was over, and the nation, civilians and military alike, began to pull together to face what was sure to be a tremendous national struggle.

The Theatre Wing also had to make adjustments in response to the new national situation. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, the Wing severed its relationship with British War Relief and reorganized itself as the American Theatre Wing War Service. The organization was now exclusively focusing its efforts on providing for American needs, on the home front as well as on the military front, for the remainder of the war. Incorporation papers were filed with New York State and approved by a justice of the state's Supreme Court on 16 December 1941. The Wing's new charter specifically stated that the primary goal of the organization was "to render voluntary service and aid toward the successful prosecution by the United States of the war in which it is now engaged." It further noted that "it is primarily a War Service Corporation with emphasis on the *service* functions and features of such work. As such, the American Theatre Wing War Service provides a channel for the war efforts of the entertainment world."[34]

On 15 December, the Hudson Theatre on 44th Street near Times Square was again

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[34] Marian Rich, ed., *Speakers Bureau Manual*, n. d. Theatre Collection of the Museum of the City of New York.

used as the venue for a mass meeting of the men and women of the theatrical profession. Some 900 performers, directors, producers, designers, lighting technicians, and stage hands met to "learn what they could do to help." Pledges were made by those in attendance to raise between $75,000 and $100,000 for the Wing's future activities. More than 100 participants volunteered to serve as "captains" of the fund drive. Included in that group were Helen Hayes, Nancy Carroll, Burgess Meredith, and Clifton Webb. Moreover, representatives of the Stage Hands and Scenic Artists Union declared their "willingness to help." At the conclusion of the meeting, telegrams, letters, and testimonials of appreciation for the Wing's past efforts coming from the British Ambulance Service, the British War Relief, and Bundles for Britain were acknowledged by the organization's leaders. Newbold Morris, the President of the New York City Council, addressed the gathering and suggested that "the theatre can be of great assistance in keeping the public amused and calm."[35]

The new national situation meant that the American Theatre Wing would have to reconsider each of its welfare programs. In a series of executive meetings held between the 15th and 21st of December, decisions were made to expand some of the pre-Pearl Harbor programs as well as to create new approaches to war-related welfare and morale-building work. The sewing workroom, of course, would continue to turn out clothing, bedding, and personal kits for refugees and wounded Allied soldiers. Now, however, it would also focus on meeting the needs of the members of the American armed forces

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[35] "Stage Folk Pledge $75,000 for War Aid; Theatre Wing Reorganized for Defense," *New York Times*, 16 December 1941.

going to Europe. Winter scarves, woolen hats and gloves, and sweaters became priority items for the ladies. The existing program featuring performers making pre-curtain pleas for small donations in Broadway theatres would be expanded into a corps of speakers available to meet a wide variety of needs, including the sale of war bonds, recruiting civilians to lead local defense committees, and encouraging the conservation of war materials such as metal, food, and rubber. In addition, following the example of the World War I theatre service organization, the Theatre Wing planned a canteen for servicemen. It was also determined that the Wing would create some special programs in order to see to the needs of the families of theatre workers who would be going into the national services as a result of the declarations of war.[36]

In the midst of a world that was quickly degenerating into barbarism, the women of the American theatre industry banded together to form an organization that was based, in part, on an imminently successful welfare society created in the First World War. From the outset, the women focused their considerable energies and talents on providing critical goods and services to the millions of European people directly affected by the military conflict. They began as a group of women operating a clothing workshop and running funding drives to help refugees and other victims of the war. With the addition of a men's division, the entire theatrical community became involved in those charitable efforts. Then, when the United States itself entered the conflict, it responded with vigor and determination. Over the next four years, the American Theatre Wing War Service would continue to develop effective ways of helping the nation win the war.

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[36] "Gossip of the Rialto," *New York Times*, 21 December 1941, sec. 9.

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Winning Over the Home Front

Long before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and more certainly after, the federal government knew that when the United States became an active participant in the global conflict, propaganda would play a critical role in both framing the ideological battle that defined the combatants and encouraging the American people to make the social and economic changes that would be necessary to win the war. Some of the earliest programs developed by the American Theatre Wing after the declarations of war were designed to aid in the distribution of war-related information to those on the home front. Whether they were workers in business, industry, government, agriculture, education, health care, or entertainment, or whether they were stay-at-home wives and child care givers, each citizen would have an important role to play in the nation's prosecution of the war, and the Wing sought to help government and public service agencies shape that role. This chapter looks at the American Theatre Wing's three most distinctive home front propaganda programs, the Speakers' Bureau, the Victory Players, and the publication of the propagandistic book, *America Goes to War*.

The Speakers' Bureau

In 1940, following the fall of France, the British anxiously waited to see if, following their bombing campaign, the Nazis would cross the Channel and invade their island. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, concerned for the very survival of his nation, appealed to

President Franklin D. Roosevelt for American support. Roosevelt recognized that some level of American assistance would be necessary if England were to have any chance of stopping the Axis armies. He was also aware of the nation's considerable reluctance to become involved in another "European war" and knew that to overcome this disinclination he would have to convince Americans that helping Great Britain was ultimately in the self-interest of the United States. So in July, F. D. R., despite his personal dislike for government controlled propaganda, set up a national political warfare department. Originally known as the Office of Facts and Figures, this bureau's chief function was to "explain the need for helping the Western democracies with as much aid as possible short of war."[1] Later the Office of Facts and Figures was replaced by two organizations: the Office of War Information (OWI), primarily responsible for the overt or "white" propaganda disseminated to the American public, and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the principal instrument of clandestine or "black" propaganda, most of which it aimed at the enemy. The well-known radio commentator Elmer Davis headed the OWI, and playwright Robert Sherwood, a firm interventionist, joined the information office to aid in the creation of effective international propaganda. With carefully crafted information campaigns devoted to both the international and domestic fronts, the United States, under the leadership of those two organizations, "surpassed all other nations in propaganda achievement."[2]

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[1] Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II* (Secaucus, NJ: Wellfleet, 1987), 144.

[2] Ibid., 146.

One of the first targets of persuasion was the American consumer. After Pearl Harbor, American industries ceased nearly all production of consumer-oriented goods and retooled to manufacture guns, planes, tanks, ships, bombs, and bullets. In print, on the radio, and in motion pictures the government extolled citizens to conserve scarce natural resources and raw materials, recycle and repair rather than replace, and do without many luxury items that had been commonplace in the prewar economy. When the call to action came, the American people, tired of the internal dissension engendered by the interventionist/isolationist debate and deeply disturbed by the violence and oppression represented by the aggressive actions of both the Nazis and Japanese, "proved ready to work harmoniously for the goal of a better life after the war."[3] Waging war, both on the battlefield and on the home front, would require the cooperative contributions of a diverse American population. Men and women of all races, religions, ethnic origins, and ages would have to come together to create a military and industrial force that would eventually help to win the war for the Allies. As it did in World War I, the government recognized that along with film, radio, and the print media, the theatre could be useful as "an instrument in building up spirit and morale."[4] Again, as it did in World War I, "the Federal Government gratefully accepted from the theatrical profession the unique services which it alone could furnish and promptly, voluntarily, offered."[5]

A few weeks after the Japanese attack and the American declarations of war,

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[3] *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, ed. I. C. B. Dear (New York: Oxford U. P., 1995), 1179.

[4] Brock Pemberton, "Of the Departing Year 1941," *New York Times*, 28 December 1941, sec. 9.

[5] Lloyd Morris, *Curtain Time* (New York: Random House, 1953), 347.

representatives from the United States Department of the Treasury approached actress Vera Allen looking for help in securing celebrity speakers to aid in the sale of war bonds. The establishment of the American Theatre Wing's Speakers' Bureau can be directly linked to this and similar requests for celebrity speakers made by government representatives or agents of civilian service organizations such as the Red Cross and the United Service Organization (USO).

In a report to the Wing's executive board dated 26 January 1942, Allen argued for the creation of a bureau to coordinate the efforts of celebrity speakers and stated that she thought "there will probably be frequent calls for speakers from the entertainment world to address mass gatherings on the subject of Defense Bonds." Looking at the larger social and economic problems facing the country, the Wing's leadership approved the formation of the bureau. In a later statement, they justified their decision by declaring,

> War has already changed the whole pattern of our lives. The entire civilian population must learn to adapt itself to new conditions and must understand clearly the reasons for doing so. This will necessitate a tremendous job of public education, in which the Speakers' Bureau of the American Theatre Wing hopes to help materially. Its members have the trained voices and disciplined bodies necessary for good public speaking . . . they should be invaluable workers in this field of morale building.[6]

The Wing's pre-Pearl Harbor speaking programs, the most prominent of which were the

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[6] American Theatre Wing, "American Theatre Wing Speakers' Manual," ed. Marian Rich, September, 1942, 1. Mimeographed copy, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

pre-curtain appeals made to audiences of both Broadway and summer stock theatres, would continue to operate, now under the direction of chairperson Vera Allen and her assistant Harold Vermilyea. Allen's report to the board also noted that, added to the cadre of experienced speakers, she now had a list of over 150 new volunteers from the theatrical community who were ready to be trained to meet any oratorical need that might arise now that the nation was fully involved in the war.

This decision marks a fundamental shift in the Wing's activities. Up until Pearl Harbor, the Wing was primarily a civilian-driven advocate in support of relief for the victims of war. The creation of the Speakers' Bureau meant that, at times, the Theatre Wing would now be acting as an intermediary for some of the government's largest and most powerful agencies. The newest division of the Wing would be encouraging an active civilian defense, increased volunteerism by the average citizen, and monetary support of the nation's war campaign. Gone were the days when the Wing could describe itself as a organization dedicated solely to the assistance of the men, women, and children casualties of the European conflict. It was now, in part, a willing propaganda tool of the federal government.

In early February of 1942, twenty of those new Speakers' Bureau volunteers, supplied with sample speeches provided by the Treasury Department, began their preparation at the Wing's first set of speech workshops. The Speakers' Bureau offered these classes as frequently as every two weeks, and they included training in general public speaking techniques plus training on specific subject matter. Volunteers honed their oratorical skills under the tutelage of Broadway voice coach Fanny Bradshaw and Garrett

Leverton, an employee of Samuel French and a former teacher of public speaking. At the end of the training session, volunteers would present a speech to a panel of judges to prove their ability to satisfactorily represent both the Wing and the speech's sponsoring organization. That the groups who used the bureau's services recognized the high level of competency achieved by the Wing's spokespersons is clear. In October Vera Allen noted that there was "a demand on the part of non-theatre people for classes such as we have been giving. Most outside organizations have quietly sounded us out on the possibility of teaching their groups."[7]

An example of the kind of speech training that focused on a particular war-related topic was an information session held in May of 1943 under the direction of the Office of War Information, in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Army and Navy. Government representatives met with seventy-five members of the Speakers' Bureau to educate them on the important issue of protecting military information by teaching civilians "not to talk about anything they hear or see, that is not published in the newspapers or heard over the radio."[8]

While the first training course was still underway, Allen approached officials at the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) to ascertain if they might need speakers to help familiarize the public with their various home front activities. They too expressed interest in having trained speakers help bring war information to the populace. Shortly thereafter,

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[7] Minutes from the Executive Board Meeting, American Theatre Wing, 28 October 1942. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has, in the John Golden collection, an incomplete set of minutes from the American Theatre Wing. Subsequent references will be shortened.

[8] Vera Allen to Antoinette Perry, 7 May 1943. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

the American Red Cross, the United Service Organization, and Office of Price Administration asked for similar oratorical services.

In February 1942, the Speakers' Bureau gave only 10 speeches, most of those encouraging the purchase of war bonds. In March the number of speeches increased to 37, and by April that number nearly doubled to 71. May figures show that they gave more than 120 speeches on eight different topics, including the recruitment of nurses' aids, the solicitation of contributions to the Army and Navy Relief fund, and a major campaign of 46 speeches in support of a salvage drive.[9]

With the early success of the Speakers' Bureau and an increasing number of requests for celebrity speakers, the Wing's leadership was motivated to hold a mass meeting in early April to enlist additional orators and to discuss with them plans for the Speakers' Bureau. More than 100 additional volunteers gathered in early April 1942 in a National Broadcasting Company studio at Radio City to learn more about the American Theatre Wing's home front propaganda program. Those assembled heard a keynote address given by Herbert Agar, the head of Freedom House and editor of the *Louisville Courier*. In his speech, Agar stated that the work of the Wing's corps of speakers would be critical to the home front war effort. "People are getting bored with the war because they don't know what it is about. They are patriotic but they are unaware of the real meaning of the war. If they were aware we would be a united nation, which we are not." At the same meeting, Clifton Fadiman told the audience that as both speech writers and orators, the members of the Speakers' Bureau had to get "an aggressive spirit in your speeches." He suggested

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[9] Executive Board Minutes, 17 June 1942.

that their success as agents of home front propaganda depended to an extent on "your ability to hate. If you don't hate the Nazis and Japs you are not going to get hate in your voices." He concluded, "You can't kill Nazis or Japs in a mood of idealistic reform."[10]

Theatre critic John Mason Brown presided at the meeting along side Vera Allen and in his remarks noted, "We are confronted today with the question of how we can do more than merely be in the theatre or go to the theatre. What is being organized here, in case you have not already guessed, is a course for dramatic Demostheneses. We need instruction in what we can say to make other people care as passionately as we do for the cause itself that now stands in hideous jeopardy."[11] In addition to Brown, Agar, and Fadiman, the actors, writers, and others from the entertainment field heard words of encouragement from Ms. Maurice T. Moore of the United Service Organizations, Lewis E. Pierson of the Treasury Department, and Ms. Leopold Simon of the Office of Civilian Defense.[12] In her report on the assemblage, Allen said that "it was a most enthusiastic meeting and out of it came a great deal of interest."[13]

At the April gathering of the Wing's executive board, a significant question arose concerning the status of the Speakers' Bureau. Considering the increasing demand for speakers and the limited resources of the Theatre Wing, Allen asked the board to decide whether the Bureau should "remain a service organization for other organizations or

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[10] "U. S. Is Not United, Herbert Agar Says," *New York Times*, 22 April 1942.

[11] "American Theatre Wing War Service: Speakers' Bureau," *Theatre Arts*, 26 June 1942, 422.

[12] "U. S. Is Not United."

[13] Executive Board Minutes, 8 April 1942.

should it set up for itself some kind of goal?" In a unanimous decision, the board resolved that the Speakers' Bureau would continue to assist other organizations but that "its primary function shall be propaganda to further the purposes of the American Theatre Wing as stated in its incorporation papers."[14] At the following board meeting, held on 6 May 1942, the same day the American forces surrendered to the Japanese in the Phillippines, they revisited the wording of that resolution. After some discussion, it was determined that the resolution should be altered by editing out the word "propaganda." Concerned that the Wing might appear to be involved in the type of coercion associated with the well-known and rather infamous propaganda arm of the Nazi dictatorship, the Wing's leadership deemed it wise to rule that the "word propaganda not be used in relation to the work of the Speakers' Bureau of the Wing."[15] This small but significant change reflected the general uneasiness that the nation had toward the very notion of propaganda. However, the truth of the matter is that the speeches presented by the Speakers' Bureau continued to be highly propagandistic. This is to say, they were wholly dedicated to the transmission of a specific set of ideas and behaviors that military, government, and welfare organizations believed would aid in the nation's successful prosecution of the war.

While the pioneer class of speakers underwent training, some of the Wing's experienced hands continued making speeches and holding seminars to aid the Wing's welfare activities. For example, early in January of 1942, the Wing launched a major

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Executive Board Minutes, 6 May 1942.

speaking program by sending 36 of the nation's leading stage personalities to speak to audiences in New York's professional theatres. Their goal was to raise a portion of the $50,000,000 the Red Cross requested in order to fund its own war welfare work. As part of this week-long program, the actors and actresses gave more than 200 speeches to Broadway audiences. Actress Kitty Carlisle was one of the volunteer speakers and addressed audiences before performances of the Moss Hart, Ira Gershwin, and Kurt Weill play, *Lady in the Dark.* Other notables involved in that drive were John Mason Brown, John Golden, Moss Hart, John Anderson, Otto Preminger, Fay Wray, Arlene Francis, Eva LaGallienne, and Vera Allen.[16]

Subsequent appeals made before audiences in Broadway theatres included a crusade for civilian cooperation in combating the hoarding of certain food items made scarce by the war. In response to a request made by New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who also served as the head of one of the national civilian defense organizations, the Wing's orators gave speeches written for the antihoarding campaign by the War Writers Committee of the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office (CDVO) in 21 Broadway theatres on 5 May 1942.[17] The CDVO also used Speakers' Bureau personnel in a series of 90 free civilian defense programs given in movie theatres in the Bronx.[18]

The Department of the Treasury benefitted from frequent war bond sales drives

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[16] "Press Release," American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc., 12 January 1942. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[17] "Anti-Hoarding Pleas in Theatres," *New York Times*, 6 May 1942.

[18] "Series of 90 Free Defense Programs Planned for Bronx Theatres by CDVO," *Home News*, 17 April 1942.

throughout the duration of the war. As it did for many of its clients, the Speakers' Bureau not only provided trained speakers, it also supplied a crew of young women who manned donation tables set up in theatre lobbies. Shortly after the creation of the Speakers' Bureau, the Wing's leadership established a special support division which recruited young women to provide essential support services for the Speakers' Bureaus' major campaigns. The ladies sold war stamps and bonds, collected money for the USO and the Red Cross, or provided sign-up sheets to volunteers for civilian defense projects. The women also took part in a campaign to gather 10,000,000 books for the nation's armed services. On National Book Day, 17 April 1942, they stood by large boxes placed in theatre lobbies and accepted new and used books from Broadway patrons.[19] Supervised by Minnette Barrett, the young women who made up the Campaign Personnel Division filled more than 4,000 positions associated with various drives in the theatres and sold more than $285,000 in war stamps and bonds in Broadway theatres between February 1942 and the end of the war.[20] With war stamps selling for 10 and 50 cents apiece, and $25 war bonds going for $18.25, these young volunteer women helped in a small way to defray the more than $304 billion that the war cost.[21]

Beyond the Broadway and movie theatre campaigns for outside organizations, a number of fund-raising events were held to enrich the treasury of the Theatre Wing itself. In one such instance, actor Luther Adler and playwright Moss Hart spoke to a group of

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[19] "Roosevelt Makes Victory Book Plea," *New York Times*, 15 April 1942.

[20] Minnette Barrett, 31 January 1944. Unaddressed Memorandum, American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[21] William L. O'Neill, *A Democracy at War* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 205.

young actors and playwrights at a seminar held in the Lincoln Hotel in New York City. The money that came from the twenty-five-cent admission fee charged to hear the two men talk about the theatre and its role in American society went to the Wing and funded training classes, supported the sewing workroom, and paid overhead expenses.[22]

One of the offshoots of the early Broadway theatre speaking campaigns was a critical appraisal of the quality of speeches being provided to the Wing by various government or private agencies. In April 1942, at the request of Leon Henderson, the head of the Office of Civilian Defense, celebrity speakers launched a civilian recruitment campaign addressing audiences in every Broadway theatre. According to Allen's assessment, the speech provided to the actors and actresses by the OCD "took from three and a half to six minutes to read, and was incredibly dull."[23] As a result, they decided that in the future all outside speeches had to be submitted to the Wing for prior approval. Simultaneously, the training program began to tutor the Wing's corps of speakers in the finer points of speech writing, with the ultimate goal of having each speaker create his or her own script. Of course, the speeches would have to deal appropriately with the topic at hand and be "not only accurate but in line with general government and American Theatre Wing policy."[24]

Because of its desire to have some degree of consistency with regard for both the speaker and the speech, the Speakers' Bureau began to develop a manual for its trainees.

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[22] "Lectures to Aid Theatre Wing," *New York Times*, 9 January 1942.

[23] Executive Board Minutes, 6 May 1942.

[24] American Theatre Wing Speakers' Manual, 1.

Edited by Marian Rich, the booklet was completed in September of 1942 and was extensive in its coverage. For example, the training book listed basic information on ten of the most commonly addressed war-related topics, including war savings bonds, price ceilings and rationing, blood donation, and home front security programs. In addition, there was background information on a variety of groups or organizations who frequently requested Wing speakers, such as the Treasury, the Office of Price Administration (OPA), the United Service Organization (USO), American Women's Voluntary Services, and the Office of Civilian Defense. Full or partial text speeches were reproduced in the manual, including speeches dealing with general morale, the dangers of spreading rumors, the need to maximize industrial production, the Four Freedoms, and the nature and value of democracy. The manual included inspirational speeches given recently by the nation's leaders and also sample informative speeches written by members of the Wing. A speech by Walter J. Weir entitled "Fighting Mad" was reproduced in the manual, in addition to a lecture on the Red Cross written by Broadway director Margaret Webster, a plea for support for the Army and Navy Relief fund written by Vera Allen, and an address soliciting war bond pledges provided by the Writers' War Board.

The Speakers' Bureau's leadership recognized that while there was a benefit to having well-known stars speaking on behalf of the war effort, there was a danger too. In the manual, they reminded speakers that their purpose was limited to advancing the causes associated with the war, not themselves or their opinions. "While the audience may be interested in you as a theatrical personality, you are there primarily to give information on the war effort, official, not personal views." That advice appears to be contradicted in a

later section of the manual marked "Speech Matter," where the Wing's orators were encouraged to "use [a] psychological rather than logical approach: in other words, include personal incidents, stories, individual experience."

In the portion of the speakers' manual entitled "Speech Manner," the cadre of Wing speakers received some general advice on their oratorical delivery. They were encouraged to "remember Hamlet's advice to the players. Be simple, direct and sincere." Wing orators were told to "keep the necessity for winning the war and peace in the foreground of every speech." Finally, in a directive that concluded the section, the manual warned them to "beware of humor." This admonition cautioned the actors against their natural tendency to want to entertain and reminded them that their primary purpose in giving a speech was to inform.[25]

Besides the general instructions, the manual contained specific advice on a variety of speech topics. For example, one part of the manual focused on speeches dealing with children and child care during wartime. An examination of that information provides valuable insight into the scope of the Speakers' Bureau's objectives, how much attention it gave to the accurate and comprehensive treatment of a specific topic, and the nation's generally high level of concern for its children in that time of crisis. The purpose of the speech, as outlined in the manual, was "to explain the vital part the home and parents play in child well-being and to outline the facts of private and civic welfare groups." To ensure that the information disseminated by speakers enlisted by the American Theatre Wing was accurate, a special committee "set up by the State Committee on Mental Hygiene and the

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[25] American Theatre Wing Speakers' Manual, 12.

war committee of neuropsychiatrists" was consulted.[26]

In the background material supplied in the manual, it notes that the most common problems plaguing children during wartime center on fear, fear generated by news reports telling of death and destruction, fear resulting from having one or both parents leave home to enter military service or spend more time away from home involved in industrial work, and fear produced by the general air of confusion, uncertainty, and crisis that permeated all levels of American society during the conflict. The manual advised the speaker to acknowledge that a certain amount of fear was natural for children because of the war. Further, the speaker was encouraged to allow that it was more destructive to have children conceal or be ashamed of their fears than to tolerate their display. It was important that parents "stress the idea that to be afraid and still carry on is not 'sissy' but 'Heroic.'" Speakers, however, were cautioned not to attempt to cover the psychological aspects of child care unless he or she had "studied a great deal and consulted exhaustively with child experts."

According to the manual, parents should also be reminded that their actions and language can create fear in a child. In the child's world, reliance on known things and trust in known people were crucial. Parents should not use war or the fear of war as a means to enforce discipline or insure obedience. At the same time, parents should be warned that "normal, bloodthirsty expressions of war savagery should be listened to as an indication of the state of mind of the child but should not alarm the parents as they are a healthy emotional outburst and have different meanings, real but not literal, in a child's

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[26] Executive Board Minutes, 28 October 1942.

mind."

In addition, the manual cautioned the orator against the inadvertent use of false or misleading information, particularly when dealing with a topic as sensitive as child welfare. To reduce the possibility of factual errors, speakers were encouraged to work in groups as they gathered data for their speeches. The Wing's experts further suggested that each group of speakers prepare a master speech including all points to be stressed in the presentation and submit that information to local authorities for general approval. The groups were also encouraged to "watch the Office of War Information (OWI) for [the] official news line." All subsequent speeches could then share the same general approach to the facts.

Included in the manual was a sample of the "most universally acceptable attitude for general speeches to untrained groups of average parents." The specimen text could be used as the conclusion to a larger presentation and stresses the importance of parental guidance.

> Many of the larger aspects of child care will touch you (the parents) only superficially. With the school activity many of your immediate questions are answered. Child care in wartime has a forbidding sound but to each of you its most vital effectiveness can be condensed into one vital duty. Maintain your home as nearly as possible in its accustomed routine, using consideration and affection to a greater extent than you have done before, and by your own control and deliberate wisdom, preserve for your children the security which will see them through every crisis with the least harm to their bodies, their

minds and their souls.

> It has been said, "Our children are the priority of America." They are the precious possessions of democracy but they are, above all, the possessors of democracy. We are making a better world for our children to inherit. We must insure better children to inherit the better world.[27]

The final paragraph expresses the kind of idealistic tone that characterized many of the Wing's propagandistic presentations.

The Speakers' Manual was a complete success and generated a great deal of interest from groups outside of the Theatre Wing. Clifton Fadiman asked that five copies of the text be sent to the Writers' War Board and a single copy sent to Elmer Davis at the OWI to show him what the Wing had done to support the efforts of the government in keeping the American public informed and inspired. The Office of Civilian Defense was so impressed with the manual that it asked to reprint parts of the Wing manual in its own advisory handbook. Finally, Vera Allen reported to the Wing's board that "professors in various colleges are already beginning to send for it." Because there was such interest in the manual and because the cost of reproduction was mounting for the Wing, Vera Allen contacted Garrett Leverton of the Samuel French publishing company to see if it would be interested in publishing the manual, but they did not reach a satisfactory agreement.[28]

In early July 1942, the executive board of the Theatre Wing noted that "many of the Government Agencies which have been supplied with speakers and stars by the American

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[27] American Theatre Wing Speakers' Manual,13.

[28] Executive Board Minutes, 28 October 1942.

Theatre Wing have neglected time and again to make proper acknowledgment of this fact." Referring to a recent speaking engagement where Helen Hayes, Mrs. Maxwell Anderson, and other volunteers spoke on behalf of the Office of Price Administration, Antoinette Perry observed that the help of the Wing in securing the appearances of such notable celebrities "had not so much as been mentioned" in any of the press coverage generated by the event. Vera Allen added that despite the close collaboration between the Wing's Speakers' Bureau and the U. S. Treasury, there had not been "a line of credit in the Treasury Department's booklet, nor in any statement to the public in which every other organization was mentioned." As a result of this discussion, it was resolved that "hereafter the Theatre Wing shall not volunteer its services unless it is understood that the Wing be given credit for its work."[29] The issue of recognition was important to the Wing since at this point in time it relied almost entirely on private contributions to fund their activities, and publicity linking the theatre industry service group to powerful government agencies and nationally recognized nongovernmental organizations was invaluable.

In August 1942, the Speakers' Bureau faced its first jurisdictional clash. The Speakers' Bureau's activities were conflicting with the work of the United Theatrical War Activities Committee (UTWAC), a war-service group formed in April by those associated with the theatre, music, radio, and concert industries.[30] Under the leadership of Bert Lytell, president of Actors Equity and chairperson of the UTWAC, the organization claimed to be the primary clearing house for professional talent used in all war

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[29] Executive Board Minutes, 1 July 1942.

[30] "Actors' Group Set Up to Aid War Program," *New York Times*, 22 April 1942.

entertainments. With both the UTWAC and the Wing being asked to supply "celebrity" speakers for various occasions, there was a clear competition between the two groups, and this proved to be the source of some friction. After an "exhaustive" meeting with James Sauter, the man in charge of public relations for the Office of Civilian Defense and Executive Vice Chairperson of the UTWAC, the two organizations drafted and ultimately adopted a plan to divide responsibilities for assigning speakers. Under the agreed upon compromise, the UTWAC would be the controlling agency when someone requested well-known celebrity speakers. The Wing's Speakers' Bureau would, in contrast, supply spokespersons for engagements where trained speakers were required but where the event organizers had not called for famous personalities.[31]

Although this cooperative arrangement between the Wing and the UTWAC might be viewed as a loss for the Wing, in reality, it solved a sometimes annoying problem experienced by the Speakers' Bureau's leadership. While celebrity speakers were nearly always guaranteed to draw larger audiences and to generate more public awareness of the bureau's activities by virtue of the increased press coverage their activities received, they were often less accomplished as public speakers and more difficult to control than average volunteer orators. It was the Wing's experience that the only speakers they could really train were those "who do not fall into the celebrity category."[32] This was largely because celebrity performers were not able to attend the Wing's regular speech training workshops due to their busy work schedules and were thus inadequately prepared to discuss specific

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[31] Executive Board Minutes, 12 August 1942.

[32] Ibid.

war-related topics. Given the Wing's commitment to both dynamic public speaking and the effectual transmission of war-related information, it is not surprising that it valued the trained speaker over the famous one.

At the same board meeting that adopted the new working arrangement with the UTWAC, Vera Allen raised a new issue. With the demand for speakers reaching an all-time high, the cost involved in providing those speakers rose. Based on "some rather rough figures" supplied to her by the Theatre Wing's Accounting Department, Allen estimated the average cost of sending a speaker out to address a public or private gathering to be about $1.65. The accounting included "the cost of training speakers, maintaining a library, telephone, chairs for classes, and all other overhead involved in running the Bureau." The board debated whether the Wing should charge the sponsoring organization for providing speakers, but there is no indication in any of the extant documents that the Wing's leaders ever decided to levy such a fee.[33]

In the spring of 1943, the Speakers' Bureau expanded its operations and opened a branch in Washington, D.C. In a town where office space was extremely scarce because of the rapidly expanding federal bureaucracy associated with the conduct of the war, the Wing's Washington bureau was given quarters in the United States Information Building, a space secured for them through the assistance of the Treasury Department. In Washington, where celebrities and trained actors were uncommon, the cadre of volunteer speakers came primarily from the ranks of the thousands of government workers who supervised a military force of about 16,000,000, a civilian population of more than

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[33] Ibid.

120,000,000, and an industrial complex that produced nearly 100,000 airplanes a year, and equal numbers of trucks, jeeps, and tanks. A third Speakers' Bureau was opened in Philadelphia in October 1943. According to a report made to the Theatre Wing's executive board, the Pennsylvania group drew most of its personnel from the many Little Theatre groups in Philadelphia and its outskirts.

As the war went on, the requests for speeches began to dwindle. New topics arose from time to time, however, and rekindled interest in having trained speakers bring important information to business, industry, government, and social groups. For example, in October 1944 a new campaign began with the Washington bureau.[34] As the number of injured and disabled veterans returning home from the European and Pacific theatres of war increased, the American Theatre Wing's Speakers' Bureau took a leading role in the drive to educate all civilians in the proper behaviors and attitudes to display when dealing with these men. As part of the research done to prepare the speakers, Vera Allen contacted the commanding officer in charge of the Headquarters Halloran General Hospital, seeking advice on "the best way for canteen hostesses and workers in similar categories to deal with men who have been seriously wounded or disabled."[35] Colonel R. G. DeVoe responded to Allen's inquiry by stating that there were no rules that could be applied. Instead, he suggested the following advice.

It is altogether [a] matter of attitudes. There is the attitude of the

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[34] Executive Board Minutes, 4 October 1944.

[35] Vera Allen to Director, Halloran Hospital, 24 May 1943. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

> person making the approach and that of the wounded man. Most of the latter are friendly, courteous and rather likely to talk about their experiences. An occasional one will be found who is morose and disinclined to talk. Some reveal a bitter attitude, but those are not the severely wounded. It would seem that the more severe the wound and the more irreplaceable the loss the more cheerful the attitude is and the less the bitterness.
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> The attitude of the one making the interview is of very great importance. It should be cheerful and friendly. A little restraint is in order. By this I mean that too much exuberance or over cordiality would well be dispensed with. This applies also to the maudlin, over sympathetic or "bleeding heart" attitude. In a word it is a matter of merely good sense and good taste.[36]

In November, the Speakers' Bureau brought the campaign to New York, the main port of re-entry for veterans of the European conflict. At a special rally held at the Stage Door Canteen on November 26 to kick off the campaign, Horace Braham, a stage and radio actor, spoke to the nearly 1,000 workers assembled there. He said "that common sense and good manners are the two best guides in learning how to act toward disabled men." Braham further stated that the Speakers' Bureau had trained a group of 50 speakers in the "official attitude and policy of Army and Navy medical men" and they would be speaking to "all people who will be in daily contact with service men." The campaign plan called for the speakers to first address meetings of "transit unions, professional workers and

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[36] R. G. DeVoe to Vera Allen, 8 June 1943. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

salespeople, . . . taxi drivers, street car and bus conductors, waiters, elevator men, and department store workers who will naturally deal with veterans, many of them visibly disabled," and then next to reach out "to family groups by speaking to members of churches, women's clubs, housing and neighborhood associations."[37]

In 1942 the Speakers' Bureau filled a total of 1,417 speaking engagements. In one of those assignments, Helen Hayes spoke to an audience of 25,000 at a war rally held in Elmira, New York. A newspaper reported, "They go to rallies, meetings, all sorts of gatherings sponsored by the Treasury Department, the O. C. D., the U. S. O., the Salvage Committee, the Red Cross."[38] In 1943 it provided speakers for 1,391 events of various types. By the end of the war, the Wing's Speakers' Bureau's records estimated the total number of speech presentations to be 4,035.[39] One of the busiest days for the bureau occurred in 1943 and saw the presentation of 28 speeches, all of them dealing with the point rationing system.[40] Among the most reliable of the Wing's speakers were some who had given more than 50 hours of service, including Vincent Price, Marie Carroll, Olga Druce, Marian Rich, and Anne Seymour.[41] The most requested topics were war bonds

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[37] "Civilians to Learn Duty to Wounded," *New York Times*, 27 November 1944.

[38] Arthur Pollock, "Want an Actress to Come Talk to You?," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 18 July 1942. American Theatre Wing Scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Many of the clippings contained in the American Theatre Wing's scrapbooks have no indication of publisher, date, or page. Even more problematic is the fact that the original scrapbook pages were cut in half at some point in time, often splitting a single article in the middle.

[39] Nina Ridenour, *Facts: A Few Pertinent Facts About the Work of the American Theatre Wing Victory Players*, 28 September 1945. Mimeographed copy, American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[40] Executive Board Minutes, 17 February 1943.

[41] Virginia Chauvenet to Nadine Sachs, 21 December 1942. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

and salvage, an indication of the close cooperative relationship the Wing had with both the United States Department of the Treasury and the OPA.

The Victory Players

The Speakers' Bureau had another important program, a program that originated soon after the first series of oratory classes began early in 1942. Following a suggestion made by drama critic and board member Brooks Atkinson, Allen formulated a plan to create and produce a series of short propagandistic plays using Broadway actors. The use of dramatized stories to educate the general public has precedents going back into theatre history at least as far as the medieval period, when the church used dramatic representations of the Bible as a means of edifying the congregation and where even the "structure of the play propagates the established order."[42]

Theatre has always been a particularly effective mode of propaganda. The immediacy of the theatrical event is, in itself, a persuasive tool. The live actor and the live audience sharing time and space create a bond that draws the audience's emotions as well as its intellect into the action being presented. The characters of drama are living, breathing representations of the playwright's particular ideology. Consequently, they are far more engaging than a mere poster or manifesto. Some dramatic characters are created in such a way as to make them attractive to the audience while they effectively demonstrate in their words and actions what the playwright perceives as positive thoughts

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[42] George H. Szanto, *Theater & Propaganda* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 144.

or activities. In contrast, characters who represent "incorrect" attitudes or behavior can be created with personal characteristics that repel the audience. The contrast of characters sharpens the differences between competing doctrines. In addition, the playwright can utilize didactic devices such as direct audience address, narration, and soliloquy to allow his model characters to explain their view of the issue at hand.

In the modern era, propagandistic drama contributed to the success of the socialist revolution through the hundreds of agit-prop presentations staged by the theatre troupes in the Russian Red Army. The Blue Blouses of the post-revolutionary period in Soviet Russia continued to create dramas with an influential social and political message. In the United States, the Living Newspapers of the Federal Theatre Project and the propaganda pieces of the workers' movement during labor unrest of the 1930s made propagandistic drama common. *Waiting for Lefty*, Clifford Odets's 1935 drama in which a group of taxi drivers argue about going on strike, is a well-known example of the genre. In Italy during the war, Mussolini's Ministry of Propaganda sent mobile theatre groups to the outlying provinces to "present Fascist morality plays, usually followed by political commentaries from local party leaders."[43] Lastly, in Germany, in both the political theatre of Brecht and later in the heavily censored theatre of the Third Reich, political propaganda was in the foreground of many dramatic presentations. Thus, when the American Theatre Wing decided to create a didactic theatre producing division, it knew exactly what to do to make the unit effective.

After receiving approval from the Wing's board of directors, Allen contacted Garrett

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[43] Rhodes, *Propaganda*, 77.

Leverton, head of the play department of the Samuel French publishing company, to help in the acquisition of suitable scripts. Leverton agreed to solicit authors, edit the highly original scripts, and use the resources of his employer to make an appropriate number of copies. By 26 January, he had secured the playwriting services of four authors and was planning to contact 45 more. The authors provided the sketches without regard for copyright or compensation, and professional actors then presented the plays free of charge. Suggestions for topics came from various sources, including federal, state, and city government agencies and nongovernmental welfare organizations, and before the end of the war, 51 different plays had been written for the American Theatre Wing.[44]

The first extant record of a play performance is found in a *New York Times* article dealing with a fund-raising "Mardi Gras" held by the Beekman Hill Unit of the American Women's Voluntary Services organization. According to the report, "an original skit, written by Mrs. Alex M. Doremus, secretary of the unit, and Staats Cotsworth, radio script writer," was to be presented on 16 February 1942. Although the article does not name the skit presented, it is reasonable to assume it was *Whoduzzit*, the only skit attributed to the pair that appears in the Wing's records.[45] The next reference to a Speakers' Bureau production comes in a letter written by Harold Vermilyea to Vera Allen on 10 March 1942. The letter refers to the presentation of a play entitled *What Is America?* for the B'nai B'rith at the Manhattan Center on 5 March 1942.[46] Written by

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[44] See Appendix A for a complete list of plays.

[45] "Mardi Gras to Aid Women's Services," *New York Times*, 12 February 1942.

[46] Harold Vermilyea to Vera Allen, 10 March 1942. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

Hal Borland and Philip Dunning, the play was intended to boost American morale and required a cast of six principal actors and ten or more extras.[47] During the next six months, the bureau's play producing unit staged approximately 35 performances using 13 different plays. The original scripts used by the Wing in that pioneer year came from writers such as the *New Yorker*'s theatre critic Wolcott Gibbs, actress Patricia Collinge, and the Writers' War Board. Topics covered in those propagandistic plays included the sale of war bonds, gasoline rationing, nutrition, salvage, and recruitment of women to be nurses' aides.

As word spread of the quality and effectiveness of the Speakers' Bureau's dramatic presentations, requests for performances increased. At the October meeting of the Wing's executive board, Vera Allen asked the board to allow for the creation of an advisory committee to help make most of the major decisions concerning the expanding demand for sketches. "One of our main problems," Allen said, "is whether or not we shall attempt to fill all the requests for sketches which have come pouring in since September 1." She reminded the board that "these are short skits on war topics and not entertainment" and that they were providing an important wartime service. At this same meeting the board first discussed the possible need for creating a mechanism that would allow for the national distribution of Theatre Wing scripts. The Office of Civilian Defense had already approached the Speakers' Bureau asking for permission to "distribute copies of them [the scripts] throughout the country for the use of amateur groups." By the end of 1943, the

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[47] Hal Borland and Philip Dunning, *What is America?* (New York: Samuel French, 1942).

American Theatre Wing, the United States Department of the Treasury, the OCD, and other government agencies would be involved in the disbursal of Speakers' Bureau scripts.[48] That program will be discussed again later in this chapter and in the final chapter of this study.

At the 27 January 1943 American Theatre Wing Executive Board meeting, Vera Allen noted that with the four performances scheduled to take place on that date, the Speakers' Bureau's total presentations would surpass the 100 mark.[49] By February the demand for sketches had grown so great that Allen asked the board for permission to hire a full-time, paid worker to "go out with them regularly to see that the props and the company gets there, to get the stage set, to announce the sketch and to deal with the chairman at the meetings." To give the board some idea of the success of the dramatic propaganda pieces, Allen related the following account of one of the bureau's original plays, which dealt with the recruitment of civilians to serve as local defense project supervisors.

> Esther Hawley, my assistant, wrote a sketch called *America's Way [Can Work]* at the special request of the Mayor's office to stimulate the recruiting of block leaders for the Office of Civilian Defense, and it has been so well received that it is already booked to play thirty-six times in February and ten times in March, sometimes three or four performances in a single day. We

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[48] Executive Board Minutes, 28 October 1942.

[49] Executive Board Minutes, 10 February 1943.

> have to get six different casts ready to cover the assignments. On February 3rd it played on the air on WNYC, at the East River Housing Project, at the Henry Street Settlement, and before 230 labor leaders at the Empire State Building. As a result of the performance for labor leaders, it was done before 1,200 radio electrical engineers in Newark and it is now going to be played for the heads of the entire CIO of New Jersey. It has also been done for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Die Casters, the Cleaners and Dyers and the Transport Workers Unions. The CIO has requested the use of it by their groups in New Jersey, and we have released it to them for that territory because we do not feel that we can cover all the meetings. Our people are going to Trenton this month, however, to play before the heads of the New Jersey Defense Councils who are paying all expenses of the trip. At one meeting of only 123 people we are told that 32 block leaders were recruited and the results have been proportionally high whenever it plays.[50]

Other plays enjoyed similar success. For example, one of Esther Hawley's many other propaganda plays, a play that addressed the need for all citizens to donate blood, had more than 280 performances. According to one report, 65 percent of the audience at one performance of *You Give What You Got* signed blood donor pledges on the spot.[51] The Wing released a third Hawley playlet, written at the request of the War Production Board,

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[50] Executive Board Minutes, 17 February 1943.

[51] "In Broadway Theatres," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), 25 July 1943.

for distribution by 315 branches of the American Women's Volunteer Service to amateur theatre groups nationwide. At a 1943 performance of one of the Wing's thirteen one-act plays that dealt specifically with war bonds, it sold $23,000 worth of bonds. The same bond sketch, done at an uptown New York church, realized $81,000 in sales. Later in the war, this playlet caught the interest of the U. S. Treasury Department after "the first day's receipts for two performances of *The Favor* given by the play producing unit of the Philadelphia branch of the American Theatre Wing, totaled $1,200,000 in war bonds."[52] According to American Theatre Wing minutes, the Treasury wished to adapt the drama into a propagandistic film.[53]

A propaganda piece on the safeguarding of war information, written by essayist and biographer Peggy Lamson, opened at the Interdepartmental Auditorium in Washington, D.C., in front of 2,000 Department of Labor employees. The sketch, entitled *Somebody Talked*, was written at the request of the FBI and American military leaders. It was believed to be highly effective by these government officials and was subsequently presented to government workers in the War Relocation Authority, the Federal Works Agency, the Federal Power Commission, and the National Archives.[54]

The success of the plays prompted the Wing's leadership to separate the theatrical performance unit from the oratorical programs of the Speakers' Bureau. On 31 August 1943, the American Theatre Wing adopted the name "Victory Players" for the now

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[52] "Day Off to Reward Bond Sale Leaders," *New York Times*, 15 November 1944.

[53] Executive Board Minutes, 24 January 1945.

[54] "Theatre Wing Play to Open Here Today," *Washington Post*, 10 October 1943.

independent sketch division of the Speakers' Bureau.[55] Harold Vermilyea, who had previously helped Vera Allen with the operation of the Speakers' Bureau, took control of the program.

A detailed analysis of all fifty-one scripts produced by the American Theatre Wing's Speakers' Bureau/Victory Players is beyond the scope of this study. However, a close examination of even a few of the dramas allows for some conclusions to be drawn regarding their construction, ideology, and propagandistic techniques.[56] From the simplest monologue to the most demanding and complex dramatic constructions, the Wing's plays are quite diverse. Nonetheless, they do share some common properties. All of the commonalities result from the Wing's need to utilize effectively both the limited number of available volunteer performers and meager resources it had at its disposal to produce these dramas.

For example, except for a couple of instances, the plays require two to four performers. The small number of cast members made it easier for the Speakers' Bureau to send out more than one production unit at a time. Because actors typically worked irregular schedules, the Wing commonly had four or more performers assigned to each role in any one production unit. The plays are also similar in that each could be presented

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[55] Publicity Release dated 31 August 1943. Found in the American Theatre Wing collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[56] Only 26 plays of the 51 known American Theatre Wing scripts are extant. The analysis to follow is based on those scripts only. All of the extant scripts can be found in various collections of unpublished documents at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Only two plays were ever published: Esther Hawley, *On the Way Home*, which was included in *The Best Plays of 1944* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945), and *America Is Americans*, published by Samuel French. The rest are found in mimeographed form.

in about twenty minutes, making them easy to fit into regularly scheduled group meetings, employee training sessions, and religious or secular services.

Each of the plays had only the simplest scenic requirements. The principal properties most commonly required were no more than a few tables and chairs. In almost every case, these would be provided by the performance's host organization. These basic furniture items could be imaginatively used to create an assortment of scenic environments. For example, two chairs placed together denoted a hospital bed, a living room sofa, or a park bench. A simple table could easily be used to represent a desk, a workbench, or a sales counter. Similarly, costume requirements were modest. For the most part, the actors themselves could meet all costuming requirements using suits, dresses, and casual wear taken from their own personal wardrobes. In some cases, of course, the dramatic presentation required special costumes. Uniforms for medical personnel, domestic or service industry workers, and military men led the list of those frequently required. Although none of the extant documents provides information as to how the necessary specialized costumes were acquired, it is reasonable, given the support the Wing received from the theatre community, to assume that the Speakers' Bureau was able to secure them from theatrical costume houses at little or no cost.

The majority of the propaganda plays use a narrator. This character introduces the principals, sets the scene, smooths the sometimes abrupt transitions between individual vignettes, and, by carefully framing the action of the plot, leads the audience to the proper understanding of the lessons illustrated in the action. The presence of the narrator also points to the presentational aspect of many of the dramas. In addition to a narrator who

bridged the aesthetic distance between the stage and the real world, the actors frequently spoke directly to the audience, explaining their character's actions, beliefs, and attitudes.

Most of the dramas were written by women. Of the 51 known Speakers' Bureau/Victory Players scripts, 38 had female authors. The most prolific author was Vera Allen's administrative assistant, Esther Hawley. Hawley penned 15 dramas on subjects including the Red Cross, returning veterans, civilian defense, salvage, blood donation, security of war information, racial and ethnic tolerance, postwar planning, the United Nations, and war bonds. The next most productive playwright was Helen Stetson, to whom six dramas can be attributed. Since women were clearly the focus of much of the propaganda represented in the Speakers' Bureau's drama, it is not surprising that female roles outnumber the men's roles by more than two to one, and some plays use women characters exclusively.[57] During the war, American women were encouraged to follow rationing guidelines, plant Victory Gardens, volunteer to provide important home front services, and take war industry jobs to free men for duty in the military. The Wing's dramas were, in almost every case, part of larger media propaganda campaigns, and were frequently written at the request of government agencies.

The most commonly occurring and most important roles in the plays are mothers and wives. They represent a wide gamut of social and economic classes, and are young, old, American, German, from established middle class families or recently arrived immigrants. Whatever their age or nationality, the wives and mothers stand as models for the women

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[57] There are at least two plays that have all male casts, *Wise Guys*, written by Hawley and dealing with gasoline rationing, and the previously mentioned *What Is America*.

in the home front audience. The mothers who appear in Speakers' Bureau dramas provide emotional support, give physical care, foster intellectual development, and serve as psychological counselors. Nurses, another female role model that appears regularly in the Victory Players' presentations, share many of the same positive nurturing qualities as mothers in the plays. In terms of propaganda value, the mother figure is a powerful tool. In her study of the turn of the century labor organizer, Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, Mari Boor Tonn notes that "maternal roles were particularly apt rhetorical strategies."[58] In the dramas of the Victory Players, mothers are the sources of wisdom, the primary advocates of hope and patience, and stimulants to positive action. For as Tonn says, "as mothers in myth, slave mothers, and even animal mothers remind us, maternal love entails the fierce protection of children, often at any cost."[59] Maureen Honey notes that during the war, in many forms of propaganda, "women were used as inspirational figures and models of what all citizens ought to be doing."[60] This is certainly true in the plays of the Theatre Wing's home front propaganda unit.

For example, in Esther Hawley's play on safeguarding war-related information, *I Didn't Think*, one of the main characters is Emily Harrison, the mother of Eddie, who serves in the Merchant Marine. Emily works tirelessly as a citizen organizer, counsels a neighbor against her class bigotry, and mobilizes a citizen's committee to help those who

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[58] Mari Boor Tonn, "Militant Motherhood: Labor's Mary Harris 'Mother' Jones," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82 (1996):1-2.

[59] Ibid., 3.

[60] Maureen Honey. *Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II.* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 54.

are having difficulties dealing with the realities of the war. However, Emily is not perfect. In the course of the play, she and her neighbors inadvertently talk about their sons' activities in the war. Emily gossips about Eddie's ship's schedule, the cargo it is carrying, and its probable destination. Near the end of the drama we learn that Eddie's ship was torpedoed and Eddie died of his wounds after floating for thirteen days on a life raft.

Included in the play is a subplot revolving around the patriotism of a neighbor lady with the German-sounding name of Hilda Meyer. After the loss of their son, Emily's husband is visited by the FBI and told "Eddie's captain reported this when he was picked up by the Coast Guard — that when the Nazi sub came to the surface, the officers yelled over at the life rafts, 'What held you up? You're four hours behind schedule.'" Emily and her husband recall that Hilda was the only person present when the boy's destination and schedule were discussed. However, it turns out that Hilda, a mother who has also lost a son in the war, was not the source of the information leak. In terms of the message of the drama, the ancillary plot line both underscores the need to guard all wartime information even from neighbors and warns against rash and unjust ethnic profiling. At the end of the play Emily addresses the audience, admits her failure to adequately protect what was vital war-related information, and then furnishes the lesson of the drama. "No matter what you know, whether it's about your boys in the services or your husband in a war factory, don't tell anyone. You may never know what you've done. I hope you'll never know like we know."[61] This mother, who now blames herself for her son's death, stands as a powerful

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[61] Esther Hawley, *I Didn't Think* (New York: American Theatre Wing War Service, 1943) Mimeographed copy in the collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

didactic spokesperson for increased citizen awareness of the need for greater vigilance with regard to information in war time.

In an ingenious play written by Olga Druce, there are three sets of mothers, and each is seen in a short vignette with her daughter in order to illustrate different modes of reacting to the stress of the wartime environment. The propagandistic goal of *Home Is Our Nation* was to encourage parents to be honest with their children when discussing the youngsters' fears. In a twist of the usual dramatic formula of having an adult serve as narrator and *raisonneur*, Druce uses a young girl to introduce the characters, frame the individual episodes, and provide the lesson of the piece. The first mother, when confronting her little girl's fears, counsels the child to "just try to think good thoughts." She does not allow the youngster to talk about the fears she is experiencing and fails to provide a positive role model by suggesting that if the child continues to cry, "Mother will cry too and then one of those nasty headaches will come."

The second vignette features a mother who encourages her child to tell her "everything that's on your mind." But when the child relates a disturbing dream in which she finds herself alone in the middle of a house set afire by a bombing raid, the mother explains away the dream by suggesting the nightmare was merely a reaction to the heat being on too high in the house. Young Midge is told that "there are just some things children cannot understand," and encouraged to accept that the war will not really affect her. The final vignette demonstrates the proper, patriotic way to handle a child's fear of war. This mother listens carefully to the child as she vocalizes her anxiety. Then the mother comforts her child, saying, "Everyone is afraid of losing what he loves. . . . I know

that whatever happens this awful war will end as it should. In a victory for all those who know and love what they're fighting for."[62]

This use of contrasting characters is an effective way to illustrate the "proper" behavior to the audience. In addition, the use of a young girl as narrator gives the propagandistic presentation an innocence that belies its pedagogical nature. The young girl's nightmare vision of an inferno engulfing her parents, her home, and herself is a powerful and emotional image that must have had a chilling effect on the parents in the audience. The use of highly emotional imagery was a common propagandistic device and was used by both the Allies and the Axis governments. Michael Balfour, a worker in the British Ministry of Information during the war, supports that contention, observing that effective propaganda "can operate by arousing so emotional an atmosphere and investing its favoured interpretations with such prestige that only an insignificant fraction of the public will consider the alternative."[63]

In only a few of the plays is the enemy presented on stage. In the Peggy Lamson and Holladay Clark script, *Missing In Action*, the enemy represented is the Nazi military man, an evil figure already defined by the many wartime movies produced after 1941. The play is a series of nine episodes in which scenes showing an American flyer interrogated by his Nazi captor in a German prisoner of war camp alternate with scenes of his girlfriend back home in America sharing gossip with her co-workers. The Gestapo agent in the

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[62] Olga Druce, *Home Is Our Nation*, (New York: American Theatre Wing War Service, 1943). Mimeographed copy found in the collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[63] Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War: 1939-1945* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 422.

prison scenes is a villainous man who uses every advantage at his disposal to intimidate and bully his captive. He seems to know all the particulars of the captured flyer's personal and military history and uses that knowledge as leverage to learn even more. Again, the lesson of the play is that all information, even romantic gossip, is potentially valuable to the enemy and must be carefully guarded.[64]

In Esther Hawley's previously mentioned play, *America's Way Can Work*, an Italian-American woman is contrasted with a German *hausfrau* and *mutter*. In the first vignette, Mrs. Famiglietti, an immigrant mother with four sons in the American Army, is visited by the local Civilian Defense block leader. The conversation is congenial and informative. She is told about rationing and price ceilings and asked to volunteer to serve in a child day-care facility to allow a younger mother to take a war production factory job. In the second vignette, the same actress portrays the German mother and housewife who is similarly visited by a representative of the Nazi Gestapo, also played by the same actor who appeared earlier. Using the same actor and actress in parallel parts made it easier for the audience to make the important comparison upon which the play's propaganda message is grounded. In the second vignette, Frau Heller is threatened, degraded, and encouraged to inform on her neighbors. The contrast between the two scenes, in terms of characterization and tone, is striking and helps to make the point that regardless of the sacrifices that must be made in the United States, our democratic society is far better than life under Nazi rule. In the short sketch, an amazing variety of war-related programs are

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[64] Peggy Lamson and Holladay Clark, *Missing In Action*, (New York: American Theatre Wing Victory Players, n.d.). Mimeographed copy found in the collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

discussed. The dialogue includes mention of war bonds and stamps, the critical shortage of nurses, nurses' aides, air raid wardens, rationing, the blackmarket, hoarding of scarce food stuffs, and salvage drives. In many of the Wing's dramatic presentations more than one topic was addressed, thus increasing a play's propagandistic potential.[65]

In conjunction with the Speakers' Bureau campaign dealing with the returning veterans and their wounds, the Victory Players performed another Esther Hawley script on the subject. *To Ease Their Hurt* featured a cast of three women. Mattie Evans is a "kind, but rather spoiled, undisciplined" mother with a son recuperating from serious war wounds in a stateside hospital. Sarah Holbrook, "a friendly, good-natured neighbor," has a husband who works long hours in a war production plant, and Jane Evans, Mattie's daughter-in-law, keeps herself busy with war bond drives and other community service projects as she waits for her husband to recover from his injuries. In this play there is no narrator to frame the message of the play. Instead, the women introduce and debate the important ideas and attitudes through their dialogue.

Mattie is an extremely jealous mother and wants nothing more than to be able to visit her son as he waits in the hospital for a long series of surgeries which will attempt to repair his broken body. When Jane suggests that instead of wasting her energies on worry, she get involved in war relief work, Mattie rejects the proposal. She is only interested in seeing her boy again. Her son, however, has told his wife that he could not face seeing his mother yet. He has written to his wife Jane, and asked her to intercede

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[65] Ester Hawley, *America's Way Can Work* (New York: American Theatre Wing Victory Players, 1943) New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Mimeographed.

with his mother for him, saying "I love her very much but I can't see her — yet. She'd be so horrified and so shocked. It's bad enough to know it without seeing it in her face . . . It's different with you. Somehow, with you, no matter what happens, I always feel safe. Will you tell her, darling, and try to explain?" But, of course, Mattie does not understand and accuses her daughter-in-law of trying to break the bond between mother and son. Mattie, in her anger and frustration, lashes out against the war, the military's medical corps, and Jane. In her frustration and anger Mattie explodes, "Do you think I wouldn't know how to act with my own boy? . . . I won't go to pieces. I can be as brave as anyone . . . I've always been there — ever since he was a little boy he used to run to me when he was hurt and I cried over the bumps and made them well." Turning on Jane, she adds, "This is your fault! You don't want me to go!" Mattie concludes her outburst by proclaiming, "It wasn't our war in the first place!"

With reasoning and patience, Jane and Sarah calm Mattie down and force her to look at the war through the eyes of her now disabled son. Sarah argues,

> It's hard to understand — really to understand — cruelty and persecution and devastation — when we've never known them. When they're just words we have to try to picture in our minds because they've never touched our lives. But Jim *knows* what it means because he has seen it. They all know, and they know it has to be wiped off the face of the earth. . . . We couldn't stand by and watch while — (feeling for words) brutality and — lust for power — trampled out all the decency and humanity — in little people. And we can't quit until that brutality and power are wiped out — for always.

> But even if we didn't believe that, even if we were just rank materialists, how long do you think we would have lasted in a Nazi-dominated world? You know that as well as I do, only you've let your personal pain grow until it's blotted out everything else.

In the end, Mattie admits that she has been "wrapped up in my own little shell," and agrees to wait as patiently as she can for the time when her son will feel ready to face her once again. She even agrees to go door-to-door with Jane trying to sell the war bonds that help to pay for the artificial limbs, physical therapy, and plastic surgery that will help her son, and thousands of other boys like him, to recover.[66]

In this play, the mother's concern for her son and her desire to help in his recovery has blinded her to the larger considerations of the war. The motherly behaviors usually extolled by the propagandist as being correct are, in this case, erroneous. The wife, however, understands her husband's wish to spare his mother the pain of seeing him until after he has recovered some of his health and dignity. This highly emotional play makes its points effectively. Subjects touched upon in the drama include the plight of wounded soldiers, the importance of investing in war bonds to help pay for hospital care and prosthetics, and the ideals of freedom from fear and oppression which were at the heart of the international conflict. It is not hard to imagine that, with three talented actresses, this Victory Players script would be an effective piece of dramatic propaganda.

Unfortunately, it is possible to pinpoint only a few of the approximately 200

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[66] Esther Hawley, *To Ease Their Hurt* (New York: American Theatre Wing Victory Players, n.d.) Mimeographed copy found in the collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

performers who donated time and talent to the American Theatre Wing War Service's play production unit. A comparison of the names of those who can be positively identified as having served in the Victory Players against the listings in the *Encyclopedia of the New York Stage: 1940-1950*, reveals that only a few of them played major roles in Broadway productions during the war.[67] Thus, it is possible to infer that not many of the performers typically involved in the presentation of the Wing's propagandistic plays were stars of the first rank. In fact, the artists who did volunteer may have done so with the hope that their service might attract the attention of some of the powerful producers, directors, or stars who sat on the Wing's board or who chaired its various committees.

By the end of the war, the Victory Players in New York, Washington, D. C., and Philadelphia had combined to give over 2,000 presentations involving more than 6,000 individual performances by volunteer actors and actresses. The audiences ranged from 50 to 7,000 in number, although one presentation given in Central Park had an estimated audience of 100,000. Included in the groups who saw the productions were labor unions, factory workers, department store personnel, Parent Teachers Associations, fraternal lodges, women's clubs, church groups, schools, many types of government agencies, and private welfare organizations.[68] A Theatre Wing report notes that "playing conditions also have been varied: backrooms of saloons, ballrooms of large hotels, the Steel Pier in Atlantic City and on platforms constructed of boxes and planks, in the midst of huge

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[67] Samuel L. Leiter, *The Encyclopedia of the New York Stage, 1940-1950* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).

[68] For a precise breakdown of the audiences that saw Victory Players' productions, see Appendix B.

pieces of factory machinery."[69]

Addressing the Wing's executive board, Allen noted,

> Typical of the assignments the Victory Players have been filling is the following: Local 65 of the United Wholesale and Warehouse Workers Union wanted to have their entire membership see our Blood Donor sketch, but their membership is so large that it could not possibly be covered in a single performance. We therefore played the sketch for them 12 different times within two weeks — sometimes twice in one night. None of the audiences numbered less than 300 and many of them were as large as 1,000, and in each case the percentage of blood donors pledged was very high.[70]

In their most productive week of operation during the war, the Victory Players gave 27 performances.[71]

Although the extant records do not address the issue of the production costs incurred by the Victory Players, especially after August 1943 when they separated from the Speakers' Bureau, it is possible to speculate. As noted, the costs assumed in sending a single speaker were estimated to be $1.65. If such items as script reproduction costs, transportation, refreshments (if not provided by the host organization), occasional costume rental or construction are included, and we hypothesize that the average Victory Players presentation required an advance man and three performers, then it is reasonable

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[69] Ridenour, "Facts."

[70] Executive Board Minutes, 19 January 1944.

[71] Executive Board Minutes, 15 May 1945.

to approximate the cost of a single performance to be between $3.00 and $6.00. Based on that assessment, and with the knowledge that the Wing did not charge any fees for its performances, it can be assumed that the Victory Players program may have cost the American Theatre Wing War Service as much as $12,000 over the course of the war.

The success of the dramas led a number of government agencies to seek permission from the American Theatre Wing to copy and distribute scripts. The most reproduced play was Esther Hawley's war bond sketch, *To Ease Their Hurt*, with the U. S. Treasury disbursing over 47,000 copies to 17 states. *The Sandbox*, a drama dealing with child care issues written by Jeanette Dowling, was sent to amateur theatre groups in 22 states. It was also sent to groups in two Allied nations, Canada and Australia. The total number of scripts sent out by the Wing, the Treasury, and other agencies by the end of the war reached more than 133,000. In all respects, the Victory Players and the plays written for them demonstrated that, as the *New York Times* reported, "theatre could be an instrument for important war work was well as for entertainment."[72]

The end of the war was not, however, the end of the Victory Players. In a letter to Antoinette Perry dated more than seven months after victory was achieved in Europe and three months after the signing of the armistice with Japan, Vera Allen discussed requests from the American Red Cross and the War Finance Committee of the Treasury Department for postwar sketches to aid in continuing fund raising and bond sales campaigns. According to the letter, Allen felt confident that the two requests "constitute a

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[72] Stephen Alexander, "Playing for Victory," *New York Times*, 26 November 1944, sec. 2.

very concrete demand for our services," and she supported the idea that the Players should be established on "a more permanent basis."[73] The minutes of the executive board indicate that additional sketches dealing with the shortages of some staple food items were produced for the Famine Emergency Committee of the U. S. Department of Agriculture in 1946, and that two other sketches were written after the armistice by Esther Hawley "dealing with the veteran in the postwar world, based on material provided by the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and the Veterans' Service Center." Another 1946 sketch, this one "about the effects of the war on young children," was to be written by Lawrence Klee "from material provided by the New York Committee on Mental Hygiene."[74] This type of continued interest after the war led the Wing's leadership to rename the play production unit the Community Players. Under this new name, the group continued to perform educational dramas up to the late 1950s, with most of their scripts dealing with social welfare issues.

America Goes to War

The last work of home front propaganda to be discussed as part of this study is a book put out by the American Theatre Wing War Service in 1942, shortly after the United States entered the war. Published by Columbia Educational Books and edited by Harold Lee Hitchens, *America Goes to War* was planned as a fund-raising device as well as "a

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[73] Vera Allen to Antoinette Perry, 4 December 1945. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[74] Executive Board Minutes, 17 April 1946.

background for understanding how and why we went to war and what we are fighting for." Included in the book are maps showing the ranges of various types of U. S. Army planes, all four stanzas of lyrics to the "Star Spangled Banner," and more than a dozen important texts related to the war, including the President's War Message, speeches of Hitler and Mussolini, and British Prime Minister Churchill's address given to Congress on 26 December 1941.

In her introduction to the book, Rachel Crothers framed the world conflict for the reader:

> This is not simply a war between nations but a war between good and evil. America is beginning to realize that if good is to be victorious, America must not only stand and fight with her Allies but must in the long run bear the heaviest part of the burden in men — munitions — money and moral courage.
>
> Slow to realize this — slow to accept it — slow to gather her power — America is now beginning to pour that power over the dam in a flood that will sweep away the enemy and save the world.
>
> Onto her young free strong shoulders she is lifting her riches and her might to fight for all the she believes is worth living for — to keep freedom and civilization and God in the world.[75]

Crothers's comments frame the conflict in the simplest terms, and present the reader with a confident belief in America and its role in the war.

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[75] Rachel Crothers, introduction to *America Goes to War*, ed. Harold Lee Hitchens (Chicago: Columbia Educational Books, 1942).

The last section of the book is arranged to serve as a place for the book's owner to keep a written account of his or her experiences during the war. The reader was encouraged to "keep a record of relatives and friends who serve in the armed forces or in defense plants. Get their autographs. List civilian defense, Red Cross, or other activities undertaken by you and your family." Pages were included for readers to make periodic entries, reflecting on how they felt as the events of the war evolved. "In our homes, in our factories, in our armed forces," the text states, "HISTORY is unfolding the pageant of American patriotism. You are living in the greatest era in American history and you, or people you know, are helping to create that history. The events recorded in these pages are likely to be the most significant experiences of your life, and the ones most worth remembering. Don't trust your memory."[76]

At a time in American publishing when the average reader was turning from fiction toward books that addressed the issues being resolved in the war, the Wing's pocket-sized book had an immediate appeal. The Theatre Wing planned to sell 500,000 copies nationwide in order to raise money to support their war-related work. Their sales campaign kicked off in New York in March 1942. For an entire week Broadway, Hollywood, and radio celebrities sold the book at Bloomingdale's Department Store for fifty cents a copy. A newspaper account of the drive noted that "the guest salesmen, who worked in hourly shifts behind the book counter, included Tallulah Bankhead, Howard Lindsay, Dorothy Stickney, Helen Menken, Rosemany Lane, Bert Lytell and Rachel

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[76] *America Goes to War*, 193.

Crothers, president of the Theatre Wing." On the first day of the promotion, more than 800 copies were sold, many of them autographed by the stars.[77]

The American Theatre Wing War Service's Speakers' Bureau, Victory Players, and publication of *America Goes to War* were just three of the many efforts made by a wide variety of groups attempting to disseminate war-related information to the citizenry during the war. The Wing's audience was never as large as that enjoyed by radio, the print media, or the motion picture industry, but it was considerable within the major cities where it had a presence. When compared to the highly efficient, advanced technologies used by such groups as the Writers' War Board and War Advertising Council, Hollywood's War Activities Committee, and the radio campaigns organized by the OWI, the Wing's efforts might be considered primitive.[78] However, the physical presence of a live speaker or live performance gave the Wing's efforts an unique quality and may have made them additionally effective. Historian and social critic Maureen Honey has noted that during World War II, the purpose of propaganda on the home front was "to inspire a feeling of collective responsibility, selfless dedication to winning the war, and solid

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[77] "Theatre Wing Book Sale, *New York Times*, 3 March 1942.

[78] Four weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Advertising Council was founded and incorporated as a non-profit organization that brought together the government, the media, corporate sponsors, and the advertising industry to support the war effort through public service advertising. Renamed the War Advertising Council a year later in 1943, the organization's mission was to support the war. With public service advertisements in publications, on billboards, and over the airwaves it encouraged people to become involved in the home front effort.

In June 1940 Hollywood established the New York-based Motion Picture Committee Cooperating for National Defense. For the next two years, the committee assisted the federal government in informing the American people with regard to vital aspects of the defense effort through newsreels. Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor the committee changed its name to the War Activities Committee.

identification of civilian activity with men overseas."[79] Through the oratorical presentations of the Speakers' Bureau, the dramatic productions of the Victory Players, and the collection of historical documents published under its banner, the American Theatre Wing, the theatre industry's primary war-service organization, made a significant contribution to the overall success of the home front effort.

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[79] Honey, *Rosie the Riveter*, 83.

3.

On the Production Front

Of the many changes that took place in American society during the war, perhaps the most spectacular were those connected with the transformation of business and industry to a wartime footing. In order to meet the demands of the U. S. military and all of its allies, existing production facilities were converted into what President Roosevelt called the "arsenal for democracy." Old factories were retooled, new factories built, and production shift schedules expanded to operate at full capacity twenty-four hours a day at least six days a week. Labor unions agreed to refrain from strikes for the duration of the conflict, and consumers adapted to the shortage of new consumer products.[1] To support the industrial front, the American Theatre Wing War Service created two significant service programs, the Lunchtime Follies and the War Production Training program. In this chapter those programs will be examined in detail.

In September 1940, President Roosevelt declared a national state of emergency and created the Office of Emergency Management to begin the process of preparing the nation for the possibility of war. Included in those plans was the reconfiguration of American factories to meet the demands of a large military action. Historian Stephen Ambrose notes, "A nation that had been stuck in the doldrums of the Great Depression for ten years, unable to figure out how to put people back to work or to utilize its industrial plant

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[1] The one exception to the "no strike" agreement was the United Mine Workers Union. President John L. Lewis took his miners out on strike four times during the war.

at even half capacity, responded to the stimulus of the war with an industrial mobilization that was staggering in scope and stunningly successful."[2]

In March 1941, the United States Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act which authorized the President to provide to America's friends military goods, humanitarian supplies, and some strategic services. This allowed Roosevelt to send tons of food and military hardware directly to the British, and after June 1941, to the Russians. To meet the new demand for war commodities, those who were not drafted into the armed forces, according to historian Donald Rogers, "trooped off to the hiring offices whistling 'Chattanooga Choo Choo' and 'Deep in the Heart of Texas,' and soon it was a 'workers' market. There were more jobs available than there were people to fill them, possibly for the first time since America was an infant nation."[3]

The Lunchtime Follies

In January 1942, Roosevelt called upon American factories to gear up for war production. Stephen Ambrose reports that FDR's charge to industry was for it to produce "an annual 125,000 planes, 75,000 tanks, and 8,000,000 deadweight tons of shipping."[4] To meet those ambitious goals, new bureaucracies sprang up to manage every aspect of industrial production. The Office of Production Management (later known as the War Production Board) was responsible for the overall regulation and direction of the nation's

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[2] Stephen Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II* (New York: Viking, 1997), 424.

[3] Donald I. Rogers, *Since You Went Away* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1973), 38.

[4] Ambrose, *American Heritage New History of World War II*, 425.

production output, while smaller, more specialized groups saw to it that specific industrial objectives were met. The War Labor Board, the War Manpower Commission, the War Relocation Authority, the War Shipping Administration, the Office of War Mobilization, the Office of Scientific Research and Development, the Office of Defense Transportation, the Army and Navy Munitions Board, the Defense Plant Corporation, the Defense Supplies Corporation, the Metals Reserve Corporation, and the Office of Lend-Lease Administration all helped to produce the remarkable metamorphosis that characterized the war years in American factories and shipyards.

Coincident with the demand for increased production came increased pressure on the average American industrial employee to work harder, put in longer days, and produce more efficiently. As one account put it, "the factory worker had become as much a part of the war as the soldier."[5] To help those laboring on the production front cope with the stresses of a forty-eight hour workweek and the dangers associated with munitions manufacturing, the American Theatre Wing created a program that brought entertainment to the workplace. This plan included a series of brief, variety-show amusements presented in American factories and shipyards and called the Lunchtime Follies.[6] The Follies featured musicians, singers, dancers, nightclub and vaudeville comedians, and Broadway actors and actresses who performed for workers at defense-related industry plants during

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[5] *Life Goes to War*, ed. David E. Scherman (New York: Time-Life Films, 1977), 192.

[6] The program was originally called the Lunch Hour Follies, but the name was changed shortly after it launched operations. The reasons for the name change are not clear, but it is probably because the Follies programs rarely lasted an entire hour. The flexibility of the programs in terms of the duration of performance would become a major selling point as the Wing attempted to interest manufacturers in sponsoring the entertainments in their workplaces.

the workers' scheduled mealtime breaks. Government leaders, industry heads, union bosses, and most important, the thousands of workers who saw and enjoyed the programs, praised the Lunchtime Follies' contribution to the home front production effort. In terms of both their entertainment value and ideological content, the Lunchtime Follies was an effective theatrical venture.

In the following account of the program, two points should be noted in advance. First, the emphasis here will be on American Theatre Wing efforts that served the New York/New Jersey area. Although the intent of the Follies organizers was to create a form of entertainment that could be presented in factories, workshops, and shipyards all across the country, only on the East Coast and later the West Coast was this possible. As will be shown later, getting the Follies programs to the rest of the nation was a problem that the Wing only partially solved. Secondly, the reader should be aware that there only a small amount of material created for the Follies survives. Equally scarce are the supporting documents that detail the administrative aspects of the endeavor. Thus, some of the most interesting aspects of the Follies programs can be dealt with only superficially. Detailed financial records, a roster of all of the performers who donated time and talent to the program, and the scripts and songs they performed could not be found. Most of the information presented in this chapter comes from early newspaper reviews, reports given to the Wing's executive board, and a small number of feature articles published in magazines.

To locate the source of the idea for the Lunchtime Follies it is necessary to look first to Great Britain in 1939. In his book *The Theatre at War* (1958), British director Basil

Dean documents the origin of the British equivalent of the Theatre Wing, the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). This assemblage of performing artists, entertainment industry trade unions, and managerial associations was formed as part of England's home front campaign in its battle against the forces of Hitler and the Third Reich. Among the many programs administrated by ENSA was a series of mealtime entertainments presented to defense plant workers and operated under the coined name of "ENSAtainments." After ENSA accomplished the difficult process of securing permissions from the military, government, and business leaders, it gave its first performance at the Woolwich Arsenal on 22 July 1940. Through "a process of trial and error" a performance format was developed that included singers, comedians, pianists, and military bands. At its peak the British factory entertainment program had up to two hundred small performance troupes visiting ordnance plants, factories, and labor union halls in locations all across the island nation. The entertainment programs provided a needed diversion from the pressures of wartime production, and measurably increased the productivity of the workers. Dean cites one factory superintendent's claim that "a definite improvement of 5 percent in output" was realized after each ENSA performance. Dean also notes that he shared the idea for the British program with his American theatrical colleagues.[7] In late 1939, while the ENSA program was still in its preparatory stage, Dean visited the United States and distributed an outline of his proposed plan among influential members of the New York theatre community. "I spent much of my time," Dean remarks, "like an itinerant preacher, distributing copies of my pamphlet to

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[7] Basil Dean, *The Theatre at War* (London: George G. Harrap, 1958), 136-137.

incredulous theatrical friends."[8]

When the Japanese attacked the United States in December 1941, playwright Moss Hart, actress Aline MacMahon, producer Kermit Bloomgarden, and actor/producer George Heller, under the auspices of the American Theatre Wing, began to organize an American version of the ENSA program. The Lunchtime Follies, although modeled on the ENSA program, had a number of significant differences that will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Theatre Wing initially anticipated two different benefits from the industrial variety shows. The primary goal of the program was, of course, to help increase wartime production by providing recreation for the workers. However, the Wing's executive board also recognized that the Follies would expose many blue collar workers to the enjoyment of live dramatic entertainment and might have the additional advantage of helping to expand the potential Broadway audience. It was even suggested at the board's 17 June 1942 meeting that a large enough factory entertainment program might be the starting point for a National Theatre.[9]

Logistically the Follies relied on the cooperation and support of several non-theatrical organizations. From the outset the program needed approval from the United States Department of Labor, the War Production Board, and the National Security Agency. Munition plants, military shipyards, and aircraft manufacturing facilities were, at

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[8] Ibid., 34.

[9] Executive Board Minutes, 17 June 1942.

the time, operating under strict security regulations to thwart the efforts of Axis spies and saboteurs. Occasionally, permission for Follies performances at these high security locations had to come directly from the government. Performers frequently had factory police escorts to and from the front gates and were required to wear large identification badges showing that they were approved guests. According to the *New York Times*, in some venues security regulations were so strict that IDs had to be worn on stage, "with the result that round pasteboard disks [were] seen dangling incongruously from pink satin [sic] tights."[10]

Because gasoline and automobile tire rationing had placed severe restrictions on personal travel, transportation to and from the work sites for performers, technicians, and the theatrical equipment necessary to stage the shows was handled in a variety of ways. When available, the production troupes used commercial buses or scheduled rail service. In some situations, the American Women's Volunteer Service provided automobile transportation for the five to fifty miles between bookings.

One of the consistently troublesome aspects of the factory entertainment program was directly related to its funding. American Theatre Wing financial records indicate that $10,000 was allocated to cover the Follies' start-up cost. The Wing's board of directors fully expected the program to continue by finding alternative funding sources. Early in the program, a newspaper reported that "it was proposed that the AFL and CIO be

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[10] "Lunchtime Follies, S. R. O.," *New York Times Magazine*, 11 July 1943, 8.

propositioned to finance the project, but that was quickly found impractical."[11] To create interest in the program, some early performances were presented free of charge, or for fees that did not fully cover production costs. Even after the program had experienced some success, Rachel Crothers, head of the Wing, suggested that the program be discontinued because "the Follies may not have justified the amount of money spent on them."[12] In the Follies' defense, Bloomgarden cited an increase in future bookings and outlined a plan to make the Follies self-sufficient by eliminating all free performances. The board agreed at that time to let the Follies continue, provided each interested production facility accepted primary financial responsibility for a Follies visit.

In order to increase industry's interest in the program, a color brochure was produced and distributed. The rationale behind the Follies was explained there. "Just as amusement and recreation are vital to the men in our armed forces, so are they essential to the workers on the home front, the men on assembly lines, the men who turn out our tanks, planes, guns and ships." In the pamphlet's text the quality and adaptability of the programs were touted.

> These shows are given by professionals from the stage, screen and radio, and are written and prepared by some of the foremost writers in the entertainment field. They comprise anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour of a great variety of fast and furious fun. It is the conviction of both the

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[11] "'Lunch Follies', Shows For War Workers, May Adopt Plan for Touring," n. p., n. p. Found in the American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[12] Executive Board Minutes, January 27, 1943.

> American Theatre Wing and the heads of war effort plants with whom the plan has been discussed that these shows will increase production output, provide a welcome recess from the monotony of manual toil, and add to the *esprit de corps* of the workers whom they entertain.[13]

Along with the Wing's own assessment of its work place program, the brochure contained reprinted newspaper accounts extolling the first two Follies performances, as well as copies of letters of appreciation and praise coming from the War Production Board, the American Federation of Labor, and the two shipyards where the earliest performances took place.

To book a performance, factory management would contact the Wing, arrange a date, agree to provide some sort of temporary stage for the players, and compensate the performers and crews for their efforts. According to a 1942 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, fees for each Lunchtime Follies visit ranged from $200 to $650, depending on both the number of performers and shows given.[14] For example, the Curtiss Wright factory in New Jersey paid $650 for six performances over a two day period.[15] Performances were typically scheduled to coincide with the meal breaks of the workers, and in many cases the shows would be repeated two or three times at the same factory, enabling each shift of workers to enjoy the Follies. It was not unusual for a troupe to

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[13] "The American Theatre Wing Presents the Lunch Hour Follies," n. d. Private collection.

[14] *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 October 1942. American Theatre Wing scrapbook. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[15] Unidentified article fragment found in the scrapbook of the American Theatre Wing. New York Pubic Library for the Performing Arts.

perform at noon, 8:00 P.M., and again at 4:00 A.M. By the end of the war, the American Theatre Wing's total contribution to the program amounted to $34,181.02, most of that amount being used to pay for a full-time advance man, publicity materials, and associated administrative costs.[16]

More than 500 performers, dancers, and musicians auditioned for the Follies programs, and the Wing usually had as many as 150 performers on call. The American Theatre Wing held one of the first auditions at the Lyceum Theatre near the end of July 1942. "Singers, dancers, specialty acts, masters of ceremony, magicians, and all other types of variety actors" were invited to join the Follies' "talent pool."[17] As the popularity of the program increased, up to six troupes of from ten to twelve performers would be operating simultaneously at different locations along the East Coast. Many Broadway and nightclub stars donated their time and talent, while others in the troupe were paid $10 per day on out-of-town trips and $7.50 when performances were staged near New York City. These flexible compensation arrangements suggest the cooperation of the entertainers' unions. Technical personnel accompanied the troupes to dress the stage and set up and operate a sound system that was, commonly, no more than a single microphone and several large speakers. Flexibility was also the guiding principle regarding stage decoration. Simple unframed cloth backdrops were frequently used to decorate the stage, while many of the stage properties used by the performers, such as a piano, desks, tables,

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[16] "The American Theatre War Wing Service Financial Statement as of 31 December 1945," Pinto, Winokur, and Pagano, Inc., New York. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[17] "Talent Registration," *New York Post*, 20 July 1942.

and chairs were borrowed from the host factory's own inventory.

To supplement the dramatic material donated to the Follies by established playwrights and song writers, the American Theatre Wing sponsored a play and song writing contest open to the general public. The contest offered U. S. war bonds as prizes, and guidelines for submissions requested that sketches require no more than two to four performers, take no longer than ten minutes for performance, and be capable of production on simple stages without extensive scenery, properties, or costumes. The report of the National Contest Committee, dated 5 January 1944, shows that it received slightly more than 1,000 song entries, and more than 260 sketches and short plays. The report adds that though it awarded 39 prizes, "very little material was received that would be suitable" for use by the professional performers involved in the Follies.[18]

Although this venture was originally scheduled to open at a factory in Schenectady, New York, the American Theatre Wing gave the first Lunch Hour Follies at the Wheeler Shipbuilding complex near New York City on 8 June 1942, just four days after the Battle of Midway where the American Navy sank four Japanese aircraft carriers. A second Follies performance was then staged at Todd Shipyards in Brooklyn on 22 June.[19] Nine days after the first presentation, Lt. J. D. Gassford, representative of the 3rd Naval District, spoke to the Wing's executive board. Gassford stated that he had conferred with leaders of the shipyard where the Follies had been presented, as well as with the admiral in

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[18] "Report of the National Contest Committee, January 5,1944," American Theatre Wing Archives, New York. There is some indication that at least two of the sketches from the contest were considered for production by the Victory Players.

[19] "Whistle While You Work," *New York Times*, 23 June 1943.

charge of American naval shipbuilding on the East Coast. According to Gassford, they all believed that "if we can keep them [the workers] going with light speeches, entertainment, etc., it . . . would be a vital contribution to the war effort."[20]

Over the next four years, hundreds of fifteen to fifty minute programs were presented in Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Norfolk, Connecticut, and in many locations in New York and New Jersey. Crowds of up to 8,000 workers in war-related industries such as the Sperry Gyroscope Company, RCA-Victor, Revere Copper and Brass, the Maryland Drydock Company, the Rustless Ironworks, and a Curtiss Wright propeller factory sat on rough benches, scaffolding, and shipping crates, and perched on cranes, with sandwiches and sodas while popular entertainers including Milton Berle, Arlene Francis, George Jessel, impressionist and radio star Arthur Elmer, and singers and dancers such as Sunnie O'Dea, Ella Logan, Buddy and Judy Allen, and the Cole Sisters entertained them. In the first year alone, the Follies played to more than 250,000 workers in 55 war-related production facilities.[21]

Because of the program's necessary association with the government agencies in charge of wartime production, many original entertainments written for the Follies focused on topics suggested by either the War Production Board or industry leaders. In an Associated Press news story, Jean Meegan quotes actress Aline MacMahon as saying, "The War Production Board had a tasty list of troubles, . . . and we converted the

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[20] Executive Board Minutes, 17 June 1942.

[21] Lewis Nichols, "Lunchtime Follies," *New York Times*, 13 June 1943.

problems into entertainments."[22] In this matter, the Follies program was different from its English counterpart. The ENSAtainments, judging from Basil Dean's account, rarely attempted to address specific issues and focused instead on relaxation and escapism. In contrast, from the outset, both the writers and the associated producers saw the Follies as a potential instrument for worker indoctrination. In its focus on industrial output, the Follies program was comparable to the propagandistic performances given in factories for workers in Russia following the Communist Revolution.

For example, one of the Follies' most provocative and propagandistic musical numbers was a song called "On Time." First sung by Patricia Ryan at the RCA radio factory in Harrison, New Jersey, on 14 September 1942, "On Time" is blatantly propagandistic. Written by Harold Rome, the song is based on a specific suggestion coming from the plant's management, who were experiencing serious production delays due to worker tardiness and absenteeism that ran as high as seven percent. Sexually suggestive lyrics are employed to discourage no-shows and generally promote more productive work habits.

> Some men are lazy, some men are slow —
>
> But those are the kind that don't stand a show.
>
> Those absentee boys, now I think are mean
>
> They'd never get working on my machine.
>
> To handle my goods and tighten my slack

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[22] Jean Meegan, "Lunch-Time Follies," *World-Herald* (Omaha, NE), 14 February 1943. American Theatre Wing scrapbook. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Now I got no use for a stayaway Jack.

The man who stays home and lets his pals down

Won't get in my plant to turn my wheels around.

I can see by your smile — I can see by your style

That all you boys have something that I'd find worthwhile

'Cause I want a man who comes to work on time

Oh give me a man who's in there working right on time.[23]

Later in the war, the sexual innuendoes in this song might not have been as effective as women took over more and more factory jobs.

The federal government's request for assistance in getting an important production-related message to the general wartime labor force resulted in another highly propagandistic musical invention. Written at the request of the War Production Board and entitled "Sloppy Joe," this bit of musical indoctrination was intended to help reduce a high incidence of on-the-job accidents through an effective use of humor and ridicule. The song sarcastically depicts the danger and inefficiency of a "flippy, floppy, mopey, dopey" production-line worker who is always dropping tools, damaging equipment, injuring his coworkers, and disrupting production output.[24]

George S. Kaufman, who collaborated with Moss Hart in 1936 on the hit play *You Can't Take It With You*, reunited with Hart to produce at least three skits for the Follies,

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[23] Unidentified newspaper clipping, November 1942, American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[24] Arlene Wolf, "Lunchtime Follies, S. R. O.," *New York Times Magazine*, 11 July 1943, 18.

and possibly a fourth. All of the Kaufman and Hart contributions contain elements of war-related propaganda, but are less specifically rooted in the day to day reality of the factory or shipyard production line. Instead, the themes expressed in these sketches center on notions related to Americanism, support for the Allies, and promoting a greater animosity toward the enemy.

The first Kaufman and Hart skit, "Fun To Be Free," was an abbreviated adaptation of a Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur 1940 patriotic history pageant of the same name, with additional music written by Harold Rome.[25] Revised after Pearl Harbor, the full-length play was scheduled to open at the Adelphi Theatre on Broadway in early 1942. However, the revival of the pageant was delayed and finally canceled in March 1942 due to what the press labeled as internal friction.[26] Instead, "Fun To Be Free," a series of vignettes taken from moments in American history when freedom was thought to be in jeopardy, became the cornerstone of the first Follies presentation at the Wheeler shipyards in Brooklyn.

"The Man Who Went to Moscow," the second Kaufman and Hart piece, is described by Kaufman biographer Malcolm Goldstein as "a spoof of Hitler's attempt to conquer Russia."[27] A newspaper photo found in the American Theatre Wing scrapbook shows comic David Burns dressed as Hitler, complete with military jacket, arm band swastika, and fake moustache. The accompanying caption reads, "Herr Schicklegruber explodes as

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[25] For more information on the original production of the Hecht-MacArthur pageant, see my article "*Fun To Be Free*: Intervention Takes the Stage," *Journal of American Drama and Theater* 9:1. (Winter 1997): 36-53.

[26] "Stage News," *New York Times*, 26 March 1942.

[27] Malcolm Goldstein, *George S. Kaufman: His Life, His Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 362.

robot-like 'Nazi soldier' tries to follow incoherent commands."[28] On its surface this sketch vilifies and belittles the German dictator, making a fool of him, and according to the *New York Times*, it was "probably the big moment of the Follies."[29] Underneath its comic surface, the sketch was a reminder to the workers that Russia was bearing the brunt of the ground war in Europe and was at a critical stage in her struggle against the Nazis.[30] This was important because many of the armaments manufactured in the United States were sent directly to the Red Army as part of America's Lend-Lease commitment to Russia. The skit also portrayed the German dictator as a ranting, maniacal nincompoop whose illusions of grandeur, however humorous, posed a very real threat to civilization. Immediately following "The Man Who Went to Moscow," a Harold Rome song, "Gee, But It's Cold in Russia," was inserted into the program to underscore both the humor of the sketch and the Nazis' lack of success in conquering either the Russian soldiers or the Russian winter.

Minutes from the Wing's board meeting of 1 July 1942 note that while "The Man Who Went to Moscow" and "Gee, But It's Cold in Russia" were well received by the workers, board member Kermit Bloomgarden expressed concern about their characterization of the German leader. Bloomgarden "thought some of the skits presented at the Shipyard were quite unfunny," and went on to suggest that "Hitler ought not to be

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[28] Unidentified newspaper photo found in the American Theatre Wing scrapbook at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[29] "Whistle While You Work."

[30] In the summer of 1942, the German forces in Russia began an offensive that would result in the destruction of Stalingrad, and the deaths of untold Russian soldiers.

pictured in any way but as the dangerous menace he is."[31] The presentation of Hitler as a comic character was, of course, already familiar to Americans through Charlie Chaplin's 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*. Bloomgarden's concerns were noted by the board, but no further action appears to have been taken. David Burns, the actor who portrayed Hitler in the sketch, continued in the role up until July 1943 when he was drafted into the Army.

The third Kaufman and Hart skit, "Washington, D.C.," was first presented at the 22 June 1942 Todd Shipyards performance. This comic parody made fun of government red tape, bureaucratic nonsense, and the overall complexity of doing business in the nation's Capitol during the early stages of mobilization. Part of its humor came at the expense of the government's ever expanding alphabet soup of war time agencies, committees, and bureaus such as the WPB, OWI, OSS, WMC, OLLA, ODHWS, FDA, and the PWPGSJSISIACWPB.[32] By employing comedy to expose the wartime waste of time, manpower, and materials, the vignette suggests that the obstacles to an efficient prosecution of the war are merely logistical complications and that they are readily surmountable. The comic skit ultimately proclaims an entirely optimistic war-related message.

The fourth Kaufman and Hart sketch is *The Paperhanger*.[33] To date, no clear

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[31] Executive Board Minutes, 1 July 1942.

[32] The War Production Board, Office of War Information, Office of Strategic Services, War Manpower Commission, Office of Lend-Lease Administration, Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services, Food Distribution Administration, and the Pipe Wire Product and Galvanized Steel Jobbers Subcommittee of the Iron and Steel Industry Advisory Committee of the War Production Board.

[33] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, *The Paperhanger* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1943) The published script is printed on both sides of a single sheet of paper. Subsequent references will be noted in the text by reference to page number.

evidence has been found that positively confirms that the approximately ten-minute playlet was presented as part of the Follies. However, Malcolm Goldstein says that it was originally written "for this [the Lunchtime Follies] and other agencies."[34] Since the script meets the strict production requirements of the American Theatre Wing's program, it is reasonable to assume that it was performed as part of the Follies. Its inclusion in this study is particularly important because it is the only sketch of its type published as a complete text, and it offers the best opportunity to examine the blend of comedy and propaganda typical of so many skits presented in the Lunchtime Follies. As in the previously mentioned sketch, "The Man Who Went to Moscow," Hitler is the main character and, contrary to the wishes of board member Bloomgarden, is once again a figure worthy only of laughter and derision. In fact, the very title of the skit, which refers to Hitler's failure as a fine art painter, was a common pejorative used in the British and American press to refer to the German dictator.

The Paperhanger requires a cast of three men and only minimal properties: a ladder, a bucket, a wallpaper paste brush, and two lunch boxes. Two of the characters are costumed in white coveralls and the third in a dark business suit. The dramatic locale is the home of wealthy Mr. Blatz. The only scenic element required is a half-papered wall, probably represented by an unframed cloth drop. When the play begins, one character is facing upstage, apparently in the middle of a wallpaper job, and singing "I'll Be Loving You, Always." As the song ends, the man turns around and the audience sees his face for the first time. It is Adolf Hitler. Hitler stops working, sits on a nearby crate, and begins

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[34] Goldstein, *George S. Kaufman*, 362.

to sob. Another laborer then joins him on stage and initiates the following exchange.

WORKMAN. Why, Adolf, what's the matter?

HITLER. (Through his sobs) If only my mother was here. I miss her so.

WORKMAN. (Sympathetically.) Aw!

HITLER. Every day, just about this time, I used to kick her in the stomach.

WORKMAN. Your own mother?

HITLER. There was nobody else around.

WORKMAN. But my goodness, Adolf! What did she say when you kicked her?

HITLER. "Heil Hitler!"

WORKMAN. You're a very strange man, Adolf. Yesterday you threw a dog under a railroad train — why do you do such things?

HITLER. The dog looked Jewish (1).

From the outset of the piece, Hitler is portrayed as a wimpy buffoon and an anti-Semitic bully. Hitler's violence against his own mother and man's best friend are clearly beyond the bounds of logical behavior. Moreover, Hitler's rationalizations for these actions frame him as both a megalomaniac and a bigot. In subsequent exchanges with the workman Schultz, Hitler calls his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, the "biggest liar I ever met in my life, including me," and labels Herman Goering, the head of the German Luftwaffe, "a dope fiend but nice" (1).

As the action continues, Hitler steals from the workman, taking a big, beautiful apple, and offering in compensation "a little bit of a wormy apple" (1). In response to the

workman's protests Hitler explains, "There are three reasons that make it right. First, I am bigger than you are, second, I am a son of a bitch, and third, I wanted the apple" (1).

To make up for the unfair trade, Hitler suggests that they exchange sandwiches. The workman hands over his bologna sandwich for what Hitler promises is a "wonderful gooseliver [sic] sandwich with lettuce and tomatoes and pickles" (1). In reality, Hitler gives the workman nothing but two slices of bread. Once again Hitler justifies his treachery, this time pointing out that no one has dared to stop his villainy. "There is one thing I can't understand about people," Hitler states, "I tell them I am a son of a bitch, I prove it to them a hundred times a day, and still they don't believe me" (1).

The balance of the sketch is an allegory of Hitler's prewar manipulation of Russia, England, and the rest of Europe. Hitler first convinces the workman that if they murder Mr. Blatz, they can share ownership of his impressive house. After they sign a contract to that effect, Hitler distracts Blatz, and the workman kills him with a knife. Once the crime has been committed, Hitler reneges on the agreement, claims the house for himself, and forces the workman to finish the wallpaper job. Hitler tells the workman that Goebbels and Goering have already raped the workman's wife, and, if he does not follow orders, they will give cocaine to the workman's daughter and turn her against him as well. Hitler ends the sketch by turning to address the audience directly.

> Isn't it wonderful how they always believe me? It's not as though I kept it a secret — I come right out and tell them what I'm going to do. They just can't believe that anyone can be as big a bastard as I am. You know, you can't tell how far a fellow could go, with a nature like mine. If one man believes it, why

> shouldn't a whole lot of men believe it? Why shouldn't whole countries believe it? Yes, sir, I wouldn't be surprised if I've got hold of something. I'll bet you it's going to work. I have an intuition. Things are definitely coming my way. (And they are. At that moment Schultz, [the workman,] on the ladder above him, crowns him with a whole bucket of paste.) (2).

The Kaufman and Hart sketch ends with slapstick humor not unrelated to the traditional pie in the face, and was sure to please the audience. However, under the farcical surface of the presentation lies an important allegorical history lesson. Hitler's broken promises, coercion, and brutality, although trivialized for comic effect in the Follies sketch, recall the reality of the failure of appeasement and diplomacy that held the hopes of many in the world before the shooting war began. Blatz, like Poland and Czechoslovakia, is killed because his house represents something the Fuehrer says he wants, "Lebensraum"(2).

The character of Schultz, the skit's dramatic representation of the German people, is portrayed by the writers not as a willing participant in Hitler's oppressions, but as a victim. Although no evidence exists that explains the authors' reasoning behind this portrayal, it is possible that they intended this portrayal to differentiate between the dedicated Nazi party members who enthusiastically took part in the German subjugation of minorities and those Germans who, at first, did not fully understand the true nature of Hitler's political, social, and military agenda.[35] These Germans came to abhor the Reich's atrocities but generally took no direct action against Hitler's brutal regime. Hitler's exploitation of the workman

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[35] Historians Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann note that Hitler was elected by a plurality of votes and that the majority of Germans voted against the Nazi party.

in *The Paperhanger*, and the violence directed toward the man's family, forces Schultz into a reluctant submission. Only at the end of the sketch does Schultz rise up against the tyrant and take his revenge. The audience, even as they laugh at his comic madness, witness the tactics of terror and belligerence used by the Fuehrer to subjugate first his own people, and then an entire continent.

While broad comedy of this type was an important part of the Follies presentations, it was not the only propaganda strategy employed by the sketch writers. Kenneth White, author of the unsuccessful 1941 Broadway play, *The Lady Who Came to Stay*, collaborated with J. P. McEvoy to contribute a more serious vignette that is based on a real event in the European war. Entitled "Dnieperstroy," this sketch focuses on the destruction of the ten-year-old Dnieper River Dam by Russian workers and soldiers. "Acting under personal orders of Premier Joseph Stalin," Red Army General Semyon Budenny oversaw the destruction of "the most important source of power in Southeastern Russia, . . . releasing tons of muddy, swirling water to flood the lowlands below the delta."[36] The heroic maneuver was undertaken to "render relatively stable terrain useless" to the advancing Germans and cover the Russian retreat from the Ukraine.[37] "Dnieperstroy's" dramatic portrait of a nation under attack by the Nazi forces, the courageous Russian people, and their determination to survive no matter what the cost in property or human life, provided a poignant example of the kind of dedication and

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[36] "Dnieper Dam Reported Blown Up by Russians; Citizens Arming On Appeal to Save Leningrad; U.S. Considers Extending Credit to Moscow," *New York Times*, 21 August 1941.

[37] Ibid.

sacrifice needed by workers on the American home front. Another sketch, "The Destruction of the Dam," contributed by Warner Brothers' writer Robert Rossen, dealt with the same topic and became part of the Follies repertoire in late October 1942.[38]

Maxwell Anderson provided an additional somber sketch to the Follies that, unfortunately, resulted in some controversy for both the program and the playwright. "A Letter from Daddy," first presented at the Rustless Ironworks factory in January 1943, is a sentimental vignette based on an actual letter written by Navy pilot John J. Shea to his five-year-old son. The letter, made public by his widow, was delivered shortly after the flyer had gone down with his ship in the Pacific. Anderson's dramatization of the mother reading the missive to her son was criticized because he failed to acknowledge the letter's original author. Anderson was also faulted because he expunged a section of the letter that linked the Catholic religion with the flier's hope for his son's future.[39] Although Anderson's motive for this omission is not explained, it is possible that he was concerned about stirring the anti-Catholic bias present in the nation at the time. He may have also thought that by removing the specific religious reference, he would touch a wider audience.

In one Follies sketch, an unknown author established a humorous connection between the work being done in defense plants and the entertainment world of the celebrities. "Factory Footlights" was first performed at the Eberhard and Gould plant in

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[38] Unidentified newspaper article fragment, *New York Times*, 23 October 1942. American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[39] "Writer Criticized," Unidentified newspaper clipping found in the American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Irvington, New Jersey, in September 1942.[40] The skit parodied what would happen to Broadway if it employed factory production methods on the stage. The sketch's comedy provides much needed laughter but, more importantly, acknowledges the pressures and difficulties experienced by the workers in the audience, and, finally, praises their dedication to the production front. Other sketches known to have been contributed to the Follies came from writers such as George Oppenheimer, Ham Fisher, Zero Mostel, and many others. An article in the 10 June 1942 edition of *Variety* stated that the American Theatre Wing had secured promises from more than fifty American writers to provide ten-minute sketches for future Follies programs.[41]

As women replaced men on production lines, the songs and sketches used in the Follies changed as well. Harold Rome, one of the leading songwriters for the Follies, supplied a group of musical numbers that paid tribute to the crucial contributions made by women workers. Rome's song "Solid, Solid, Suzabelle," reportedly "concerned a damsel who was turned from less patriotic pursuits, . . . to the production of tanks, planes, and guns."[42] His 1943 song, "The Lady's On The Job" honored women workers as well.

Putting up her fancy clothes,

Rolling up her these and those,

Hard at work and pitching in to help us win,

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[40] "'Lunch Time Follies' Invades New Jersey, Lambs-Berlin Party," *New York News*, 10 September 1942.

[41] "1st 'Lunchtime Follies' Clicks at Shipbuilding Yard Near New York," *Variety*, 10 June 1942.

[42] "Entertainment for War Workers," *Philadelphia Record*, 23 September 1942.

THE LADY'S ON THE JOB![43]

This song would have been especially appreciated at one of the Follies' regular venues, the RCA factory in Harrison, New Jersey, where ninety percent of the employees were women.

Another popular number dedicated to the woman worker, "She Rolled Up Her Sleeves — She Hitched up Her Hose," was the subject of a photo layout in the *Omaha World-Herald* for 14 February 1943. One image reproduced there shows a chorus of six women singing the song, dressed in short skirts and kicking their legs Rockettes style. Although we would now view this image as sexist and politically incorrect, at the time it was probably viewed as an important acknowledgment of the women's contribution to achieving maximum product output and considered a positive glamorization of the woman's role in the workplace. This bit of propaganda was an important component of the government's campaign to convince women workers that doing factory work previously handled only by men would not affect their femininity or make them less attractive.[44]

Kurt Weill, the German refugee composer, not only collaborated with American lyricists on many musical numbers for the Lunchtime Follies, but served as head of the program's production committee as well. A song featured in the Follies and attributed to Weill and lyricist Lewis Allen was a tribute to the American worker entitled "Story of an

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[43] Harold Rome, "The Lady's On The Job" (New York: Kaycee Music, 1943).

[44] For more information on this aspect of the government's recruitment campaign, see: Maureen Honey, "Remembering Rosie: Advertising Images of Women in World War II," *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society*, eds. Kenneth Paul O'Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 83-106.

Inventory." It was first presented in 1943 at the Cramp Shipyard in Philadelphia. Loosely based on the children's rhyme "The House that Jack Built," the lyrics function as a reminder to the workers of how important each step in the factory production process is to the overall success of the American war effort.

A thousand ships were launched today,
A thousand subs are on their way,
A million planes are off, hooray! . . .
When ships go sailing down the ways,
When bombers roar and cannons blaze,
When men pass ammunition, praise
The man that worked the drill
That screwed the bolt
That held the shaft
That turned the wheel
That ran the belt
That made the things
That built the plane
That held the bomb
That dropped on Hitler![45]

In production, as they sang each line, chorus girls dressed in blue tights and red blouses held up oversized wooden props representing the items mentioned in the song, enabling

[45] Nichols, "Lunchtime Follies."

the audience to join with the cast in singing the refrain. They punctuated the final stanza of the song with a realistic sound effect of a dropping bomb played over the sound system.

Another audience participation number used in the Follies was a propagandistic version of the "Schnitzelbank" song. Using a large fabric backdrop with words and pictures painted on it to guide the audience's responses, the lead singer would introduce each stanza and the audience would join in singing the expanding chorus.

> Isn't this the setting sun, yes this is the setting sun (Japanese Flag)
>
> Isn't this the done for Hun, Yes this is the done for Hun (cartoon of a Nazi soldier),
>
> Heroes True (American military men), Heroes too (American workers with Union badges)
>
> Kick in the Panzer (German Tank), The only answer (bomb),
>
> Things to buy (War Bonds), Battle cry (National Unity), . . . [46]

Other songs included in the Follies during its operation were a gag song entitled "For Defense," a musical number that equated the front lines with the production lines. A Ted Mossman number, "Put Another Nail in Hitler's Coffin," was usually accompanied with a square dance performed by dancers dressed in "pert red farmerette outfits with straw hats." While the women "do-se-doed" on stage, the spectators joined with the cast in singing the chorus.

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[46] "Lunchtime Follies," *Rustless Recorder*, January 1943 (the *Rustless Recorder* was the in-house newsletter of the Rustless Ironworks), and "Lunch Time Show for RCA Employees," *Camden Courier* (NJ), 21 September 1942. American Theatre Wing scrapbook. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Put another nail in Hitler's coffin,

That's the way to win.

Dig the muddy ditch a little deeper,

And we'll dump him in.[47]

Popular standards, including "Deep in the Heart of Texas" and "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," and African-American spirituals, such as "The Walls of Jericho Come Tumblin' Down," were occasionally included and also allowed the audience to sing along with the performers. Communal singing not only got the audience more involved in the presentation but had the added benefit of creating comradery among the workers.

Factory and shipyard management hailed the Lunchtime Follies program for giving their workers an effective break from the routine of production line manufacture and for creating a greater sense of teamwork among their employees. In a letter to Kermit Bloomgarden and the American Theatre Wing, the management at Todd Shipyards praised the program and noted, "to say that our men enjoyed it, to say that their morale was helped greatly, and to say that they would like more of it, is but to be trite; you and the many representatives of the Theatre Wing were present to see how the men reacted to it."[48]

James McGary, an employee at the Todd Shipyards, witnessed his first Follies from a rooftop perch. In a 1942 *PM Magazine* article McGary is quoted expressing his desire for more lunchtime entertainments and acknowledging the program's quality. He said, "I

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[47] Arlene Wolf, "Lunchtime Follies, S. R. O."

[48] "The American Theatre Wing Presents The Lunch Hour Follies."

guess it's about the best performance I ever saw . . . the men know they're getting big-time entertainment. You can bet they really appreciate it."[49] The *New York World Telegram* quoted Frank Castillo, a nineteen-year-old apprentice at the same shipyard, who agreed with McGary, saying, "It's wonderful, . . . they ought to have more of them."[50]

In a *New York Times Magazine* article, a carpenter at a New York shipyard is reported as saying, "It gives us something to think about." In the same report, a plant supervisor noted, "It's the first time I've seen a smile on some of those faces for nearly four months. . . . Just the idea of bringing all of the workers together in one place at one time to enjoy themselves encourages teamwork." According to Arlene Wolf, the author of the piece, the noontime Follies presentation had a measurable effect on the shipyard's productivity. She notes, "The frame department pointed proudly to the fact that it had turned out fifteen of the frames used in the sides of invasion boats that afternoon, in contrast to the usual twelve or thirteen."[51]

An article on the Follies that appeared in *Factory Management and Maintenance* in November 1942 outlined exactly how it thought the program benefitted the nation's overall war production effort.

> Today it is generally agreed that the destiny of the United Nations will depend as surely upon the morale of the man in overalls as upon the man in uniform. Fatigue and boredom born of labor are as dangerous as any secret

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[49] "No Fun in War Work: Broadway Has a Cure," *PM Magazine*, 22 June 1942.

[50] "The Noon Whistle Blows and the Show is On," *New York World Telegram*, 22 June 1942.

[51] Arlene Wolf, "Lunchtime Follies, S. R. O."

> weapon the enemy might employ . . . this new service . . . is making a vital and significant contribution to the country's battle for production.[52]

Echoing this sentiment, an article in the 24 June 1943 issue of the *American* states, "You can't win a war if the morale on the home front isn't tops, and the variety shows . . . are the big morale boosters on the production front."[53]

By the end of 1943, according to *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Stewart Asher, manufacturers had acknowledged that "as morale sustainer and tempo tonic the shows are worth many times their financial outlay."[54] As industry looked forward to the end of the conflict and the return to consumer-oriented production, leaders interested in keeping productivity high considered several proposals that would continue to offer entertainment within the confines of the factory. Writing for *Variety*, George Rosen commented on the new relationship between business and entertainment.

> It is only since the advent of World War II that the value of entertainment as a contributing factor in attaining highest production levels in America has been recognized. Figures reveal increased production directly attributable to the theatre-for-the-factory, with the industrialists who have booked the Wing's 'Follies,' many of them for return engagements, now fully convinced of the morale value of carrying this new tool into the postwar period of reconversion.

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[52] "The American Theatre Wing Presents the Lunch-Hour Follies," *Factory Management and Maintenance*, November 1942, 90.

[53] "Lunchtime Follies," *American* (Cohoes, NY), 24 June 1943.

[54] Stuart Asher, "Lunchtime Follies for Workers in War Production," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Dated only 1943. Found in the American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

> . . . Picking up where 'Follies' leaves off, big business will retain the best proven features of the wartime industrial show biz and mold the new addition to its production line to fit the needs of private enterprise.[55]

Despite the measurable effect industrial entertainment programs had on productivity, they were not continued after the war ended.

The Follies were extremely popular with both war workers and business leaders in the East. In response to industry requests, and as New York writers, composers, and performers went west to Hollywood to get involved in the film industry, a similar Follies program began on the West Coast using motion picture writers and many of the nation's leading film players. As many as eleven Lunchtime Follies troupes performed simultaneously at the many munitions and aircraft production facilities located there.[56] Original material for the West Coast Follies came from such capable writers as Groucho Marx, Jerome Kern, and Ira Gershwin. Sketches and songs again served two purposes: entertainment and education. For example, one musical number performed in the West featured "The Fleagelhorm Welding School" and one of its students, Zelda the Welder. The musical sketch "glorifies the woman in war work in boogie-woogie rhythm." "You Look Better to Me Now," another West Coast Follies' song, "romanticizes the girl on the assembly line who is more alluring in overalls than in her party gown."[57] Clearly the West

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[55] George Rosen, "Plan Mail-Order Show," *Variety*, 1 December 1943.

[56] Although the format would have been similar to the East Coast Follies, it is likely that on the West Coast, the Japanese would have been the most prominent enemy portrayed in most of the Follies' presentations.

[57] Arlene Wolf, "Lunchtime Follies, S. R. O."

Coast Follies was acknowledging the tremendous contributions made in airplane and armament manufacture by thousands of newly employed women.

Hearing about the entertainment program's productive benefits, midwest manufacturers and workers expressed the desire for their own Follies program, but the shortage of professional talent in the heartland and the geographical distance between industrial centers made the proposal problematic. In response to those appeals, however, the American Theatre Wing offered two rather unusual variations of the Follies. In December of 1943, the Wing announced the availability of "Mail-order" Follies programs. Upon request, the Wing would send scripts containing sketches, songs, and ideas for soliciting local talent to interested factory groups. How well the mail-order program fared is not known, but its creation is a clear indication that plant managers and industrial leaders recognized the value of entertainment as a practical means of easing the pressure felt by workers on the wartime production line and increasing product output. In July of 1944, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the Theatre Wing, released a series of records that featured leading entertainers performing material from the Follies. Costing as little as fifteen cents each, "the platters [were seen] as the answer to the American Theatre Wing's problem of how to get the lunchtime follies [sic] to out-of-the-way plants in the face of transportation troubles and stars' booking problems."[58]

At the 11 August 1943 board meeting, Kermit Bloomgarden announced that the CIO was "planning a musical comedy to be produced originally in Detroit and then to

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[58] "Lunchtime Follies Put Out on Wax," Unidentified newspaper article dated 20 July 1944. American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

travel to other cities in which there are large war plants." According to Bloomgarden, the labor union group had recognized the benefits of workplace entertainment and was asking the Wing to help create a show that could tour the midwest. It should be remembered that while the Lunchtime Follies program was still in development, the idea of getting the AFL and the CIO to fund the venture was considered and rejected. Now the CIO was willing to put up $50,000 to launch its own version of the Follies to cover areas of the nation that were beyond the reach of the either the Wing's East Coast or West Coast operations. A contract prepared by the CIO was presented to the board and after being examined by the Theatre Wing's legal counsel, Sidney Fleisher, was rejected. Bloomgarden was instructed to relay the results of the board's deliberations to the CIO and to let them know that if they wished to reopen negotiations, they would have to make significant changes in the terms of the contract.[59] Unfortunately, the contract's particular sticking points are not specified in the board's minutes, and no further information about the proposed CIO production was found in researching this study.

The fame of the Lunchtime Follies program was so widespread both within the manufacturing community and beyond that it was almost instantly incorporated into the popular culture of the period. For example, in a *Black Terror* comic book published during the war, the story's hero is seen fighting hand-to-hand with Nazi saboteurs in an American industrial plant, while behind him, using the bed of a large truck for a stage, a group of scantily-clad chorus girls dances for an assembly of workers under a "Lunchtime

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[59] Executive Board Minutes, 11 August 1943.

Follies" banner.[60] Another example of the Follies being incorporated into other entertainments can be found in the 1944 film *Right Guy*, which contained a scene set in a factory where a Follies performance was in progress and provided background interest.[61]

The Lunchtime Follies was an extremely successful endeavor for the American Theatre Wing. Using a variety of entertainment forms, including songs, dances, stand up comedy, magic acts, novelty musicians, and dramatic sketches, the men and women of Broadway, Hollywood, radio, and the nightclub stages of New York brought much needed, and appreciated, amusement to war industry production workers. In cooperation with government and industry leaders many of the popular entertainments presented by the Follies addressed important national or production related issues such as absenteeism, job safety, and quality control. The skits and songs brought to the workers reinforced American commitment to her allies, acknowledged the bitter realities of life on the home front, and, if only temporarily, refreshed the workers' spirits. Designated as "one of the most astonishing institutions to come out of the war,"[62] the Lunchtime Follies prove that theatre has a unique potential to be both a therapeutic entertainment and a powerful motivational force when propaganda is intimately linked with popular amusement. Like the films, fictional stories, and radio dramas of the period that characterized the seriousness of the crisis facing the nation, the Lunchtime Follies sought to remind the

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[60] *Black Terror*,. n. p., 1943 (Single page found in the American Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts).

[61] Memorandum to Antoinette Perry, n.d. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[62] Unidentified clipping found in American Theatre Wing scrapbook, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

worker that his or her efforts on the factory assembly line or in the shipyard dry dock were no less critical to the nation's survival than the efforts of Allied soldiers and sailors.

The War Production Training Committee

In a separate program, the American Theatre Wing sought to do more than just entertain and inform the workers in war-related industries. It undertook to supply trained workers eager to assist in the production of war *matériel*. In the spring of 1942, the Theatre Wing's leadership established the War Production Training Committee and selected actor Edward Raquello to head the committee. The idea for the training program came, in part, directly from Raquello, a naturalized American of Polish extraction. Raquello reasoned:

> Actors, whose very stock in trade is an imitative instinct, can be taught very rapidly. Many of the skills used in the theatre are related or could be adapted quickly to similar tasks in other fields of war production. The technician can quickly be turned to precision work in a factory; the scene designer to camouflage, the stage carpenter to boat building, the costumer to uniforms, or the touring stage manager to traffic management.[63]

In addition, he believed that while the "main function of the theatrical profession in wartime is to aid morale," that was not enough.[64] Like others in the theatre who wanted to put their abilities to use helping to win the war, Raquello saw a need and sought to fill

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[63] "The Theatre Takes Census of Its Abilities," *New York Times*, 31 May 1942, sec. 8.

[64] Ibid.

it. Consequently, the War Production Training Committee was also created "in direct response to the demand of members of the profession who are at present over draft age or otherwise draft-exempt, and who are eager to engage in direct war activity on the industrial front."[65]

One of the first actions taken by the group was to stage a "Victory Enrollment Rally" in mid-April to "convert to industrial production in factories and other production centers those members of the entertainment world who are ready and willing to find an active part in the war production front."[66] At the rally, Paul V. McNutt, head of the War Manpower Commission, applauded the goals of the Theatre Wing's War Production Training Committee, noting that "the genius of the American entertainment field has made men understand the job they have to do."[67] The committee ended the rally by offering to each of the more than one thousand theatrical workers in attendance the chance to join training courses set up with the assistance of industries looking for war production workers.

To enlist even more workers from the ranks of the stage world, a plan was formulated to conduct a survey that included all the members of the theatrical professions. The object of the survey was to learn what skills were available among theatre workers and how many were free to fill war production jobs. Raquello and his associates went to a wide range of government and industry agencies collecting questionnaires, looking at the

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[65] "American Theatre Wing War Service: The Theatre Trains for War," *Theatre Arts*, May 1942, 351.

[66] Ibid.

[67] "Stage Aid in War Praised."

kinds of information they were most interested in learning. The Wing committee then wrote its own survey. Raquello approached IBM for help in formatting the census, and it provided an expert who set up the questionnaire in such a way that the responses could be quickly transferred to an automatic index card system. Next, Raquello secured membership lists from nineteen theatrical unions and sent a survey to each member. Each of the performers, stage hands, directors, and others who received the questionnaire were asked to list their "occupational skills and potential abilities."[68] Questions ranged from asking whether the respondent "had experience in any one of twenty-nine listed skills ranging from nursing to camouflage, how many languages he knows, what his hobbies are, whether the theatre alone has provided adequate income during the past three years, whether he already has or wishes to take training for some specialized branch of production, what his citizenship status is, what sort of work he did in the theatre."[69] Over 27,000 surveys were sent out by the committee, and nearly 5,000 were returned, representing a thirty percent return. Respondents ranged from "the top-priced star to the most obscure backstage hand." Those who answered the questionnaires were classified according to the specialities indicated in the responses.

The questionnaires revealed "an astonishing range of skilled people, most of whom are eager to do their part in the battle of production. Those whose questionnaires are now on file include men experienced in shipbuilding, concrete frame construction, traffic management, lathe and drill press operation, blueprint reading, photography and scores of

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[68] Executive Board Minutes, 3 June 1942.

[69] "The Theatre Takes Census."

other fields."[70] Those who were qualified were enrolled in training classes that typically lasted from six to twelve weeks and ended with placement in a war production industry.

In a report delivered to the American Theatre Wing's executive board in January 1943, Raquello noted that the "referrals toward war production employment opportunities has reached a total of 812." Some 206 theatre workers had been given aptitude tests and were awaiting assignments, 350 were enrolled in training courses, and 256 had been actually placed in war production factories in and around New York. The men and women who participated in the educational program ranged in age between 26 and 62, and included actors and actresses, vaudeville performers, writers, directors, musicians, and stage technicians. Several of the men were trained as instructors and placed in "an aeronautical school which is being used by the Army Air Corps to train ground crews in aviation maintenance and repair."[71] The head of the school wrote to thank the Theatre Wing for its assistance, noting "I have interviewed and hired men you have sent over and they are an excellent group."[72] In his report Raquello further noted that "the Radio Maintenance and Repair Course which we arranged with the Board of Education particularly for our people now has 141 persons enrolled, 90 percent are projectionists, for whom the course was especially designed, but it also includes several women, stage hands, musicians, and theatre managers."

One young actress, who took a war job on an aviation assembly line, sent a letter to

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Executive Board Minutes, 23 January 1943.

[72] Quoted by Raquello in his report to the Executive Board.

Raquello saying, "I have greater satisfaction in my work than any performance could give me." An actor, "who in his own words 'did not know the difference between a hammer and a saw' before taking training, is now an expediter with a large corporation supplying vital material to the Navy." In a 1943 newspaper interview, Raquello said, "Our people are energetic, contrary to the general notion that theatrical people are lazy; they are ambitious, lucid and make good progress and provide excellent material for being instructors."[73]

Although the programs designed by the Theatre Wing in support of the industrial front were only one element of the wartime mobilization of Broadway, they were very successful. According to all accounts, the Lunchtime Follies had a material effect on the morale and production of America's industrial army. The War Production Training Committee also exceeded expectations. It took trained theatrical workers and put them into service working in critical war-related industries or training others for vital war work. Both programs should be remembered as evidence of the theatre's creative contributions to the American war effort.

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[73] Irving Spiegel, "War and the Theatre," *New York Times*, 7 March 1943.

4.

For the Armed Services

The American Theatre Wing's early focus was to aid the civilian victims of the war in Europe. After Pearl Harbor, it was deeply involved in the task of mobilizing the American public. However, its primary commitment after the United States entered the war was to the care and comfort of the American soldiers, sailors, and flyers who would risk their lives in battle. To honor that charge the Wing created and maintained several programs. This chapter looks in detail at those efforts. The topics discussed here include the Stage Door Canteen, the Merchant Seamen's Club, and the series of Sunday afternoon tea dances that helped entertain female service personnel.

The Stage Door Canteen

After the end of the First World War, the American armed services fell into a steady decline. The public favored an international policy based on isolationism, and Congress was more interested in solving the social and economic problems associated with the Great Depression than rebuilding the nation's military forces. Thus, between 1919 and 1940, the strength of the American military waned. The number of Americans serving in the military dropped, and the United States Army and Navy's adoption of new technology slowed. The military decommissioned ships and closed training bases. As a result, when the storm clouds of war again appeared on the horizon, the American Army, Navy, and Army Air Corps were woefully unprepared. At its lowest point, in 1936, the Army had

only 110,000 men in uniform, while the Navy struggled to keep its ships afloat with fewer than 100,000 sailors. When hostilities in Europe were about to erupt into a real armed struggle, Congress, at the urging of President Roosevelt and the military leadership, passed several funding measures to begin the process of rebuilding and modernizing the American armed services. Early in 1940, they allocated more than $10,000,000,000 for this purpose. In September 1940, Congress passed the nation's first peacetime conscription law. The Selective Service Act called for a draft lottery that included all American men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-six. More than 16,000,000 men were required to register with the government by 16 October 1940. The draft had a target of putting 1,200,000 men into active military service, with an additional 800,000 trained and allocated to the Army or Navy reserves.[1]

All across the country, the government reopened old military training camps and built dozens more. However, training conditions were less than ideal in many areas. Shortages of such necessities as uniforms and weapons were experienced. Historian Donald Rogers reports, "The new draftees were sent to training camps in World War I gear, hand-me-downs from 1918. In the Carolinas and Georgia and Tennessee, woodworking factories were pressed into service to turn out wooden rifles for the trainees so they could get the 'feel' of them. At Fort McClellen [Alabama], soldiers used broomsticks to learn the manual of arms."[2] Another observer notes, "For a while the army was short of everything but bodies, but slowly the gears began to mesh. The Americans

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[1] James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II* (New York: Morrow, 1980), 119.

[2] Donald I. Rogers, *Since You Went Away* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1973), 27.

were slow to arm, but once they hit their stride, there would not be another country in the world capable of touching them, and American industrial and military might became one of the key elements in the entire war."[3]

New York and New Jersey were each important to the military's mobilization plan. New Jersey was home to one of the Army's largest training camps, Fort Dix, and New York State was the site of more than 200 Army and Navy facilities, ranging from specialized training schools to prime military training camps and hospitals.[4] New York City played a particularly important role as it served as the main point of embarkation for soldiers heading to Europe. An estimated 3,000,000 men passed through the Port of New York on their way across the Atlantic before the Allies declared victory in Europe. The city was also a major shipping point for war *matériel*, food, and other critical goods. With docking facilities able to accommodate more than 600 oceangoing vessels and with 39 active shipyards, New York City became "unquestionably the premier shipyard in the world" during the war, handling more than 63,000,000 tons of Allied supplies.[5]

Even before the momentous event of 7 December 1941, New York streets were teeming with soldiers, sailors, and merchant marines looking for a bit of entertainment while on leave or while waiting for their ships to leave port. Before America was drawn into the war, the theatre industry attempted to provide affordable entertainment to these

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[3] Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War II*, 119.

[4] Karl Drew Hartzell, *The Empire State At War: World War II* (New York: State of New York, 1949), 28.

[5] Joseph F. Meany Jr., "Port in a Storm: The Port of New York in World War II," n. d. *New York State Museum*. <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/hisportofnewyork.html> (15 November 2001).

men. Producer John Golden and actress Henrietta Jacobson, the wife of the well-known Yiddish actor Julius Adler, headed a plan that provided free or reduced price tickets and allowed service men to see some of the then current Broadway shows. Sponsored by the entertainment division of the City Committee on Defense Recreation, this ticket program distributed nearly 2,500 hundred passes to shows in its first two weekends of operation.[6] After Pearl Harbor and with the increased military presence in the city, it disbursed larger numbers of tickets to an even wider variety of events. Two months into 1942 the number of tickets to movies, museums, Broadway shows, variety shows, radio shows, and the circus had risen to 250,000, and by March 1943 that number exceeded 2,000,000.[7]

After Pearl Harbor, the American Theatre Wing took up the task of providing additional entertainment options to the men in uniform. Following the example of the World War I theatre-industry service group, the Stage Women's War Relief, the leadership of the Theatre Wing decided to set up and operate a canteen. In December 1941, they began planning for a servicemen's social center to be located somewhere in the Times Square district. The persons selected to serve as heads of the canteen committee were Selena Royale and veteran actress Jane Cowl.

Although the World War I theatre industry organization ran a canteen between 1917 and 1919, it was a relatively small operation. Their canteen was only open on Sundays, and only for a few hours during the afternoon and evening. In contrast, the average World War II serviceman could visit the Theatre Wing's Stage Door Canteen any night of the

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[6] Milton Bracker, "Service Men Get in Free," *New York Times*, 10 August 1941.

[7] "The World and the Theatre," *Theatre Arts*, March 1943, 135.

week between five-o'clock and midnight. During the war, the Canteen became one of the most popular and well-known programs created and run by the Theatre Wing.

The first issue the Wing's leadership had to contend with was finding a suitable location for its canteen. Broadway theatre owner and producer Lee Shubert had an empty space at 244 West 44th Street in midtown Manhattan, just a block away from Times Square. The basement of the Forty-fourth Street Theatre Building had formerly been a nightclub and was empty at the moment. On 7 February the Wing announced that Shubert had donated the space and agreed to pay the heating costs as well.[8] The main room of the club measured 80 feet by 40 feet and could hold up to 500 people at a time. Theatre designers, painters, set builders, and electricians then set to work making the space suitable for its new purpose. They built a small stage, installed lights, situated tables and chairs, and painted murals to decorate the walls. According to an article in the *New York Times*, donations of paint, lumber, and hundreds of man-hours of volunteer labor by the theatrical and stage craft unions kept the entire cost of the make-over to less than $100.[9]

At the same time as they were transforming the space, a call went out for volunteers to staff the servicemen's social center. On 17 February, the Canteen committee held a mass meeting at the Martin Beck Theatre to enlist workers. At the rally, Jane Cowl addressed the more than 700 attendees and explained the project's plan. A newspaper account reported that "Cowl made a plea for a hosts committee, composed of 'strong, stalwart men,' so that 'one or two a night will help us out in things that don't occur to

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[8] "Club Is To Be Canteen," *New York Times*, 7 February 1942.

[9] "Canteen Preview Brings Food Pile," *New York Times*, 1 March 1942.

women.' Also needed are 600 girls to be hostesses (250 have signed up to date) and cars for the motor corps which will transport food from donors to the center." The Canteen committee planned to provide the soldiers with snacks, most of which, it hoped, would come free of charge from the kitchens of midtown Manhattan restaurants and hotels. The light refreshments would include sandwiches, coffee, soda, bakery goods, and fresh fruit. "Enough condensed and fresh milk, coffee, 'cold cuts,' eggs, mayonnaise and tea have been guaranteed for the duration of the war, but so far no one has come along offering cigarettes and matches, doilies and paper napkins, and condiments, all of which are needed."[10] In addition to food, the Canteen would feature hostesses who could provide the feminine contact the men in the all-male services craved. At the meeting, Cowl warned young female volunteers that "if they signed up they would not only work for the duration, but if they were unable to appear at their allotted time they had to provide 'understudies.'"[11]

The Canteen committee also planned entertainment as a part of the endeavor, talent and good will being its most abundant assets. The project's managers hoped to have at least six acts perform nightly on the small stage, with variety being their watchword. All the performers were volunteers, and they represented every type of entertainment venue. The committee asked comics, novelty acts, magicians, jugglers, and singers to donate their time and talent to the Canteen. The management committee cautioned singers, however, not to sing songs that reminded the boys of the distances between them and their loved

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[10] "The Theatre Canteen Ready for Service," *New York Times*, 2 March 1942.

[11] "Stage Folk S. R. O. for Canteen Task," *New York Times*, 18 February 1942.

ones. Songs such as "Dear Mom," "White Cliffs of Dover," and "Miss You" were on the list of those that they should avoid. The other major entertainment option for the men in uniform would be dancing with the hostesses, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The American Theatre Wing War Service originally scheduled the opening of the Stage Door Canteen for 1 March 1942. However, it postponed this for one day. Because the operation of the Canteen would depend upon donations of food and money coming from the public at large and because they were going to restrict admittance to only enlisted men in the armed forces of the United States and its allies, the Wing allowed the general public access to the new social center for two days before its official debut. On Saturday, 28 February, members of the entertainment industry were invited to see the club, and in the afternoon and the evening of Sunday, 1 March, the general public was welcome to stop by. The "entrance fee" required on either day was a donation of a nonperishable food item to help stock the Canteen's pantry shelves. On the last day of preview, 3,500 people came to see the new service Canteen, bringing with them more than 1,500 pounds of sugar, along with generous quantities of peanut butter, jelly, canned goods, coffee, and tea. In return, they were able to sample the types of entertainments that were going to be regularly presented to the men in uniform. They were treated to performances by entertainers including Benay Venuta, a member of the *Porgy and Bess* cast, Gertrude Lawrence, Danny Kaye, Paul Draper, George Jessel, and Joe E. Lewis.[12]

The first night of the Canteen's regular operations was 2 March 1942, and it was

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[12] "Canteen Preview Brings Food Pile," *New York Times*, 1 March 1942.

handled by the press more like a play opening than a nightclub or restaurant. Brooks Atkinson wrote an extensive review of the event.

> It is the biggest hit Broadway has had for weeks. Within an hour 500 sandwiches had vanished down the gullets of the soldiers and sailors of the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, New Zealand and Australia: and the ladies and gentlemen of the theatre were rushing up further supplies to the biggest war front that has developed in the Times Square district. By 8:30 some of Broadway's most excitable statisticians figured the attendance at 1,000, and others jumped the gate to 1,500. Probably nobody knows how many service men poured in to the free supper club that has opened under the auspices of the American Theatre Wing, for at 10:30 more were coming in and only a few were going out.[13]

Along with enjoying the abundant supply of food, the opening night throng saw performances by Gertrude Lawrence and the cast of *Lady in the Dark*, dancers Carole and Sherot, comic Billy De Wolfe, actor Walter Pidgeon, and actress Tallulah Bankhead.

A commentary written by historian and author Karl Schriftgiesser begins by describing the Canteen as "probably the happiest hangout for service men on the loose in the big city." Schriftgiesser went on to recall his own first-time trip to the club.

> We found the room jam-packed with uniforms. Only a meager sign on the fire-escape of the theatre indicates the entrance. Narrow stairs lead down. If you are an entertainer come to put on an act, or a showgirl come to dance

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[13] Brooks Atkinson, "Curtain's Up at the Stage Door Canteen," *New York Times*, 3 March 1942.

> with the boys, or a famous critic come to act as bus boy at the tables (the Canteen has an excellent and well-stocked kitchen), you have to prove your identity before the burly doorman will let you in. . . . In the center of the room there is space for dancing. . . . One night an entire unit from one of the cleverest floor shows in town showed up with a name band, and another evening John Carradine proved again the universality of Shakespeare.[14]

Schriftgiesser's report on the Canteen probably increased its popularity with the men of the armed forces and may have helped the Wing in its efforts to keep the servicemen's club furnished with food and drink.

For the first week of the Canteen's operation, attendance estimates ranged between 8,000 and 10,000. The canteen restricted attendance to only enlisted men in the Allied armed forces and officers were not, typically, allowed to enter. This was done because the Army and Navy routinely provided special clubs on military bases for officers but neglected soldiers below the rank of lieutenant or sailors below the rank of ensign. The Wing's Canteen was specially created to benefit the average serviceman, not the upper ranks.

Although the Canteen could only hold about 500 servicemen, many times that many were served on a nightly basis. Those who were inside the Canteen were asked to limit their stay to an hour or two, so that others could come in to enjoy the food, entertainment, and company of the hostesses. This system of patron rotation worked fairly well because the servicemen had many other options open to them while on leave in New York. As

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[14] Karl Schriftgiesser, "An Ever-filled Canteen," *New York Times*, 5 April 1942, sec. 8.

already mentioned, there was a free ticket program that provided passes to a wide range of entertainment venues. There were also dance clubs, nightclubs, restaurants, and a host of other canteens. The Silver Screen Canteen, sponsored and operated by the female employees of local motion-picture companies, was open three nights a week, and served "a large number of visiting service men."[15] The Soldiers and Sailors Club, located on Lexington Avenue, also provided a canteen and recreational facilities for servicemen.[16] Sailors benefitted from the efforts of the New York Ships Service Committee, headed by Mrs. William Vanderbilt, and all service personnel enjoyed the hospitality of canteens managed by church groups, such as the four-story Cathedral Canteen, operated by the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine. Included in the list of canteens open to the Allied service man was the Community Canteen, situated in an empty store front in the Bronx, and staffed by the "Canteen Cuties," 300 volunteer girls who belonged to the Youth Committee of the Civilian Defense Volunteer Organization. The young women were willing dancing partners, worked on skits and variety shows, and engaged the men in conversation.[17]

The surprising success of the Stage Door Canteen forced the management committee to quickly find new methods of keeping the pantry stocked. On 25 March, the New York radio station WMCA asked its listeners to bring "non-perishable goods for the Stage Door Canteen with their admission tickets to studio broadcasts." Each morning the

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[15] "New Canteen Popular," *New York Times*, 23 May 1943.

[16] "Patriotic Groups Will Attend Service Organization Meeting," *New York Times*, 10 January 1943, sec. 2.

[17] "Canteen Triumph of Bronx Girls," *New York Times*, 22 August 1943.

Wing would pick up the items and take them to the kitchens in the basement of the Forty-fourth Street Theatre.[18] In early April, Paul Meltsner, a painter known for bright, almost garish industrial views and colorful, lively scenes of New York theatres and burlesques, opened a show at the Ferargil Galleries with proceeds from sales going to support the Canteen. Featured paintings included portraits of some of the nation's biggest stars, including Lynn Fontanne, Gertrude Lawrence, Marian Anderson, Martha Graham, Gypsy Rose Lee, Carmen Miranda, and John Barrymore.[19] Another fund-raising event, a benefit cocktail party, was held at the Essex House hotel in New York on 12 April. Two days later, actor Alfred Lunt held the first of several cooking classes from which the $1.50 tuition paid by those attending went directly to the Wing. Lunt displayed his culinary skills before a group of fifty women. According to newspaper reports, Lunt demonstrated "how to prepare a Sunday breakfast."[20]

During May, in a further effort to help pay the costs of the Canteen's operation, the Wing's leadership introduced a plan that would allow some civilians to visit the exclusive club. Five "sponsor's tables" were designated, and for $50 a non-military patron and three guests could see the same shows and eat the same food that the men in uniform were enjoying for free. The public's enthusiastic demand for the reserved seats at the hottest spot in town quickly led the Wing to raise the going price of the tables to $100.

The performers who entertained the troops at the Stage Door Canteen were many

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[18] "Asks Food Be Taken to Canteen," *New York Times*, 25 March 1942.

[19] "Art by Meltsner Will Aid Canteen," *New York Times*. 9 April 1942.

[20] "Lunt Shows His Skill as a Wartime Chef," *New York Times*, 15 April 1942.

and varied. Regular appearances were made by such notables as Gypsy Rose Lee, Celeste Holm, Ray Bolger, Danny Kaye, Jane Wyatt, Rita Hayworth, James Cagney, Merle Oberon, Bob Hope, Milton Berle, Bette Davis, and Irving Berlin. These leading Hollywood, Broadway, radio, and nightclub performers were augmented by the occasional special appearance by stars from the classical music world as well. Famed violinist Yehudi Menuhin, opera stars Marian Anderson, Gladys Swarthout, opera composer Deems Taylor, and pianist Eugene List, who performed while serving as a private in the Army, all appeared. The reception they received from the men in uniform demonstrated that "contrary to the popular impression, the soldiers, sailors and Marines like the concert and opera artists as much as the lighter and popular entertainers."[21] Many of the stars who performed at the Canteen were provided by the United Theatrical War Activities Committee, the agency which had the jurisdictional dispute with the American Theatre Wing War Service's Speakers' Bureau mentioned in Chapter Two.

A number of Broadway shows sent entire companies to entertain, usually doing a few of the musical numbers or comedy routines from their production. Included in the list of those that visited the Stage Door Canteen were *Porgy and Bess, This is the Army, Let's Face It, High Kickers, Sons o' Fun, Banjo Eyes,* and *Johnny 2 x 4.* In March of 1942, the *Silver Screen Revue*, Billy Rose's most recent musical extravaganza, packed up costumes, properties, and music scores after its regular Saturday night show and headed to the Canteen to do a complete repeat performance for the troops.[22] In a reversal of the

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[21] "Concert and Opera," *New York Times*, 13 September 1942, sec. 8.

[22] "Revue for Service Men," *New York Times*, 25 March 1942.

Lunchtime Follies program, the workers at the Bridgeport (Conn.) Brass Company appeared at the Stage Door Canteen in a condensed version of their original musical show dealing with the Navy. The revue, entitled *Ready!, Aim!, Fire!*, was said to "mark the first time war workers will entertain service men."[23] Even the Army sent entertainers to the club. In January 1943, an original revue entitled *General Disorders of 1943* was presented at the Canteen by eighteen soldiers of the Fort Hamilton Special Theatre Section. According to the *New York Times*, included in the revue was a comic skit "concerning the 'red-tape' encountered by a private trying to acquire a new shoestring for one which he had broken while 'running through a commando course.'"[24]

The volunteers who worked at the Canteen also contributed to the fun by creating and performing in their own one-hour entertainment. The *Canteen's Show*, which premiered on 18 August 1942, featured short skits and songs, including a new song, "That Eagle," written for the group by American poet Langston Hughes. The production had "music and lyrics by James Shelton, a couple of sketches that are better than average sketches, a torch song or so, a love song, tap dancing and a can-can dance done to a lyric that is something about 'the Stage Door can-can girls, sponsored by the can-canteen,' which gets across the general idea."[25] The successful production would subsequently be taken on tour to some of the military facilities near New York.

Band leaders such as Tommy Dorsey, Leo Dryer, Benny Goodman, and Fred

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[23] "War Workers' Show Due," *New York Times*, 17 August 1942.

[24] "Army Show at Canteen," *New York Times*, 20 January 1943.

[25] Lewis Nichols, "Hour Of Charm," *New York Times*, 4 September 1942.

Waring brought their groups to the basement hall and provided live dance music for the men. When Judy Garland visited the Canteen, the high spot of her performance was the duet she sang with band leader Johnny Mercer, who had written special lyrics for the hit standard "How About You" for the occasion.

(Judy) I like the Stage Door Canteen. How about you?

(Johnny) It's full of big marines. That's why you do.

(Judy) I like a uniform on the land or sea

(Johnny) What I like mostest is all the hostesses

(Judy) How about me?

(Johnny) Naturally.

(Judy) When I'm by a soldier's side, I can't resist.

(Johnny) I guess that maybe I'd better enlist.

(Judy) Mr. Mercer, I may be wrong, but I think we're on too long.

(Johnny) I think so too,

(Both) But we like us, how about you?[26]

Two songs took on special meaning for the Stage Door Canteen. In May 1942, Irving Berlin donated to the American Theatre Wing's Stage Door Canteen a song written for his all-soldier show, *This Is The Army*. "I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen" became the anthem for the club. In appreciation for his gift, Berlin and the entire cast of his hit Broadway production were honored at a luncheon sponsored by the Wing. There,

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[26] *Canteen Capers*, American Theatre Wing, Stage Door Canteen Newsletter, n. d. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Helen Hayes presented Berlin with a gold cigarette case, "declaring it to be 'crammed with the esteem, love and admiration of the American Theatre Wing War Service and the hearts of the cast and members of the profession.'"[27] The other special song was "Good Night, Sweetheart." At the end of each day's operations the song was played, indicating to everyone that it was time to close the Canteen. Hostesses and military personnel alike would join in to sing the refrain ending the evening's festivities.

Equal in importance to the stars who entertained the men were the stars and bit players who provided the basic services needed to run a busy social club. There were more than 200 men volunteers from the theatre profession who worked as hosts, waiters, coatroom attendants, and cooks. At various times during the war, such leading personalities as Alfred Lunt, Michael Todd, Vincent Price, Luther Adler, and Boris Karloff served as bus boys. The senior hostesses, women who acted as greeters, worked on food preparation, or doled out snacks to the men, were captained by Helen Hayes, Lynn Fontanne, Mrs. Oscar Hammerstein, Ruth Draper, and Katherine Cornell. The more than 600 young women who danced and chatted with the military men who visited the Canteen were led by actresses Virginia Kaye and Vivian Smolen, co-chairpersons of the Hostess Committee.[28] Those "junior hostesses" were, of course, the real draws for the Canteen. Any soldier or sailor, no matter which of the Allied nations he came from, could find a pretty face, a soothing voice, and a willing dance partner by coming to the Stage

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[27] "Berlin, 'Army' Cast Feted," *New York Times*, 19 September 1942.

[28] "American Theatre Wing War Service: The Theatre Plays Its Part in War," *Theatre Arts*, April 1942, 285.

Door Canteen. The female volunteers who served in this capacity were governed by a strict set of rules that were formulated to reduce any chance of inappropriate behavior either by the women themselves, or the men they entertained. Regardless of whether the canteen volunteers were stars or bit players, each had to have a Canteen pass in order to enter the club. Before receiving their pass, each would have the rules and regulations explained to them. If in doubt, they would have to provide proof that they were citizens of one of the Allied nations. The issue of citizenship would become a source of concern for the Wing's leadership, and will be addressed later in this chapter.

One of the more creative methods of explaining the regulations that governed the hostesses is found in the form of an instructional poem which was written in 1943. Entitled "Here's Looking at Ya!," the work begins by telling the women volunteers to "Read it carefully . . . sort of between the lines too . . . and see if perchance it will help to make a better 'woman' out of you. Take it with a grain or two of salt and laugh like we did while writing it." The entire poem provides such an informative view of the expectations the Wing held regarding the junior hostesses that it is worth presenting here in full.

So, now you are a hostess at the famous
Stage Door Canteen!
And you're more frightened than in all
your life you've ever been.
Well, pull yourself together and learn this
from all the rest

That once you get the hang of it, you'll

work with fun and zest.

The thing you must remember is to be a

happy gal —

An able conversationalist, a dancer and

a pal.

Also keep it in your mind your petticoat

to hide,

For skirts these days are very short and

when you dance they ride.

Your makeup should be subtle — keep it

natural, my dear;

And, are your stockings seams on straight

if noticed from the rear?

Please give your best attention when a show

is on the floor,

For actors like politeness or they won't

come any more.

And, speaking of attention, do you give it

without stint

To everyone you entertain? If not, this is

a hint.

You know your momma taught you, "Never

ask a man to dance,"

They **still prefer** to make some choice, so,

please give them a chance.

Don't slouch or slump when standing, nor

loll instead of sit —

Look brisk and pleasant and alert — you'll

be a bigger hit.

Don't brag or say you're sorry for what you

really are.

The boys will like you better if **you're**

natural — by far!

We'd also like to mention, in the aisles you

should not park.

The Fire Chief won't like it. And, is it

such a lark?

Don't let it fuss and bore you if the men are

far and few.

In that case, just amuse yourself. Find

other things to do.

Now that that much is settled, we set down

the regulations.

Though there aren't so very many, they're

as necessary as rations.

It's essential, in the first place, that **on time**

you come and leave.

To stay a little later, get the 'check-out'

Captain's reprieve.

Don't fail to bring, and show each time, **your**

own admittance card.

Because, if you don't have it, from the

dancing floor you're barred.

You know the rule on dating every night

you here appear.

Don't blame the rules too harshly; it's for

your protection, dear.

During any entertainment, guests upon the

floor may sit.

It's an old Canteen tradition and it won't

hurt you a bit.

Bring one of Dad's old hankies; spread it out

there nice and wide.

Who cares about a little dirt — you just

take it in your stride.

In conversing, we must warn you **talk of war**

must be taboo.

You'd be helping out the Axis — so, let this

be your cue.

We all try to do our best to make each time

we come complete,

That's the reason our Canteen is a favor-

ite place to meet.

Though the Canteen, **remember**, is for the

men in service,

A hostess must have fun, too, so, don't

you **dare** be nervous!

Anything that's puzzling, you'll not hesitate,

we trust,

To bring to our attention, so you'll not

remain nonplused.

To each of you our blessing. We're sure

you'll make the grade

And for all your time and effort feel

enormously repaid.[29]

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[29] "Here's Looking at Ya!," Eds. Elaine Fasciano et al. American Theatre Wing Stage Door Canteen of Cleveland, 1943. Private Collection. Emphasis appears in the original.

Through the efforts of the Canteen's leadership and all of the volunteers who took care of the day-to-day operations, the endeavor was a complete success. Figures compiled in early August 1942 indicate that, between the opening in March and the end of July, 320,000 servicemen had been to the club. Average attendance was estimated at 3,500 on week nights and 4,000 on weekends. Given the capacity of the club, these numbers indicate that there was a complete change in guests about every hour of operation. With crowds of this size, the Canteen kitchen was kept busy distributing weekly 14,000 sandwiches, 21,000 slices of cake, 23,000 cups of coffee, 7,000 half pints of milk, 185 pounds of candy, 42 crates of fresh fruit, and 35,000 cigarettes. Antoinette Perry estimated the cost to the American Theatre Wing per soldier was between 17 cents and 20 cents.[30] Using those figures, and basing an estimate on the reported number of weekly patrons, it is possible that the Canteen's monthly operating costs ranged between $17,000 and $20,000.

The costs involved continued to be a concern to the American Theatre Wing's executive board. All sorts of fund-raising events were held to benefit the project. Art shows, food festivals, and card parties were employed to help pay the costs of feeding the men who came to the club. In May the Canteen held an open house so that the pubic who had not attended the preview performances could see the night spot that was creating such a stir. A $2 admission fee was charged to help defray some of the expenses associated with its operation. However, the most promising fund-raising prospect was the interest in

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[30] "Statistics," American Theatre Wing, 30 July 1942. In the archives of the American Theatre Wing, New York.

the Canteen displayed by several film makers.

In April, just a month after its opening, three Hollywood companies contacted the Theatre Wing's board seeking permission to produce a movie based on the Canteen. Columbia Pictures offered to guarantee $15,000 to the Wing if it could produce "six two-reel shorts." It also proposed to give the Wing a fifteen percent interest in the net profits after production costs, distribution costs, and advertising costs were deducted. Paramount Pictures proffered a deal where it would pay $2,500 for exclusive rights to the name Stage Door Canteen, but stated it did not have a script yet. And finally, Sol Lesser, the independent owner of Principal Productions, expressed interest in doing a canteen project and asked the Wing what it would want in order to grant him the right to do so. At first, all three offers were rejected. Moreover, in order to protect itself, the Wing ordered Broadway producer Gilbert Miller and legal counsel Sidney Fleisher to "write to Washington and register, if possible, the name[s] 'Stage Door Canteen,' 'American Theatre Wing Canteen,' and 'American Theatre Wing Stage Door Canteen.'"[31] In later discussions with the Paramount Pictures, Miller, acting on behalf of the Theatre Wing, made a counter-offer that requested a $50,000 fee for the motion picture rights to the Stage Door Canteen, but the offer was refused by the studio. In the end, it was Sol Lesser who secured the rights to use the name of the Canteen.

Hollywood's interest in the Canteen was part of a larger movement in the media at that time to portray American military personnel in situations away from the battlefield. Films such as the comedy hits *Call Out the Marines* (1941), *The Fleet's In* (1941) starring

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[31] Executive Board Minutes, 8 April 1942.

Dorothy Lamour, and *Private Buckaroo* (1941), which featured the Andrew Sisters and Harry James and his Band in a USO entertainment venue, all emphasized plots that focused on the soldier or sailor out to have a good time while officially off duty. On Broadway, plays such as *Janie* (1942), *Victory Belles* (1943), *Something for the Boys* (1943) and *Strip for Action* (1942), similarly followed the formula of military men on leave and looking for adventure and romance.[32] Jerome Robbins created the ballet *Fancy Free* which opened 18 April 1944 at the Metropolitan Opera House and featured music by Leonard Bernstein. The involves three sailors on leave in New York City and glorified their "comaraderie, energy, and lechery."[33] It was not surprising then, for Hollywood to express interest in a New York nightclub that featured some of the biggest names in show business and catered exclusively to the man in uniform.

Lesser agreed that, after production costs, nearly all profits from the motion picture would be given to the American Theatre Wing. In return, the Wing would help to secure the services of stage stars who would appear in the picture without fee. By August over twenty of the nation's leading entertainers had agreed to the plan. Included in that group were Ray Bolger, Eddie Cantor, Katherine Cornell, Helen Hayes, Katherine Hepburn, Ralph Bellamy, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Sam Jaffe, Ethel Merman, Paul Muni, Johnny Weissmuller, Dame May Whitty, Ed Wynn, George Raft, and Judith Anderson. Lesser asked the Wing to inquire through its government contacts about the

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[32] A year after Lesser's film based on the Stage Door Canteen was released, the most famous of the Broadway musicals with a similar plot became a hit. *On the Town*, with a book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green and music by Leonard Bernstein, opened at the Adelphi Theatre in December 1944. In 1949, it would be made into a motion picture starring Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly.

[33] Lincoln Kirstein, *Movement & Metaphor* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 234.

possibility of getting the U. S. Army and Navy to release Jimmy Stewart, Jeffery Lynn, William Holden, and Burgess Meredith from their service duties to appear in the film. It was thought that "they might release the boys if the Army were allowed to share in the receipts of the picture." The minutes of the August board meeting also reveal that the Screen Actors' Guild (SAG) had agreed to waive compulsory membership to all non-union members who would appear in the film. However, it insisted that "actors are not asked to take less than their accustomed salary." It was originally hoped that the stars would be able to appear without compensation, so this demand from SAG was seen as a setback.[34]

In September, SAG adopted a new rule, one that sought to protect actors from appeals for them to appear without adequate compensation in films that had a patriotic purpose or films that were donating all or part of net earnings to charity. The Stage Door Canteen film fell under this decree. By 21 October the production company and SAG had reached a compromise regarding payment for performers involved in the film. Lesser agreed to "pay the established union salaries and the established salaries of the artists, and with respect to all those who appear as themselves, remuneration will be worked out on a *pro rata* basis. That is a star will get a proportionate amount of his accustomed salary, based on the number of days he has worked." In November, SAG once again demanded considerations. It ruled that "every person appearing in the picture . . . must be a member of the Screen Actors' Guild in good standing." By that time the film was about ready to move into production and most of the actors had been selected, so those players who were

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[34] Executive Board Minutes, 12 August 1942.

not already members of SAG joined. SAG later donated back to the Wing the membership dues paid by most of those actors.[35]

At an October board meeting Lesser

> outlined the action of the picture, which he said resolves itself into two categories — the fictional story and the 'atmosphere' aspect. The story is about four soldiers who are embarking in New York before going overseas and it is during these three days that the action of the picture takes place. They meet three girls in the Canteen and one outside and the events that result follow the formula of first, second and third acts. . . . The Canteen is visited in the course of the picture four times and each time new personalities are introduced — new hostesses, new officers of the day, new bands and new actors.

At the meeting Lesser suggested that the picture might gross as much as $2,000,000.[36] The final agreement between Lesser's production company and the Wing called for Lesser to take only 8½ percent of the gross as his cut, while 20 percent of the balance would go to the Hollywood Canteen, 2½ percent to the Naval Aid Auxiliary, and the remaining 69 percent allocated to the American Theatre Wing War Service.[37]

At the same time as the negotiations concerning the movie were going on, the Stage Door Canteen began to branch out. Noting the success and popularity of the endeavor,

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[35] Executive Board Minutes, 4 November 1942.

[36] Executive Board Minutes, 21 October 1942.

[37] "Charity, Hope and Faith in Filmland," *New York Times*, 20 September 1942, sec. 8, and Executive Board Minutes, 10 February 1942.

cultural, civic, and social leaders in other American cities asked permission to start their own Stage Door Canteens. However, the Wing's board of directors felt that any attempt to recreate the success of the New York program would suffer from two significant problems, first locating, funding, and otherwise establishing the canteens and second, providing entertainment for them. Brock Pemberton argued that if the Wing was serious about its desire to expand its membership to other parts of the country, then trying to establish affiliate canteens could be an asset. "Other cities should have canteens under the supervision of the Wing and could accomplish great good without the great amount of professional entertainment," he noted. "The main thing being that the men will have the opportunity to meet pleasant people and will be able to dance." Square dances, dance contests, and local performers were suggested as alternatives to Broadway or Hollywood stars.

Philadelphia opened the second Stage Door Canteen in June 1942. The Pennsylvania canteen began simply and developed into a "wartime effort which overnight grew into tremendous proportions," and which by the end of the war had served over 2,000,000 servicemen. Entertainment industry stars such as Frank Sinatra, Xavier Cugat, Duke Ellington, Woodie Herman, Franchot Tone, Katherine Cornell, James Cagney, Lucille Ball, Bill Robinson, and Irving Berlin played there. The Canteen's kitchen provided light refreshments, and by the end of the war had served massive amounts of food, including:

931,000 sandwiches

791,000 glasses of root beer

411,000 half pints of milk

379,000 bricks of ice cream

512,000 cups of coffee

53,000 cakes and pies (cut in eight portions)

114 tons of candy

18,000 cartons of cigarettes[38]

To escape the summertime heat, the Philadelphia Stage Door Canteen moved its operations to an outdoor terrace where it was cooler. It also started a mobile canteen unit to bring entertainment and snacks to servicemen in Philadelphia area hospitals. Free telephone calls home were awarded as prizes in raffles, sketch artists were on hand to draw quick portraits suitable for sending to loved ones, and more than 3,500 "talking letters" in the form of phonograph records were made and then shipped to mothers, wives, and girlfriends.[39]

In October, a third Canteen opened in Washington, D. C. The Washington Canteen was housed in the old Belasco Theatre and staffed by civic, professional, and government leaders. In the preview open to the general public more than 12,000 civilians paid $3.00 or deposited two pounds of food to see the space. Present at the official opening were Irving Berlin, Brock Pemberton, Helen Mencken, Helen Hayes, and the War College Glee Club. Although there were fewer celebrity entertainers playing at the Washington Canteen, it offered an impressive mix of local talent. During one week in 1944 the

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[38] *Biography of a Canteen*, Philadelphia Stage Door Canteen, n. d.

[39] Ibid.

Canteen featured singer Mary Russell Kelly with pianist Dorothy Emery, folk dances performed by students enrolled in a local dance school, Rubini the magician, dancers Johnny and Evelyn Draper, the University of Maryland Girls' Glee Club, the U. S. Army Band from Fort Belvoir, the band from the Naval Air Station at Patuxent River, Maryland, and a band representing the Military District of Washington.[40]

Also opening in October was the Hollywood Canteen, which, although an independent venture, maintained a financial and professional association with the American Theatre Wing throughout its existence. Staffed by film stars, contract players, and others involved in the motion picture industry, the Hollywood Canteen was like the New York institution in many respects. It was housed in a building that had been decorated by entertainment industry designers and carpenters, and it relied on the welcome smiles and durable dance shoes of an army of junior hostesses to satisfy the enlisted men who visited there. Film stars who frequented the club included Bette Davis, Betty Grable, Eddie Cantor, Fred MacMurray, Bing Crosby, and Rita Hayworth. It too provided a respite from the realities of military service in a time of war for more than 1,000,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen.[41] The opening of the Hollywood Canteen was followed in rapid succession by canteens in Cleveland, Boston, Newark, and San Francisco.

One of the most successful of the branch canteens was the San Francisco location. Operating under an excellent set of directors, the canteen hosted 3,000 servicemen per

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[40] "Stage Door Canteen Booking Sheet for the Week of August 29, 1944," Washington, D. C. Private Collection.

[41] Frank S. Nugent, "Super-Duper Epic: Hollywood Canteen," *New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 1943, 16.

night, and at the same time, ran its finances so well that it put more than $74,000 in the bank. For Christmas 1943, the San Francisco Canteen anticipated feeding 7,000 men. Four huge Christmas trees were donated by the Southern Pacific Railroad, and a caterer donated a one-ton fruit cake that was 12 feet high and 10 feet in diameter.[42] In a report filed with the Wing's executive board in May of 1945 Pemberton noted that the "demands on the [San Francisco] Canteen are terrific now, because there is such a flow of men back and forth to the Pacific Theatre of war. It will become increasingly important as the Japanese war goes on." Pemberton closed his report by announcing that the West Coast canteen was about to welcome its 1.5 millionth service man.

In December 1943, when the civic leaders of New Orleans asked for a branch canteen, they asked if it would be possible to open two. They "suggested we have one there for the white men and a similar one for the negro. The Board said 'no — no.'" The Wing's board refused to either condone or contribute to any segregation based solely on the color of a serviceman's skin. This declaration of respect for servicemen of all races was also evidenced in a series of three postcards made available to the men who visited the New York Canteen. Drawn by artist Barney Tobey, one of the cards features a group of soldiers and sailors standing in line at the Canteen, waiting to pick up cake and coffee. Included in the line of white soldiers is an African-American serviceman. In all of the canteens, equality among the men of the Allied nations was a controlling principle. In 1944, Tai Solarin, a Nigerian RAF pilot, sent a letter to the Wing that praised the democratic ideals exemplified by the non-discrimination policy of the canteen.

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[42] Executive Board Minutes, 15 December 1943.

> After the most memorable 5 days leave I ever had in my life I returned from New York last night. As my mind ploughs through the whole thing, I just find that my 2 visits to the Stage Door Canteen, that matchless serviceman's home of world renown, stands like a lighthouse in my mind. I have no doubt that my letter will be one and only one of the myriads that pour in daily to express the same sentiment. I candidly confess that I know no other way wherewith Christianity could be better made practical. It is unfortunate that it took so much as a war to make mankind with all its races and creeds tune its life together, . . . I dare say America will indeed be a specimen of Democracy, where *all* men are free and happy. God Bless the Stage Door Canteen. God Bless America.[43]

The Wing's policy of total integration was a significant social statement in light of the fact that despite the War Department's order that all recreational facilities on military bases be open to men of all races, both the American Army and Navy were still highly segregated institutions at this point in time.[44] The Wing's policy against racial discrimination in its facilities was a powerful example of its desire to change what it viewed as a inequitable aspect of American society. It was a national disgrace that the United States, a country that claimed to be fighting for democracy and the protection of all the minorities oppressed by the Nazis, was itself still a rigidly segregated society.

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[43] Reprinted in *Canteen News*, 16 November 1944. American Theatre Wing War Service. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Mimeographed copy.

[44] President Truman finally directed the complete desegregation of the armed forces with his Executive Order 9981 issued in July 1948.

In October 1944, the first American Theatre Wing War Service Canteen outside of the United States opened in London. Although the Theatre Wing offered to set up a club in the British capital as early as September 1942, the British entertainment industry felt that "a year of military anxieties and even setbacks, at home one of shortages and restrictions," precluded any real consideration of the proposal. In the summer of 1943, the Wing again made the offer to sponsor a servicemen's club in London, and again the British theatre associations "regretfully" declined the offer. The British War Office, however, heard of the proposal and thought that it presented an excellent opportunity to provide wholesome entertainment for its military personnel. Lieutenant-Colonel Brian Rowe, an officer serving in the War Office "was so struck by its possibilities for good," that he personally formed a company, registered it in accordance with the War Charities Act. and enlisted the support of the Dowager Marchioness Townshend of Raynham to make the Canteen a reality. The London Stage Door Canteen was located in Piccadilly Circus and boasted of an Entertainment Committee that included Noel Coward, Lawrence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Alfred Lunt, and John Gielgud.[45]

After the liberation of France, a Paris Canteen was organized. The Paris Canteen opened at the end of January in the Café Tyrol Champs Elysées where its rent was paid by the French government. One of the largest of all the canteens, it was able to handle 1,000 visitors at a time. After the European armistice was signed, locations in Berlin, Manilla, and Honolulu were considered as potential canteen sites. All were approved by the

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[45] Maurice Colbourne, "How It All Happened," *The Stage Door Canteen: London* (London: Cole, n. d.) Souvenir book printed after the end of the war in Europe. Private collection.

Wing's executive board, but none were established.

At various times in its history, the Stage Door Canteen program faced a number of issues that troubled the board. In the New York Canteen's first summer of operation, the heat generated by kitchen activity and several thousand dancers made the basement space nearly unbearable. The board debated the value of spending money on air conditioning in light of its already strained budget. However, with the promise of some new fund-raising ventures, it decided to proceed with the improvement. The board's minutes state, "It was reported that engineers from Cities Service, Westinghouse, American Gas and Electric and General Electric had all agreed on the cooling problem, so a contract has been signed with Abbott and Lester, the Westinghouse outlet, for a twenty-five ton cooling unit which had been in the Roumanian Pavilion at the [New York World's] Fair." The $5,000 to $6,000 needed to complete the installation of the air conditioning system came from a variety of sources. A series of benefit Broadway performances, including a significant portion of the profits generated by a Broadway revival of G. B. Shaw's *Candida* contributed to the air conditioning fund. *Candida* was produced by the Theatre Wing as a fund-raising venture and starred Katherine Cornell. An original revue staged by the Artists and Writers Association called *Incendiary Blondes* also helped to defray the cost of air conditioning. Equally important to the Canteen improvement was the signing of an agreement between the American Theatre Wing War Service and CBS Radio, allowing the network, for a monthly fee of $2,500, to broadcast a weekly variety program originating at the Stage Door Canteen. Sponsored by the Corn Products Refining Company (Mazola Corn Oil),

the program premiered on 30 July 1942 and continued through to the end of the war.[46]

In October 1942, the Theatre Wing reconsidered its policy of allowing only uniformed servicemen into the Canteen. The members of the womens' military auxiliaries took exception to the discriminatory rule. Board member Kermit Bloomgarden argued that "if they were part of the Army and Navy" he would not hesitate to admit them, however, since they were only "auxiliary" groups, "he did not feel it was part of the job of the Canteen to entertain them."[47] Out of this discussion came a program that catered to the woman in uniform that will be discussed later.

Another troubling issue concerned the status of what the federal government called "enemy aliens." Included in that category would have been many of the refugee artists who had fled Germany or Italy at the beginning of the war, but had not finished the process of applying for and being granted United States citizenship. At the Wing's board meeting of February 1943, "a serious and prolonged debate occurred over the issue of how to handle enemy aliens who wished to help with the Wing's wartime programs," including the Stage Door Canteen. It was suggested that enemy aliens who had their first citizenship papers be permitted to apply to the Wing, seeking permission to participate in the group's many programs. Rachel Crothers, however, proposed that the Wing should follow the same basic guidelines that other wartime service organizations followed regarding this issue. She cited the rules of such associations as the USO, the American Women's Volunteer Service, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the Jewish Welfare

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[46] Dorothy Kilgallen, "The Voice of Broadway," *Journal American*, 30 June 1942.

[47] Executive Board Minutes, 28 October 1942.

Board. Letters on the subject from the Federal Security Agency and the Headquarters of the Commandant of the 3rd Naval District were read and considered. The Navy letter argued, "It would seem extremely unwise for the American Theatre Wing, or any other organization, to include among its workers people from nations at war with this country, who do not have their final citizenship papers. Your members are as interested in keeping our ships afloat as we are. They certainly know that a bit of information dropped by a sailor to one of your very attractive hostesses with wrong connections could impede the war effort."[48] The issue of war information security was a serious concern, as is demonstrated by the numerous speeches and at least three plays dedicated to the subject by the Speakers' Bureau and Victory Players. In the end, the Wing's administrators decided to continue to restrict the participation of anyone who was not a citizen of the United States or one of the Allied nations. In a letter sent by Crothers to Hungarian refugee actor Geza (Charles) Korvin, she explained the Wing's policy and added that she hoped "the few volunteers who are affected by this policy will not think it unfriendly to them as individuals."[49] Although this ruling might have reduced the talent pool available to the Wing, the goodwill and confidence of the War Department and other government agencies were very important to the success of a number of Wing programs and therefore their wishes were given priority.

The first year's attendance record for the New York Stage Door Canteen was set on

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[48] Executive Board Minutes, 10 February 1943.

[49] Rachel Crothers to Geza Korvin, 2 March 1943. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

Thanksgiving Day when 4,510 men sought entertainment and refreshment. For Christmas Day the Allied Textile Association donated funds to provide for 4,000 dinners, while for New Years Day 3,500 turkey dinners were donated by the "300 women who have done volunteer work in the Canteen's kitchen and pantry since it opened."[50]

The Stage Door Canteen celebrated its first anniversary in March of 1943. In an article that marked the occasion, Lewis Nichols noted that at some time in the evening of 2 March, "a young man in the uniform of one of the Allied nations . . . will be guest No. 935,000. He may well eat the 438,000th doughnut or the 750,000th sandwich." However, the most impressive statistic Nichols uncovered was that the hostesses at the Canteen had danced "some 2,184,000 miles since March 2, 1942. Each mile is a bit nearer Berlin and Tokyo."[51]

During the war, dancing was one of the most popular activities at canteens, USO clubs, church socials, and nightclubs. According to Richard Lingeman, dancing, for the youth of America, was "a popular way to expend energy, socialize or pursue courtship ritual." Lingeman further notes that dancing was such a favorite pastime that "more than 2,000 war plants provided facilities on the premises for dancing during breaks or lunch hours."[52] For the man in the military, dancing was a socially acceptable way of meeting new girls and an opportunity for physical contact, albeit contact of a respectable and sometimes brief nature. Dances such as the Jitterbug, the Balboa, the Jersey Bounce, the

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[50] "Fabric Salesmen to Aid Canteen," *New York Times*, 11 December 1942, and "Canteen Serves 3,500 Dinners," *New York Times*, 2 January 1943.

[51] Lewis Nichols, "Stage Door Canteen," *New York Times*, 28 February 1943.

[52] Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's A War On?* (New York: Putnam, 1970), 292.

Jig Walk, and the Latin influenced rumba, were practiced along with the more traditional fox-trot, waltz, and polka. The boom in dancing popularity was generated, in part, by the prosperity that resulted from the wartime economy. Increased spending money boosted the average American's ability to afford to visit nightclubs and dance halls. An upsurge in radio listening also helped to bring music into the everyday lives of citizens, and encouraged dancing as a leisure activity. Finally, the comradery of the dance floor seemed to fill an unvoiced need for community participation that was such a part of the wartime experience. Given the popularity of social dancing, it was natural that the Theatre Wing's Stage Door Canteen would make the lively pastime one of its primary attractions.

Whether accompanied by a live, big-name band or phonograph records, the men of the armed forces seemed to enjoy nothing more than getting on the dance floor with a Canteen hostess. Unfortunately for the hostesses, not all the men were equally talented dancers. One women reported that "with every sort of GI footwear taking turns scuffing up your pumps it's a downright grind. . . it would keep a couple of pharmacist's mates busy bandaging up bruised ankles and crushed insteps — which would be nice work if they could get it."[53] Radio actress Madaline Lee spent one evening a week as a hostess at the New York Canteen and claimed that she danced with "about a thousand boys a week." She further observed that "the army dances better than the navy."[54] The most famous dance activity held at the Canteen was the Jitterbug contest held almost every night. The

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[53] John Martin, "The GI 'Makes with the Hot Foot,'" *New York Times Magazine*, 9 January 1943.

[54] Princess Alexandra Kropotin, "To the Ladies," *Liberty*, 30 May 1942, 49.

"king" of the contest was a Coast Guard sailor stationed near New York and nicknamed "Killer Joe." According to an article in *Life* magazine, the energetic dancer, whose real name was Frank Piro, "wears out three jitterbug partners per evening."[55]

In May 1943, after nearly three months of production, an advance print of Sol Lesser's film, *Stage Door Canteen*, was delivered to the offices of the American Theatre Wing War Service.[56] Because of the technical problems involved in shooting the film in the real basement location, the entire film had been actually shot on two identical exact replicas of the real Canteen. One of the sets was constructed in Hollywood, and the other in New York City. The total cost of the production, including actors' salaries, was estimated at $700,000. Some cost savings were realized by casting relatively unknown actors and actresses in the story's leading roles, while many of the stars who appeared as themselves in the film accepted substantially less than their normal fees.[57] A portion of the production costs was paid by the Philip Morris tobacco company. In exchange, the Philip Morris cigarette brand was featured in several shots in the movie. Today, we know that practice as "product placement," and it is a common method of subsidizing motion picture production costs.[58]

When the motion pictured premiered in June 1943 it was an instant success. Bosley

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[55] "Life Visits the Stage Door Canteen," *Life*, 3 April 1944, 123.

[56] "Wing to Get Film Print," *New York Times*, 13 May 1943.

[57] Thomas F. Brady, "Facts Behind 'Yankee Doodle Dandy,'" *New York Times*, 10 January 1943, sec. 8.

[58] Executive Board Minutes, 3 February 1943. It is possible that Philip Morris supplied cigarettes to the Stage Door Canteen, so the relationship between the Wing and the company may have been a long term one. However, no evidence has been found that confirms this speculation.

Crowther, film critic for the *New York Times*, suggested to his readers that "You'll not get so much entertainment in a good cause if you shop the whole town." He closed his very positive review by observing, "This may not be the picture to arouse the sophisticates. But it will fetch honest thrills, tears and laughter from millions throughout the land."[59] However, the film was not without its critics. When the picture was exported to England, it ran afoul of the Board of British Film Censors, who "requested cuts of what it termed certain objectionable scenes." Although details were not given, it was assumed by the *New York Times* that the censors objected to the religious nature of one particular musical number, Gracie Fields's rendition of "The Lord's Prayer."[60] A subsequent dispute clouding the success of the film centered on a lawsuit filed on behalf of Emeline Roche and Peggy Clark, both of whom had provided design services for the picture but "failed to get credit." They appeared before the Wing's executive board, a compromise was reached, and the lawsuit withdrawn.[61]

Despite the controversy, the film was a hit both at home and abroad. As a result, money soon began to flow into the Theatre Wing's coffers. In October 1943, the "first pennies" from the film began "trickling in." According to the financial report of the picture, the total paid to the Wing at that time was just over $210,000.[62] By February 1944, that amount had jumped to nearly $1,380,000. According to the *New York Times*,

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[59] Bosley Crowther, "Stage Door Canteen," *New York Times*, 25 June 1943.

[60] "Cuts Asked in 'Canteen,'" *New York Times*, 3 September 1943.

[61] Executive Board Minutes, 6 October 1943.

[62] Ibid.

the motion picture became "the largest single source of income for the maintenance of the American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc." The CBS radio program originating from the canteen was the next most important funding source, with the monthly payment coming to the Wing increased to $3,500.[63] This influx of money allowed the Theatre Wing to remodel the Canteen in 1944. The dance floor was expanded, benches along the walls added, the rough plaster posts replaced by mirrored columns, and a new mural painted that featured the flags of the Allied nations.[64]

The money generated by the radio contract and the film removed a major problem that had, up to that point, been plaguing all of the Wing's programs: the lack of adequate funds. The royalties from the film allowed the American Theatre Wing to expand some of its already successful activities and create new ones. As will be noted in detail in the following chapter, nearly half of the money went to fund an additional program dedicated to those American soldiers, sailors, and airmen who had been wounded in battle.

The money was also used to help fund the branch canteens. However, each branch was responsible for the bulk of its operating expenditures. For example, the Philadelphia Canteen committee was given a $5,000 start-up fund from the Wing in May of 1942. By the time the Philadelphia canteen closed its doors in October of 1945, the Wing's total contribution to its efforts only amounted to $26,800. Against that total was the cost of running the Canteen during that period which, according to a summary report compiled by Philadelphia branch of the Wing, amounted to over $317,726, with an additional $200,000

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[63] "Theatre Wing Income," *New York Times*, 11 February 1944.

[64] "Stage Door Canteen Reopens in Splendor," *New York Times*, 21 June 1944.

coming in the form of locally donated equipment and services. The balance of the money used to fund the Canteen, Speakers' Bureau, and other Wing programs operating in the City of Brotherly Love, also came from local sources. Nearly $26,000 was raised through contributions collected on street corners by the Canteen's Junior Hostesses, and another $13,700 came from donations made by audience members in the Shubert theatres of Philadelphia. The bulk of the balance came from the United War Chest, a local fund-raising organization, which contributed $57,876 to the canteen in 1943, $73,239 in 1944, and $59,958 in 1945.[65]

The release of Lesser's film, the radio program, and the power of "word of mouth" advertising made the Stage Door Canteen a very popular spot with servicemen. An often repeated story is told of two Allied ships passing at sea, one heading out of port and the other entering New York harbor. Aboard the incoming ship a sailor uses semaphore flags to ask about things to do while he is on shore leave. The "wig-wagged" response from the vessel leaving port is the address of the Stage Door Canteen and the comment, "No liquor, but lots of fun."[66] U. S. Army Private Leo Langer was thrilled by his visit to the canteen. "Meeting the women stars personally, shaking their hands and grinning at them. Boy, how they can grin back. They're not acting either. They're glad to see us. If I ever have a baby girl, I'm going to name her 'Helen H.' after one of the stars." Corporal Theodore Brown shared Langer's reactions. He commented on "the informality of the famous people I have met there. They are all very friendly. The girls are gorgeous and

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[65] *Biography of a Canteen.*

[66] Nichols, "Stage Door Canteen." The same story appears in several other sources.

the Canteen is in a class by itself. It's entirely different than anything else I have seen. It is more than a cabaret without charge to us."[67] Not unexpectedly, the New York Canteen was also popular with political leaders. Over the span of its existence it was visited by former President Herbert Hoover, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, and Vice-President Henry Wallace. And, although the club was designed to serve the enlisted man, many of the Allied commanders made an appearance there.

In February 1944, the Stage Door Canteen's managers were anxiously counting down to guest number 2,000,000. The lucky man would be given two tickets to the hit Broadway musical *Oklahoma!*, would go backstage to meet the cast, and then be able to choose from two New York nightclubs where he could enjoy the rest of the evening. That same year the Canteen was honored by having a Liberty ship named after it. The SS *Stage Door Canteen*, which was built at the Bethlehem-Fairfield shipyards in Baltimore, completed its maiden voyage in the spring of that year.[68] In a similar tribute, an American Army Air Corps B-17 bomber crew stationed in England named their plane after the 44th Street club. On hand to commemorate the christening was Mary Churchill, the daughter of the British Prime Minister. Representing the American Theatre Wing War Service at the ceremony were Vivien Leigh and Lawrence Olivier.[69]

In "An Ode to the Stage Door Canteen," music critic, novelist, and photographer

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[67] "Canteen Capers."

[68] "Ship Named Father Duffy," *New York Times*, 2 September 1943 and *Canteen News* 1:2, (9 March 1944).

[69] Photograph of christening with identification text printed on back. Private Collection.

Carl Van Vechten succinctly summed up the ideals and values which all of the Stage Door Canteens shared and sought to exemplify.

> The place is absolutely democratic in its organization and social behavior, perhaps one of the few democratic institutions in existence anywhere: English soldiers, sailors and RAF men dance beside, mingle and eat with Chinese airmen, Americans from every branch of the service, including Negroes and Indians, Canadians, Australians, South Africans, Dutch and French sailors (how pleasant it is to listen to the 'Bon Soirs' which greet them from every side of the room when they enter), occasionally Russians: All are a part of the Stage Door Canteen. Hostesses and busboys are an equally heterogeneous lot . . . Is it any wonder that almost every one who sees the Stage Door Canteen for the first time bursts into tears from sheer happiness that such things can be?[70]

It is indisputable that the more than 10,000,000 Allied servicemen who visited the eight Stage Door Canteens appreciated the food, dancing, professional entertainments, and fellowship that they found at the clubs. It is also true that for the thousands of hostesses, busboys, waiters, food service personnel, and entertainers, working at the canteens was a small way to repay those men for the great sacrifices they were making in the cause of freedom.

The Merchant Seamen's Club

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[70] Carl Van Vechten, "An Ode to the Stage Door," *Theatre Arts*, April 1943, 229-231.

The American Theatre Wing War Service had reason to open an entirely new canteen in New York on 4 January 1943. The patrons of this new club were the men of the American and Allied Merchant Marine. These sailors were responsible for the shipments of food, military supplies, fuel, and medicines that made England's continued existence possible and insured that there would be enough war *matériel* to invade Europe and defeat the German and Italian fascists. In early August the heads of the National Maritime Union called for the same kinds of services for their members as were being offered to the men of the military. They argued that just like the soldiers and sailors of the armed services, the merchant seamen "constantly face injury and death at sea." This was particularly true as more and more German U-boats took up station off the east coast of the United States in order to sink Allied shipping headed to Great Britain. In November 1942, the Allies lost over 800,000 gross tons of shipping, and over the course of the war, over 24,000,000 tons.[71] During the war, over 8,000 American merchant seamen were killed and more than 11,000 wounded in the line of duty.[72] One seaman, frustrated by the lack of recreation opportunities dedicated to the industry, stated, "There is a lot of talk about 'the unsung heroes' and the 'heroes without uniform' but nothing happens. We don't want uniforms and we don't care so much for singing, but we would like to have something to do in port."[73]

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[71] *The Almanac of American History*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), 482.

[72] "American Merchant Marine in World War 2," 14 December 2001. U. S. Maritime Service Veterans. <http://www.usmn.org/ww2.html> (28 December 2001).

[73] "Merchant Seamen Resent Treatment," *New York Times*, 2 August 1942.

A month before the seamen's union made its plea, the American Theatre Wing's executive board entertained a suggestion that originated with actresses Ruth Draper and Constance Collier dealing with that very topic. According to Antoinette Perry, Draper and Collier "were interested in having something done for the Merchant Seamen," and they were ready to "do something about them whether the Wing did or not." A committee was appointed by the board to investigate options. Collier and Mrs. Brock Pemberton were selected to head the committee which included Ruth Draper, Nedda Harrington, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Tibbett, and John Wharton. At the same board meeting,

> the Chairman told of a meeting with Anna Rosenberg, who, as head of the Mayor's Recreation Committee [was] interested in any planned activities for the seamen. Mrs. Rosenberg said she was interested in opening a recreation center for the seamen with showers, and bowling alleys, etc. She also said she would be delighted to have the Theatre Wing join with the Mayor's Committee and she could promise the Wing financial support, or, if the Wing wanted to work by itself, she would like to know what was being planned so there would be no duplication.[74]

The board instructed its committee to investigate both the specific needs of the seamen, and possible locations for a social center.

As a result of those investigations, a site was found at 109 West 43rd Street in Manhattan. This location was near Times Square and, although distant from most of the

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[74] Executive Board Minutes, 15 July 1942.

shipping berths, it was central to the primary New York City entertainment district.

The selected space was, like the Stage Door Canteen, refurbished by volunteer theatre workers, and decorated with murals painted by well-known artists including Abe Birnbaum and Al Hirshfeld. The Merchant Seamen's Club took up several stories in the building. The first floor held a large game room, complete with ping-pong tables, pinball machines, and card tables. The second floor held the club's small theatre, where bands and stars would entertain, and a library with comfortable chairs for reading and abundant desks for letter-writing. The upper story also had a food bar decorated in a red and white circus motif. Unlike the Stage Door Canteen, food at the Merchant Seaman's Club was not free. It was, however, sold to the seamen at cost.

In addition to the Times Square social center, the Theatre Wing set up a free ticket program for the merchant seamen similar to the one operated by the City Commission on Defense Recreation. Passes were distributed to the men for a variety of events including the legitimate theatre, motion pictures, radio broadcasts, concert, and sporting events. According to an accounting prepared in April 1946, over 1,290,000 tickets were given away.[75]

The Merchant Seamen's Club opened on 4 January 1943. Present at the inaugural ceremonies were Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, theatre producer John Golden, opera star Gladys Swarthout, actors Paul Muni and Alfred Lunt, actress Lynn Fontanne, Captain Edward Macauley (Assistant Administrator of the U. S. Maritime Commission), and the African-American skipper of an American-owned

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[75] Executive Board Minutes, 17 April 1946.

merchant ship, Captain Hugh Mulzac.[76] In his remarks, LaGuardia thanked the men and women of the theatre industry for "making this bright spot possible for the boys who are delivering the goods." Thanks to the American Theatre Wing War Service, the New York City Defense Recreation Committee, the United Seamen's Service, and the Victory Guild, over the course of the rest of the war, the men who "daily fight the battle of supplies for the United Nations on the high seas," had a place they could call home while in New York City.[77]

Tea Dances and Parties

The ladies who served in the military's auxiliary services also benefitted from an American Theatre Wing project. During the war, just over 140,000 women served the nation by enlisting in one of the auxiliary branches of the service.[78] The Army's WACs, the Navy's WAVES, the Army Air Corps's WASPs, the women of the Marines, and the Coast Guard's SPARs all made significant contributions to the war effort, but were often neglected in terms of recreation opportunities.[79] As previously mentioned, they had asked to be allowed into the Stage Door Canteen, but the American Theatre Wing's executive

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[76] The presence of the African-American officer once again testifies to the Wing's nondiscriminatory policies.

[77] "Merchant Seamen's Club Here Is Dedicated to 'Boys Who Are Delivering the Goods,'" *New York Times*, 5 January 1943.

[78] Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, *We're in This War, Too* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 29.

[79] Women's Army Corps, Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, the Women Airforce Service Pilots, and S(emper) PAR(atus), the Coast Guard motto.

board refused to change its "men only" policy. Instead, the Wing created an entertainment program that catered specifically to the women in uniform. Although this program was much smaller in scope, it was designed with particular care for the needs of the women and the concerns of their commanding officers.

On 16 May 1943, the Theatre Wing held the first of its Sunday afternoon Tea Dances for "all women in uniform of the services of the United Nations."[80] The fetes were held at the Roosevelt Hotel between 3:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M., and after one year had entertained nearly 27,000 men and women in uniform, "of which two-thirds have been enlisted personnel." The dances were designed "with the idea that women in uniform are still women with a fondness for parties."[81]

In her report to the board, the Tea Dance Committee Chairperson, Broadway costume designer Emeline Roche, reminded the board members of the history of the program.

> We gave up the Officer's Dances after a trial period lasting into August because we found we were turning away so many enlisted people while we were entertaining a comparatively few officers compared to the number present at the enlisted dances. Since that time we have reserved a few tables for officers every Sunday, but they do not come in large numbers. The cost has been $12,094.49 for an average of forty-five cents per guest. I feel sure

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[80] American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc. Invitation to a Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance. Private Collection.

[81] "Service Women to Dance," *New York Times*, 16 May 1943.

> that the members of the Board will be glad to know that these dances are not only eagerly looked forward to by the women of the armed services, but have the enthusiastic endorsement of the ranking military authorities, and also of organizations such as the Womens Military Service Center and the New York City Defense Recreation Committee who tell me there is nothing comparable to these parties given in the city.[82]

This program, never one of the larger endeavors of the Wing, did benefit from the financial windfall to come out of the Lesser film, as a portion of the film's income was used to pay for the Tea Dances.

New York Times dance critic John Martin and his wife were allowed to attend one of the Tea Dances, and he filed the following report.

> When Russ Smith and his band turn on the jive 250 brace of fighting men and women off duty start making with the hot foot, and until you've seen that you haven't seen anything. Russ can play sweet, too, waltzes, rumbas, congas, fox trots. And can these kids dance! Brother, they can dance them faster than you can call them, and a whole lot better. At every session there is a contest or two; sometimes it's a waltz contest, sometimes a rumba or a jitterbug, and that's when they go to town.
>
> There's a lot of superstition handed out about who generally wins. They try to tell you sailors practically always walk away with the jitterbug prize and that the English and their Australian cousins are the waltz kings.

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[82] Executive Board Minutes, 7 July 1944.

> Well, maybe so, but one Sunday afternoon when they let a newspaper guy and his wife look on, real old people, you know, in their forties, those theories sure were wet. It was a sailor from Boston who won hands down in the waltz with a smooth little Wave for a partner. In the jitterbug free-for-all there wasn't even a sailor in the finals — that is, not a man sailor. The decision was a tie between two soldiers and their Wave partners.[83]

By the end of their second year of operation, the American Theatre Wing's Tea Dances had entertained an additional 29,000 service personnel of both sexes.

Unlike the Stage Door Canteens, which were open every day, the Theatre Wing's tea dances were only held once a week and lasted only three hours. For the women of the Allied armed forces, appropriate entertainment options while on leave would continue to be a problem. Their choices rarely compared to those enjoyed by their male counterparts. Bars were off-limits, New York restaurants were expensive, and motion picture theatres were crowded. Although the Tea Dances never benefitted as many service personnel as the Stage Door Canteen, they were necessary. Being able to mix with their male counterparts in a safe and sophisticated environment, without excessive concern about impropriety or coarseness on either side, was a treat for the women, and the program easily won the approval of their superiors.

The Wing's programs created to provide recreation for the men and women of the Allied military services were among its most successful. The Stage Door Canteen, because of the large number of men it served in each of its locations, has to be considered

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[83] John Martin, "The GI 'Makes With the Hot Foot.'"

the Theatre Wing's single most effective endeavor. With the successful release of the Sol Lesser film, millions of dollars went directly into the coffers of the Theatre Wing, eliminating, once and for all, most of the financial problems the organization struggled with for the first three years of its existence. The timing of that influx of operating capital was ideal. As will be discussed in the following chapter, half of the money generated by the film *Stage Door Canteen* was used in the last major welfare effort created by the American Theatre Wing War Service, the Hospital Entertainment program.

In 1943, former American President Herbert Hoover praised the contributions made to the nation's war effort by the men and women of the professional theatre. "Here is the only business in the country" he said, "which gives away the only thing it has to sell. And what can one say that even in part expresses the appreciation of the work and sacrifice of the whole stage profession? Every actor in America is making some contribution to the morale and inspiration of the home front and of our armed services."[84] The Stage Door Canteen, the Merchant Seamen's Club, and the Sunday tea dances were important parts of the American Theatre Wing War Service's contribution to the nation and to the morale of the armed forces.

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[84] "Theatre's War Aid Praised by Hoover," *New York Times*, 1 February 1943.

5.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Over the course of the war, the American Theatre Wing War Service developed cooperative relationships and worked on welfare programs with a wide variety of organizations and governmental agencies. In every case, with its extensive pool of talented writers, producers, and performers, the Wing contributed to the overall success of each venture. This chapter looks at these collaborations and partnerships and attempts to evaluate the specific contributions made to each undertaking by the American Theatre Wing. Unfortunately, for many of the programs discussed here, there is an even greater shortage of detailed evidence than for those covered in the previous chapters. Thus, some of the entries in this chapter are brief and statistically incomplete. The end of this chapter will serve as the conclusion to this study and will contain a final assessment of the American Theatre Wing War Service's contributions to the nation's war effort.

The Theatre Wing's War Players

During the last half of the war, the American Theatre Wing joined with the United Service Organization to bring legitimate theatre to the men and women serving overseas. The USO was founded in February 1941 by six social welfare agencies, which dedicated themselves to the task of providing recreation for service personnel and defense workers. These groups were the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's

Christian Association, the Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, the National Travelers Aid Association, and National Catholic Community Services. The underlying mission of the USO, with regard to the military, was to provide an affordable place for soldiers and sailors to find relaxation and diversion. To that end, USO clubs, housed in churches, barns, empty store fronts, and unused train cars, sprang up near almost every military training camp in the country. In April 1941, a new division of the organization, USO-Camp Shows, Inc., began its operations by offering professional entertainment to the men of the armed forces. Performers hired by the USO worked for union wages in what can only be called primitive circumstances. Performing on temporary stages, frequently without adequate stage lighting, coping with dressing rooms that were rudimentary at best, and often forced to provide their own transportation from venue to venue, those entertainers proved equal to both the task and the conditions.

In May 1941, at the request of the U. S. Army, the USO began an experimental touring entertainment program with seven traveling show buses which went from military camp to military camp. By the end of that first summer, the musicians, singers, dancers, magicians, comics, and specialty acts who participated in the program had performed before an accumulated audience of over 3,200,000 service personnel. In October, USO-Camp Shows was designated by the Army and the Navy as the "Official Entertainer to the men and women of our armed forces."

USO-Camp Shows began its overseas tours that same October with the departure of an Army transport plane loaded with performers and their effects heading for the Caribbean. Included in the troupe were Chico Marx of the four Marx brothers, screen star

John Garfield, the comedy duo of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, musical comedy star Mitzi Mayfair, and singers Jane Pickens and Benay Venuta. Before the end of the war, the USO-Camp Shows had "given a grand total of 293,738 performances through 208,178 separate visits of entertainment groups, to a cumulative audience of 161,000,000 service men and women overseas and in the United States."[1]

The majority of the performances given by USO-Camp Shows were variety revues with a mix of entertainers. Comedian Bob Hope, the most steadfast USO performer, made his first tour in 1942. Stars such as Betty Grable, Al Jolson, Ray Bolger, Martha Raye, Keenan Wynn, Jack Benny, Judith Anderson, and Paulette Goddard joined with lesser known entertainers including tap dancer Gertrude Briefer, ventriloquist Richard Lane, dancers Allen and Kent, and juggler Stan Kavanaugh to bring amusement and a few moments of relaxation to Allied soldiers and sailors in places such as Alaska, Australia, Bermuda, Brazil, Belgium, Burma, Central Africa, China, Egypt, England, France, Greenland, Germany, Iceland, India, Iran, Italy, the Philippines, and West Africa.

The American Theatre Wing, seeing an opportunity to both contribute to the cause by entertaining the service personnel in Europe and, at the same time, foster new audience members for Broadway when the war was over, decided that it would get involved with the USO-Camp Shows's program. On 26 April 1944, the American Theatre Wing created the War Players. This division of the Wing was set up, from the outset, as an "overseas

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[1] *The Curtain that Goes Up 700 Times a Day*, USO-Camp Shows, Inc., n. d. New York Public Library.

stock company."[2] Under the direction of Bert Lytell, who served on the USO-Camp Shows's board of directors, and Antoinette Perry of the Wing, a plan was formulated that would involve taking a complete non-musical Broadway production overseas. The show selected by the Wing for this venture was a revival of Katherine Cornell's hit production of the Rudolph Besier play, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. Directed by her husband, Guthrie McClintic, the play was a solid hit in 1931 and then extended its life by touring all across the nation. Cornell, McClintic, and most of the original cast were contacted and they agreed to participate in the USO-Camp Shows's tour.

The choice of this particular play for an overseas tour was controversial. Representatives from both the USO and the military felt that a serious drama, especially one that was based on the lives of two nineteenth century British poets, would be beyond the immediate interests of servicemen who had just left the battle lines. They believed the most appropriate and most appreciated entertainments would include a collection of pretty girls, snappy tunes, and jokes. However, since the project was to be completely funded by the Wing, the opposition postponed final judgement and allowed the Wing to begin to pull together the production.

The War Players ordered a portable set designed and constructed, rented costumes, and had a flexible lighting set-up configured. The production went into rehearsal and then gave a number of performances at New York area military bases as a sort of "out-of-town" tryout. On 11 July 1944, the *New York Times* announced that, based on the success of those preview performances, and "with the blessings of the War Department and the

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[2] Executive Board Minutes, 26 April 1944.

USO-Camp Shows, the American Theatre Wing has received the go-ahead signal to send a company of players overseas." According to the article, all expenses for the production, including the salaries of the performers, set at $100 per week, were to be paid by the Wing, but the actual management of the troupe would be handled by the USO.[3]

This production was to be the largest single theatrical venture attempted by USO-Camp Shows. The typical USO entertainment unit would play on temporary stages set up in camps or hospitals with only rudimentary settings and props. The normal troupe was typically forced to limit variety shows or plays to a running time of one hour. The Wing's production unit, in contrast, would perform in traditional theatre spaces and was permitted to bring along with it nearly all of the production apparatus necessary to assure a full-blown professional presentation. According to Margalo Gillmore, an actress in the show:

> We were to be allowed five thousand pounds of scenery and equipment as against the usual restriction of five hundred, and we would be seventeen people instead of the regulation seven. The play was to be played in its entirety, and the production was to suggest, as far as possible, the sense and illusion of the complete theatre.[4]

Cornell and the rest of the cast and crew were designated Unit 319 of the USO, and after being fingerprinted, inoculated, issued steel helmets, identity cards, and gas masks, they boarded a ship and headed for Europe and their first theatrical engagement as the War

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[3] Sam Zolotow, "Top Stage Stars Headed Overseas," *New York Times*, 11 July 1944.

[4] Margalo Gillmore and Patricia Collinge, *The B. O. W. S.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945), 6.

Players of the American Theatre Wing War Service.

Their first performance was given on 25 August 1944 in the Teatro Garibaldi in Santa Maria, Italy. A telegram sent by Katherine Cornell to the Theatre Wing's Board concisely expressed the results, "Opening last night like Mitchel Field [Long Island] in exquisite Opera House. Very thrilling."[5] The troupe was enthusiastically received by servicemen everywhere it played, including Caserta, Versailles, Paris, Rome, Florence, and Dijon.

Private Howard Taubman, a music and theatre critic for the *New York Times* who was serving in the Army on the Italian front, filed a first-hand account of the troupe's overseas performances.

> Katharine Cornell and her fine company of actors and actresses who inhabit the forbidding mansion on 50 Wimpole Street have met the audiences of service men and women and the result has been startling and enormously stirring to the parties of the first and second parts. The cast has never played to such audiences, they readily admit. And for many in the audience this is the first time they have seen and heard "round actors," the term used to distinguish them from the shadows they are accustomed to seeing on the screen. . . .
>
> Watch this GI audience and note how that magic of play and performance grows on them. Early in the first act there are a few of the usual soldier reactions — some audible comments such as "Oh, my aching back!" some whistles, some guffaws in unexpected places. But even these are rare

[5] Quoted in "Canteen in London Opens Doors Tonight," *New York Times*, 31 August 1944.

> and widely dispersed. Most of the audience is intent from the beginning and the intensity of concentration increases as the play unfolds. By the end of the play the audience is completely within its spell.[6]

That men who just hours before were fighting for their very lives midst blood and filth could be so effectively transported to another time and place for a few hours' respite demonstrates the power of good theatre. After 140 performances in Italy, France, and the Netherlands, the company returned to the United States in triumph and played an additional 87 performances on Broadway with box office proceeds going to fund the Wing's continuing service to the armed forces.[7]

In the estimation of all involved with the American Theatre Wing War Service War Players project, the *Barretts of Wimpole Street* was a complete success. Although it is not possible to estimate the impact the production had on each of the Allied servicemen who saw it or to know if the Wing succeeded in persuading any of them to become theatre patrons after the war, it is certain the efforts of the War Players were appreciated by most of those who saw the production, if only for the moment of performance.

Hospital Entertainment

In addition to the previously discussed entertainment programs that provided for the men and women who served in the armed forces and Merchant Marine, the Wing created a

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[6] Howard Taubman, *New York Times*, 17 September 1944.

[7] Samuel L. Leiter, *The Encyclopedia of the New York Stage, 1940-1950*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 54.

program that catered to those who had been wounded in battle and returned to the United States to recuperate. This program operated with the cooperation and material assistance of a number of other welfare organizations, including the American Red Cross, and, once again, the USO. For the men and women who volunteered their time and talents to the hospital entertainment program, it was likely to be seen as a difficult duty because of the terrible damage done to the young men they visited. The hospital visits may also have been the most rewarding of the Wing's efforts because of the unmistakable appreciation demonstrated by the men for whom the program was designed.

In the Second World War over 500,000 American men were wounded in combat. As the primary shipping point for military traffic moving to and from the European and North African theatres of war, New York served many of these men with several of the nation's largest military medical facilities and general hospitals.[8] The American Army and Navy sent men who had suffered physical injury as well as mental trauma home by hospital ship to rest and recover in those stateside medical facilities. With wounds that might include total blindness, loss of limbs, and serious burns, many of those men were confined to bed twenty-four hours a day. Naturally, the morale of those men was a serious concern to the military's medical corps.

On 3 June 1942, the Theatre Wing's board passed a resolution that established their desire to "undertake the entertainment of convalescent men of the armed forces in the

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[8] Karl Drew Hartzell, *The Empire State at War: World War II* (New York: State of New York, 1949), 31.

hospital."[9] However, at that time, there were few casualties in the New York military hospitals, so no action was taken. In the spring of 1943, American casualties from the North African campaign, as well as airmen who had been injured flying bombing raids deep into Nazi occupied Europe, were beginning to return to the United States for convalescence and rehabilitation. At that time, Bert Lytell, the head of Actors' Equity and a very active member of the Theatre Wing, raised the hospital entertainment issue again and proposed that the Wing get immediately involved in providing for soldiers recuperating in New York area military hospitals. His suggestion was warmly received by the board, which recognized that, as a whole, the nation was making every effort not to let happen in this war what happened in the last, when large groups of men in veterans' hospitals were neglected by the nation they had served.

Lytell and the board were sure that the American Theatre Wing could make a valuable contribution to that important task.[10] Accordingly, a committee was formed and a letter of inquiry sent to the commandant of one of the local military hospitals asking how to go about taking over a portion of the entertainment for that facility. After receiving a positive reaction to its initial probe, the Theatre Wing exploratory committee exchanged additional letters with the Army and Navy's medical corps regarding entertainment programs suitable for the hospital environment. Inasmuch as other organizations had also expressed an interest in providing diversion for the men confined to hospitals, negotiations began with the Wing, the military's medical establishment, USO-Camp Shows, and the

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[9] Executive Board Minutes, 3 June 1942.

[10] Executive Board Minutes, 15 May 1945.

Recreation Division of the American Red Cross taking part. Those discussions clarified the patients' need for amusement and set the various responsibilities of the three service organizations.

In August 1943, the American Theatre Wing War Service announced the formation of two new committees, the National Hospital Committee with Lytell and Blanche Witherspoon as co-chairpersons, and the New York area committee with actresses Selena Royale and Vera Allen as heads.[11] Royale and Allen asked the board to fund a six-week trial project and then began making plans for their first hospital visit. They also proposed that, in addition to the Red Cross and the USO, the Wing should solicit the cooperation of the UTWAC and the Metropolitan Council for Camps and Hospitals. The first group could help provide some of the talent needed to make the new venture a success, and the latter organization might supply logistical and possibly some financial support. The early long-range goals of the New York committee were to establish the utility of hospital entertainment and to identify the types of entertainment most popular with the patients. In discussions with the Wing's board, committee chairperson Blanche Witherspoon reported on early discussions with the Red Cross and explained an additional objective of the program.

> There are two problems I wanted to straighten out with the Red Cross, the fact that the American Red Cross itself should set aside a certain amount of money to establish paid entertainment units. It is all right to depend upon volunteer entertainment for certain things, but if you definitely want

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[11] "Stage to Aid Hospitals," *New York Times*, 2 August 1943.

> someone on Tuesday night, there is only one way to get them and that is, to have them paid. It is a principle we have insisted be used throughout all the entertainment enterprises that have been established by USO-Camp Shows for the Armed services. Definitely there should be a working agreement established along these lines.[12]

The other issue was setting up a regular entertainment schedule that balanced the efforts of the Wing, the USO, and the Red Cross.

In the Hospital Entertainment Program, along with the Lunchtime Follies, the Wing did not ask the men and women of the entertainment industry to volunteer their services. Most performers, including many of the stars of Broadway, Hollywood, radio, and nightclubs, would be paid standard union rates. Although there is no documentary evidence to explain this policy, it is reasonable to assume that performers were paid by the Wing in this venture partly because the Hospital Entertainment program functioned in cooperation with the USO which, as Witherspoon noted, traditionally paid its performers. At this same time, in both Hollywood and New York, the performers' unions were beginning to express concern that their membership were being unfairly exploited by being asked to donate so much time and talent to causes that claimed to be patriotic or charitable. The Wing's need to maintain the goodwill of its performers and their unions may have also contributed to the Wing's policy. After consultations with all of the parties involved, the Wing decided that it would begin the project by providing the same types of

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[12] Executive Board Minutes, 11 August 1943.

entertainments that were so popular at the Stage Door Canteen.[13]

On 9 August 1943, the Wing made its first expedition to the Halloran Hospital. This medical complex was located on Staten Island and was the "largest facility in the nation for treating injured soldiers."[14] According to Royale's report to the Theatre Wing's executive board, along with several stars, "approximately 142 American Theatre Wing girls were taken to Halloran Hospital to talk and dance with the wounded men. The Red Cross provided transportation and seem terribly pleased with results. They were excited, the boys were excited because it was the largest turn-out they ever had." The Red Cross suggested that every Monday night be set up as a Theatre Wing night. The Red Cross also proposed that the Wing alternate its amusements, one Monday featuring a "party" with the Canteen girls, and the next Monday simply bringing performers. One request that Royale presented to the board came directly from the boys, who wanted more "colored girls" to be brought to the hospital. There were only eighteen women of color among the first group of Wing entertainers.[15]

In her report on the first evening of entertainment taken to Halloran, Royale included a story that testified to the enormous potential represented by the hospital program.

> I should like to relate one of the instances where a man had been in a complete state of lethargy. Spencer Tracy spent almost three hours with him

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[13] Ibid.

[14] *Staten Island: An Economic Review*, Office of the State Deputy Comptroller for the City of New York, Report 4-2001 (October 2000). The hospital grounds are currently the site of the College of Staten Island, City University of New York.

[15] Executive Board Minutes, 11 August 1943. Some hospital wards at Halloran were set up exclusively for wounded African-American servicemen.

> and finally in the last fifteen minutes made a remark that brought some association of the past and from that time this man has been gradually regaining all of his mental faculties, and a report came in that he is now going around and trying to help those less fortunate than himself. I cannot urge too strongly that every person who can possibly devote the time should go out and visit the wards.[16]

With that kind of result possible, it is easy to understand why the Theatre Wing's board was so eager to continue the program.

The success of the first hospital program was shared among the administrators of other New York hospitals. The Brooklyn Naval Hospital immediately contacted the Wing asking for a similar visit. By 25 August, five hospitals had negotiated agreements with the Wing and the Red Cross, with some of them asking for two visits per week. Taking part in the program, along with Halloran and the Brooklyn Naval Hospital, were the Fort Jay Military Hospital located on Governor's Island, the Fort Hamilton Hospital in Brooklyn, and St. Albans. The agreements were based on three main points. First, the American Theatre Wing, in cooperation with the USO-Camp Shows, would arrange special entertainment groups for service to the hospitals. Secondly, all of the shows produced by the Wing would be accredited to it. And finally, all performers who were members of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America and were being used as volunteers or paid at a rate below standard union wages had to have clearance through the UTWAC and/or the Hollywood Victory Committee.

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[16] Ibid.

Although no accounting figures have survived, it is possible to speculate on the cost of this program. For example, Theatre Wing records do state that in August 1,337 women took part in "Canteen Parties" held in various military hospitals in and around New York City. Allowing a minimum payment of $10 per appearance to each of these hostesses, adding the fees paid to headline entertainers, the cost of transportation to the medical facilities, and a steadily increasing number of visits, it is reasonable to assume that the program cost the Theatre Wing between $15,000 and $20,000 per month. The Wing's board passed a funding measure that could cover these costs and thus demonstrated its firm belief in the importance of this new project. It allocated fifty percent of money coming from the motion picture *Stage Door Canteen* to the program, ordering that it be "set aside and devoted exclusively" to the benefit of the thousands of wounded men returning home from overseas and recovering in military hospitals.

While the entertainment programs were valuable and appreciated, the Halloran Hospital's administrators thought the Wing's talents could be used to have a direct impact on the medical progress of the patients. Vera Allen and Esther Hawley met with the field director of the Halloran Hospital in August to explore "the possibility of building a program . . . that would have real therapeutic value."[17] The first plan suggested by the doctors at the hospital was for the Wing to provide "short plays or condensed versions of melodramas" that the men could produce for themselves. However, the shifting population of the hospital made this idea impractical. The hospital's staff then asked if

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[17] Vera Allen, "Report on a Project for the Hospital Committee," 13 August 1943. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

Theatre Wing's Victory Players would write and perform new sketches to meet specific recommendations made by the doctors. The heads of the hospital asked that the new material be "especially written for the soldiers, good entertainment but with a certain point which could be implied."[18] It appears that, like the industrial worker and the citizen on the home front, the wounded soldier or sailor would be indoctrinated with what was considered by doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others to be appropriate propaganda. However, in this case the purpose of the presentation would be to impart a restorative message or strengthen the individual's morale. Unfortunately, none of these therapeutic plays were found while researching this study, so it is impossible to know if any were actually written and performed.

The Hospital Entertainment Committee filed a report at the first of the new year that detailed the progress of the program. According to the figures compiled, in October 1943, it served six hospitals and filled fifty-five bookings. In November the Wing's traveling hospital troupes visited seven different medical facilities and filled eighty bookings. The committee closed out the year by sending entertainment units to nine different New York area hospitals and presenting 115 different programs. The most popular aspect of the amusements offered was, of course, the Canteen girls who danced or chatted with the men. Over 1,500 women assisted at the Wing's hospital "parties" during the last three months of 1943. In her January 1944 evaluation of the program, Norma Chambers, the new chairperson of the Wing's National Hospital Committee, stated that "two things hit us at the same time, the fact that as important as the entertainment, was the

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[18] Vera Allen to Antoinette Perry, 22 July 1943. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

personal touch of the entertainment and also the value of anticipation."

The entertainments offered to the men in recovery included singers, musicians, magicians, specialty acts, and novelty programs. In the month of December, the hospital program sent out twenty-nine singers, twenty-three accompanists, eighteen instrumentalists, five quartets, seven magicians, seven sketch artists, two community singing groups, and eight novelty acts.[19] Among the big-name performers who participated in the hospital entertainment program were Frank Sinatra, Roy Rogers, and Benny Goodman and his Orchestra.

Included in the novelty program category were presentations built around a single theme. For example, an evening's entertainment might be focused on sports. Celebrity athletes, sports writers, sports experts, and radio sports announcers would meet with the men and discuss the current state of sports such as baseball, boxing, horse racing, or college football. Trivia contests developed. The soldiers would spend "two or three weeks in advance thinking up questions to stump the experts." According to Chambers, "The sport smokers are strictly a man to man affair. They ask all the women to get out, and the men love that kind of man to man thing."[20]

Quiz show programs became very popular with the patients and were developed around such topics as world news, the theatre, sports, and radio programs. Broadway producer Brock Pemberton occasionally played the role of emcee for a quiz program

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[19] Norma Chambers, et al. National Committee Report, January 1, 1944. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[20] Executive Board Minutes, 15 May 1945. All information attributed to Chambers and not specifically cited as coming from any other source comes from the minutes of this board meeting.

styled after the "Information Please" radio show. Other popular programs included a behind-the-scenes look at how radio programs were produced that was created by WCBS Radio, explaining sound effects and the technical side of the medium. The success of this program led to the creation of a "Behind the Screen" program that focused on the inside workings of the motion picture industry.

The Wing's songwriters pool also developed at least three different hospital programs. In one variation, the writers would make up new lyrics to old favorites using suggestions contributed by the patients. Soldiers would make their suggestions as difficult as possible, hoping to stump the musicians and win a small prize. Another type of program was a version of musical charades. A soldier or sailor would act out a song title and challenge the musicians and the rest of the audience to guess what tune he was thinking of. Chambers told the board about one instance of this game that was particularly touching.

> A wonderful thing happened on one of the recent nights. . . . One boy in the back raised his hand. He said, "I have one." He came up and he was on crutches. His face was beaming as he came up. He was full of feeling of what he wanted to do. He came up to the front of the circle, and when he got to the center he took one crutch and gave it to a boy; he took another crutch and gave it to another boy, and then for the first time he took three steps by himself, unassisted, to the arm of the 'quiz mistress' and started to walk with her. The audience called out, "I Don't Want to Walk Without You, Baby."

The third program was actually a twist on the "Beat the Band" type of contest. In this

competition, the wounded men would describe a song and the Wing's corps of songwriters and lyricists would have to come up with the song title and then play the song on the piano. Again, Chambers provided a poignant example for the board.

> There was a boy in a wheel chair, both legs were gone, and he said, "I have one for you." The man [songwriter] said, "All right, what is it?" He [the boy] said, "I am thinking of the one who is going to have trouble fitting me." The song he wanted was, "Sam, You Made My Pants Too Long."

In all three music programs, the patients were given an opportunity to get involved in the action. These kinds of participatory activities were thought by the military's doctors and psychiatrists to be most beneficial for the patients. The programs encouraged the men to interact with others and may have helped some overcome the depression and withdrawal that often accompanies serious physical trauma. It was also important to the men's recovery that they began to accept their war-related disabilities, as the young man in the last example seems to have done.

One of the most often requested entertainments was a program built around the talents of some the nation's leading cartoonists. Martin Branner (*Winnie Winkle*), Ray Van Buren (*Abbie 'n' Slats*), Ad Carter (*Just Kids*), Ernie Bushmiller (*Nancy*), Bill Holman (*Smokey Stover*), Al Posen (*Sweeney and Son*), Milton Caniff, who drew *Terry and the Pirates* as well as contributing to the military's own news magazine *Stars and Stripes*, and Rube Goldberg, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist, sculptor, and author, along with emcee Bugs Baer, the humorist and one-time vaudevillian, would pile into a bus, make the trip to the lower end of Manhattan, and take the ferry to Halloran. Once

there, they would entertain the patients by "challenging any boy in the audience to come up on stage and put five dots in any position he wants to, and he [the cartoonist] will do a credible sketch using them, a drawing of a man, and so on. The boys get tougher and tougher. They always think of a position that would be impossible for him, but invariably he works them in. One of them, three dots in a circle, turns out to be a man sliding on a flag pole, or something of that sort."[21] This program, like those mentioned above, did more than just entertain the men; it drew upon their creativity and competitive spirit and it involved them in the action.

By May 1945, the American Theatre Wing's Hospital Entertainment Committee had spread to three other cities: Washington, Philadelphia, and Boston. All totaled, the Wing was providing between 65 and 72 percent of all entertainment presented in 31 of the nation's military hospitals.[22] In Boston, the Hospital Committee began with its first program at Lovell General Hospital on Thanksgiving, 1944, and quickly spread to seven additional Massachusetts's military medical facilities. In Philadelphia, the hospital entertainment program became a major activity. The program there often entertained far more men per week in the hospitals than were guests in the Philadelphia branch of the Stage Door Canteen. In addition to giving in-hospital presentations, the Wing's Philadelphia program took ambulatory patients out of the wards for short periods of recreation. They were taken to home parties or to dinners and shows at country clubs, nightclubs, and restaurants. The benefits of the program were valued so highly that when

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[21] Executive Board Minutes, 15 May 1945.

[22] Ibid.

the Philadelphia affiliate of the American Theatre Wing closed its doors on 31 October 1945, a new organization was born, the Hospital Entertainment Canteen, Inc. Its goal was to carry on all of the activities that brought a few moments of relief to men who were only slowly recovering from the severe physical or mental damage that was done to them by the war.[23] The American Theatre Wing in New York continues to operate its hospital program, expanding it to include public and private general hospitals in the metropolitan area. The Hospital Entertainment Program is the Wing's longest continuously active charitable activity. According to a recent promotional brochure, today the Wing entertains 30,000 patients with almost 500 visits annually.[24]

It's Up To You

One of the ways that the war had an impact on the average American was in the shortage of certain food items which, before the war, had been plentiful. Even with American agriculture operating at full capacity, the drain on food resources resulting from the U. S. commitment to supply the Allies through Lend-Lease, the rapid growth of the armed forces that followed the passage of the Selective Service Act in September 1940, and a booming wartime economy meant that staple food items such as coffee, milk, and vegetable oils were in short supply.[25] In an effort to control food distribution, the federal

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[23] *Biography of a Canteen*, Philadelphia Stage Door Canteen, n. d.

[24] *The American Theatre Wing Programs*, promotional brochure, n. d.

[25] The economic growth spurred by the war reduced American unemployment. Well paying jobs meant that many previously economically disadvantaged citizens were suddenly able to afford more high quality foods.

government began a food rationing program that provided each citizen with coupons that were supposed to guarantee that scarce items would be evenly distributed. Historian Paul Fussell notes, "Soon butter, cheese, canned goods, and — worst of all — meat required coupons. By the end of the war virtually all foods were rationed except fruits and vegetables, and many people supplied these from their own gardens."[26]

The shortages caused by the war disturbed Americans just emerging from the Depression and previously accustomed to an abundant food supply.[27] Many in the United States resented the fact that, because of the nation's commitment to its Allies, so much American food was being sent to aid England and the Russians. As a result, some of these less patriotic citizens, as well as some with a more criminal intent, took matters into their own hands. A black market appeared in the United States almost as soon as rationing began, offering bootleg meat as well as counterfeit coupons. The critical need for consumer cooperation in managing the available food resources led federal authorities to recognize the need for a national informational program, and then to seek the assistance of "the agencies of propaganda easiest to employ, the apparatus of peacetime advertising and entertainment."[28]

As part of that information drive, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) employed the services of playwright Arthur Arent, the author of many of the

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[26] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford U. P., 1989), 198.

[27] Ibid., 195.

[28] John Morton Blum, *V War for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcort Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 10.

Federal Theatre Project's most successful Living Newspaper presentations. Arent was instructed to write a dramatic presentation that would highlight the important aspects of the nation's food problems and advocate the most equitable solutions. While Arent worked on a script that explained the rationing program, Ben James of the USDA approached theatrical producer Kermit Bloomgarden to see if he and the Theatre Wing would be willing to work with the government on the project. Specifically, James asked if Bloomgarden thought it would be possible to find New York actors and actresses, stage hands, and technicians who would be willing to perform without pay on the behalf of the government. Bloomgarden made inquiries among his theatre colleagues and discovered that the unions would not allow this to take place.[29]

The Department of Agriculture, undeterred by those initial reactions, went in search of private sector financial support for their endeavor. Typical of the patriotic spirit of cooperation that exemplified the period, the USDA garnered sponsorship from the theatrical community, the motion picture business, and food industry organizations. Twelve food industry groups, including the American Meat Institute, the National Association of Retail Grocers, the Super Market Institute, and the United States Wholesale Grocers Association, joined together to provide over $100,000 for the program.

Then, on 7 February 1943, James again approached Bloomgarden and the Wing on behalf of the USDA and asked for help. This time, however, the request was accompanied by $15,000, which was to be used to pay actors as well as to compensate the Wing for its

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[29] Executive Board Minutes, 24 February 1943.

professional managerial services. Bloomgarden presented the idea to the Wing's board on 24 February and suggested that it cooperate with the USDA. The project was accepted and the initial New York production was planned. *It's Up To You*, directed by Elia Kazan, opened on the evening of 31 March 1943 at the Academy of Music on Fourteenth Street in New York.[30]

The USDA show was acclaimed by both the press and government leaders as being simultaneously entertaining and educational, and two versions of the production were readied for distribution to both professional and amateur theatres across the country — a full-length version running 1½ hours, and a half hour tabloid version, both of which incorporated live performers interacting with filmed sequences. A 20-minute movie variation which required no living actors was also prepared and released to some of the nation's largest motion picture theatre chains. On 10 April 1943, Vera Allen met with two representatives of the USDA to discuss the formation of additional acting companies to perform the half hour variation in motion picture theatres throughout New York City. As a result, 150 actors, directors, and technicians were hired by the Wing and formed into 35 troupes to perform the play.[31] In the end, Agriculture Secretary Claude R. Wickard proclaimed the play "a splendid use of the living theatre in bringing the urgent message of wartime food production and management to the people."[32] The American Theatre Wing War Service's contributions to the program were mainly administrative, but they were

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[30] For more information on this unique production, see my article: "The Federal Government's Wartime Food Play: *It's Up To You*," *Theatre History Studies* 19 (1999): 43-62.

[31] "To Discuss 'It's Up To You' Plans," *New York Times*, 9 April 1943.

[32] Claude R. Wickard to Paul Dullsell, 14 July 1943. National Archives, Washington, DC.

important in the production of an influential wartime play which, it was hoped at the time, would be eventually staged by over 100,000 amateur players nationwide and seen by over 10 million Americans free of charge in their local theatre, church, or school.[33]

Music War Committee

One of the paradoxes of World War II was that despite the vast array of popular music being played by dance bands, on the radio, and in the movies, there seemed to be no one song that epitomized the era. In a *New York Times Magazine* article, John Desmond took note of the some of the attempts to overcome the deficiency and defended the men and women of the American music business, stating:

> It isn't that Tin Pan Alley hasn't been trying, either. Very early in the war, ten days after the Japanese attack to be exact, it burst into tune with its first effort — a thing called "Remember Pearl Harbor" that was something less than terrific. Since then thousands of songs, rhyming Jap with slap, mama with Yokohama, Yank with tank, have poured into music publishers' offices and thousands have poured out again after one audition. Some have passed on to the public; a few went over the country on national radio hook-ups and via recordings, and fewer still won even temporary public acceptance. None was an "Over There" or even an "O How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning."[34]

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[33] U. S. Department of Agriculture Press Release, File Number 17-340. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[34] John Desmond, "Tin Pan Alley Seeks *The* Song," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 June 1943.

The lack of success did not stop the American Theatre Wing from trying to motivate songwriters. In April 1943, the Wing, with the help of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), created the American Theatre Wing Music War Committee. Among the members of this new war committee were some of America's most important popular song and Broadway musical writers, including Harold Rome, Irving Berlin, and the chairman of the committee, Oscar Hammerstein II.

When the American Theatre Wing held its previously mentioned contest for skits, songs, and one-act plays, the Music War Committee played a role. Judging the quality of the songs submitted was the responsibility of a select group of composers and lyricists from the committee. Over 1000 songs were entered in the contest, of which "800 were written by civilians, 115 by members of the armed services, and 89 by industrial workers." Only 14 songs made it into the contest finals, however, and none of the musical creations was judged by the five-man committee to be the long sought after war song.[35]

In July, the American Theatre Wings' Music War Committee held a mass meeting for musicians at the Hotel Edison. The purpose of the meeting was to encourage New York songwriters to write war songs that would increase the national morale, inspire cooperation on the home front, and spur the military to victory. Hammerstein acted as master of ceremonies and the program featured speeches by Jack Joy, musical consultant to the United States Army, and Captain Harry Salter, Special Service Officer of the Music Division of the Army.[36]

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[35] "Report of National Contest Committee."

[36] *New York Times*, 28 July 1943.

The Music War Committee not only encouraged composers and lyricists, it formed a cooperative relationship with a music publishing house. Leo Feist Publishing agreed to put out sheet music for a number of the songs to come out of the committee's efforts. One of the songs published under the banner of the American Theatre Wing War Music Committee was "West Of Tomorrow." With music by Henry Manners and lyrics by Robert Sour, the song is a tribute to the submariners of the United States Navy.

> When our sub broke the surface way out West Of Tomorrow,
> It was night and as dark as it could be,
> The tubes all were loaded when we heard the skipper shout,
> "Fire one! Fire two! Fire three!"
> We could hear the pounding in the breast of ev'ry sailor there;
> When we all saw Fujiyama's crest reflected in the glare.
> All the ships, all the Zeros way out West Of Tomorrow
> chased us down to the bottom of the sea,
> But we'll pay another visit and we'll hear the skipper shout,
> "Fire one! Fire two! Fire three!"[37]

The song was written as an attempt to provide the men of the underwater "silent service" with an anthem as stirring as *The Marine's Hymn*, or the floating Navy's *Anchors Aweigh*.

In March 1944, the Music War Committee co-sponsored a benefit memorial service in tribute to the recently deceased lyricist Lorenz Hart. Hammerstein, Billy Rose, and Jimmy Durante joined with other members of ASCAP and the Music War Committee to

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[37] Henry Manners and Robert Sour, "West Of Tomorrow" (New York: Leo Feist, 1943).

present an evening of entertainment that realized a total of $5,980. The money was then donated to the Armed Forces Master Records, the supplier of musical record libraries for servicemen's recreation centers.[38] In addition, the music committee contributed to the efforts of the Theatre Wing's hospital entertainment program by sending composers and lyricists to amuse the patients, as was previously noted.

The American Theatre Wing's Music War Committee kept looking for the one song that would "sum up the hopes of all the services and all the civilians," but failed to find it.[39] While no single tune was written that could stand as the musical symbol for the war years, music continued to serve the nation as a source of inspiration, diversion, and memory throughout the war.

Youth in Wartime Committee

One of the areas of interest to the American Theatre Wing was the large number of boys and girls who were going through their teenage years during the war. These adolescents were old enough to be completely aware of the realities of the war, but too young to serve in the armed forces. Many of them wanted to make some meaningful contribution to the national war effort, but did not know how. The Theatre Wing and a group of collaborating agencies attempted to provide some direction for those young people.

In every nation involved in the war, the adolescent represented a significant national

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[38] "Memorial Tribute Paid Lorenz Hart," *New York Times*, 6 March 1944.

[39] Desmond, "Tin Pan Alley."

asset. If the war dragged on for years, young men would come of age and either be put in the military to fight or on the production line making the instruments of war. Girls could be used as a source of industrial or agricultural labor, or be kept at home caring for the next generation as well as tending to the wounded. Young citizens are also catalysts for change. They are malleable and relatively easy to indoctrinate to new ideologies and methodologies. In short, they are the future of the state.

In Germany these young men and women were organized into productive societies under the auspices of the National Youth Movement (*Staatsjugend*). The young men, aged fourteen to eighteen, joined the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*). Young women belonged to the League of German Maidens (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*). These two associations carried the standard for Naziism among young people and are described as being "the bearer[s] of the principle of the German revolution, out of which would develop 'a new nation a new form of humanity and a new order of living space.'"[40] Over the course of the war, the more than 1,500,000 members of these organizations enjoyed a spirit of camaraderie, were intensely involved in their national cause, and experienced a wider range of social interaction than the average German teenager. Although they joined these organizations for a variety of reasons, including patriotism, some merely sought the opportunity for greater independence as they began moving away from strict parental control.

In the United States, highly motivated youngsters in the same age bracket had their war-related efforts coordinated by such organizations as the Boy Scouts of America, the

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[40] Lisa Pine, "Girls in Uniform," *History Today* 49:3 (March 1999): 24.

Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, and other church or social institutions. Like their German counterparts, the American teens took part in neighborhood salvage drives, collecting paper, rubber, cooking fats, and metal for conversion into war materials. In addition, the American teens raised money for the Army and Navy Relief funds, sold War Bonds and War Stamps, and helped with Red Cross relief drives. The Boy Scouts had a close relationship with several government agencies and served the Department of Agriculture, the Armed Forces Postal Service, and the Treasury with the distribution of propagandistic posters.

In May 1943, the Wing joined with the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Child Care section of the Welfare Council of New York, the New York Committee on Mental Hygiene, and the United Neighborhood Houses of New York to create the American Theatre Wing Youth in Wartime Committee. Headed by actresses Helen Brooks and Olga Druce, the program suggested a variety of ways that young people could contribute to the war effort. The division's goals, as stated in an American Theatre Wing report, were two-fold: "training youth for war service to come" and encouraging "active participation in community war efforts."[41]

Youth-oriented public service projects conducted under the collaborative supervision of the Wing and its partners included a civilian clothes bank to provide for the needs of families who had been adversely affected either by the war or natural disaster. The young men and women also assisted with a New York Board of Education program that

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[41] "Youth Activities," The American Theatre Wing War Service, n. d. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

endeavored to fingerprint all civilians.[42] Youth organizations were encouraged to write and present skits, songs, dances, and pageants interpreting salvage, conservation, rationing, rumor control, and other war-related topics. In New York, the boys and girls writing the material could be assisted by professional writers and performers. According to a *New York Times* article, by the end of May, two New York City high schools and three settlement houses had already indicated their desire to participate in the dramatics program. Broadway performers Judson Laire, Grace Coppin, George Mitchell, Patricia Peardon, Coby Ruskin, and Katherine Squire all volunteered to consult with the young people as part of this plan.[43]

Teenagers were also encouraged to plant, maintain, and harvest group Victory Gardens. Other projects that were promoted included making or repairing toys for the children of slain soldiers and helping rubber conservation by forming "Pick-up Corps" to keep streets clear of broken glass, stones, and other bits of rubbish that could damage precious automobile tires. Girls were urged to knit afghans or create "patchwork" quilts for wounded soldiers and sailors. One of the most popular programs suggested that individuals or groups "adopt" a soldier or sailor and provide him with such things as toiletry items and cookies, in addition to writing letters to him.

There was also a paramilitary side to the committee's recommendations. The program's guidelines suggested teaching young men such things as military drills,

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[42] The reasons for this program are not clear, but it is reasonable to assume that it began as either a security measure or to aid in the identification of casualties if the Nazis or Japanese should attack the American homeland.

[43] "To Aid Community Shows," *New York Times*, 30 May 1943.

marksmanship, survival skills, and pre-flight aeronautical training. Both boys and girls could, according to the committee, be indoctrinated into the ideals of wartime citizenship, as well as trained for critical production occupations. In 1942, the U. S. Army Quartermaster Corps inaugurated a "Dogs for Defense" program. Shortly thereafter, the American Theatre Wing War Service made a formal offer to the Army to supply dogs suitable for training for the new program.[44] Although there is no evidence to firmly establish a relationship, the Wing's Youth in Wartime Program did suggest to the Boy Scouts of America that they create dog training regimens during the war. The Boy Scouts did establish a program that trained dogs for service in the military or as sentries guarding secure military or industrial installations on the home front, but no evidence was found to certify that any of the dogs trained by the Scouts were ever accepted into military service.

Even the youngest Scouts were encouraged to contribute to the home front defense. They were urged to make model airplanes based on Allied, German, Japanese, and Italian designs which could then be used for identification purposes by Civilian Defense aircraft spotters watching the American skies for signs of Nazi, Italian, or Japanese air attacks. These military-like programs are very similar to programs offered to the young men in the Hitler Youth organization in Germany and testify to the level of preparedness that any nation involved in a total war felt called upon to achieve.

The Youth in Wartime Committee, like other Wing programs, was created to

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[44] Anna M. Waller, "Dogs and National Defense." Department of the Army, Office of the Quartermaster General, 1958. <http://www.qmmuseum.lee.army.mil/dogs_and_national_defense.html> (18 December 2001).

maximize the creativity, patriotism, and energy found in the American public. It addressed the needs of an often forgotten portion of the population, the teenager. In a time when juvenile delinquency was on the rise, due in part to the lack of adults available to supervise adolescents, the Wing's collaborative program provided teens with activities that made them feel like they were making a positive contribution to the nation's mobilization plan. Although there are no records that attest to either the quantitative or qualitative success of the program, it may be appreciated simply as an important and necessary attempt to help shape the next generation of Americans, those who would inherit the world when the war was over.

Non-Professional Theatre Relations Committee

While it was true that the majority of the members of the American Theatre Wing War Service lived and worked in the New York City area, from the outset the Wing's leadership sought to encourage the men and women in other parts of the country who loved the theatre to join with them in serving the greater good during the conflict. To that end, the American Theatre Wing's Non-Professional Theatre Relations Committee was established. This division of the Wing encouraged individuals as well as theatre or educational institutions to become members of the theatrical welfare organization. In return, the Theatre Wing provided guidance and program models for amateur dramatic groups who wished to become more involved in their local war mobilization.

The Non-Professional Theatre Relations Committee operated under the direction of Garrett Leverton, the Wing's liaison with the Samuel French publishing company.

Because of its regular contact with even the smallest amateur theatre due to the need for production permissions and royalties, Samuel French already had relationships with more than 250,000 academic, union, and civic amateur theatres scattered across the nation. A Department of Treasury Field Memorandum issued in 1944 estimated that the total number of people involved in those non-professional stage groups was about 5,000,000.[45] According to Paul Green, the head of the National Theatre Conference, those local theatres presented over 400,000 live theatrical performances in 1941, and the plays, pageants, and musical revues they produced were given before an accumulated audience that numbered in the tens of millions.[46]

In the summer of 1942, Leverton made an extended trip around the country trying to enlist the support of many of those amateur theatre groups. At the 25 August board meeting, he explained his efforts:

> The idea I have for this project started last March. Since that time I have been trying to set up an organization which would reach all over the country. There are 13 national organizations among amateur groups and by the first of May I had received letters from all of them saying they could not support our effort.[47]

It seems that because there were a number of other organizations trying to put together a coalition of amateur theatre groups with similar purposes, no one group was able to

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[45] "Field Memorandum No. 820," U. S. Treasury Department, 23 May 1944. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[46] Paul Green, "The Play is Still the Thing," *New York Times*, 11 April 1943.

[47] Executive Board Minutes, 25 August 1942

muster complete support. Included among those organizations were the Hearst newspapers, the Office of Civilian Defense, and the Navy Relief Fund. When none of those associations appeared to be able to marshal the huge potential represented by the non-professional theatres, a couple of them joined forces and attempted to form a coalition. In early June, the Navy Relief and the OCD asked the Wing to join with them to pool resources and influence. When made aware of this proposal, Antoinette Perry convinced the other board members that the Wing would be better served if it turned the offer down. The reasoning behind Perry's decision is not recorded in any of the extant documents; however, it is reasonable to hypothesize that she was concerned with the narrow focus the two government organizations might have regarding the utilization of the amateur theatres' efforts.

By the end of August the non-professional theatre situation had cleared itself up. All thirteen of the national organizations serving the amateur theatre groups were, according to Leverton, now "solidly behind the American Theatre Wing." Again, the maneuvers that led to the theatre groups' unanimous alignment with the Wing are unclear, but we can postulate that they were more comfortable with the American Theatre Wing's broadly based approach to home front matters and its theatrical expertise. Along with the theatres themselves, Leverton garnered the support of seven magazines that catered to the amateur theatre community, including the largest and most influencial, *Theatre Arts*, which provided the Wing with a free page in each issue to promote its activities.[48]

To a nation at war, the propaganda potential represented by those amateur theatres

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[48] Ibid.

was a enormous resource that could be used to influence the attitudes and actions of the populace. Not only could the groups produce plays, skits, and pageants that featured approved propaganda, but the fact that the information was coming from members of the audience's own local community, and not from some huge impersonal government agency, increased the power and effectiveness of the message. Thus, the amateur groups were encouraged by the Wing's committee to incorporate patriotic dramas and pageants into their regularly scheduled seasons. Twenty-five scripts dealing with war-related topics were made available without royalty to the groups through Samuel French. The Theatre Wing also published and distributed its own script catalogue. Listed in the directory of plays available were one-acts, monologues, and sketches. Twelve of the sketches were taken from the repertory of the Victory Players, and the rest were winners in the American Theatre Wing National Contest.[49] Coincident with the efforts of the Wing and Samuel French, the Office of War Information and the War Finance Division of the United States Treasury Department each made scripts written at their request by the Writers' War Board available to the amateur groups.[50] In addition to providing access to patriotic plays, the Wing asked the groups to hold special American Theatre Wing benefit performances or to donate a portion of their box office receipts to support war relief activities.

The American Theatre Wing's summer theatre fund-raising campaign was taken over by the Non-Professional Theatre Relations Committee for the first time in 1943. Working

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[49] "American Theatre Wing Script Catalogue," American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc., n. d. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, MO.

[50] The OWI plays, pageants, and radio scripts were available to amateur theatres without charge and could be performed without royalty payment. Included in the list are such titles as *Junket for the Junk Man*, *Mr Togo and His Friends*, and *Hitler Has a Vision.*

with the committee was the Actors Fund of America. The money collected from audiences in many of the nation's summer theatres was divided among three organizations. The Theatre Wing and the Actors Fund each received forty percent, and the remaining twenty percent was donated to the Stage Relief Fund. In 1944, the total amount raised in the summer theatres was $4,323.[51]

The Wing's outreach program allowed thousands of amateur theatres to make a contribution to local war relief projects as well as the national war effort. Most importantly, they were able to make their contributions through their performances. Although it was never a highly publicized program, the Non-Professional Theatre Relations Committee probably involved more individual volunteers than any other program, as thousands of community, college, or club theatres took part in the committee's various activities.

The Theatre Wing Supper Club

On New Year's Eve 1942, the first of eight supper dances was held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. The organization sponsoring the galas was the Theatre Wing Supper Club, a group of New Yorkers who adopted the American Theatre Wing War Service as their special wartime fund-raising project. Membership in the Supper Club was by invitation only and was restricted to civilians in the upper strata of New York society, making it a highly exclusive institution. Although this elitism was contrary to the Wing's democratic policies as demonstrated in the regulations regarding the Stage Door

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[51] "Stage Drive Nets $4,323," *New York Times*, 15 November 1944.

Canteen, the Supper Club was an independent organization and therefore beyond the control of the Wing. At the same time, some of the same celebrities who stood so strongly against racism in the operation of the canteens were members of the Supper Club. It seems that although skin color or ethnicity could not be discriminatory factors in Theatre Wing related activities, money, social position, and political power could be.

According to the *New York Times*, the sponsoring club had a two-fold objective in holding the parties: "to raise funds for the wartime relief program of the Theatre Wing and to promote general good-fellowship in these serious times."[52] The board of governors for the club included Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, the former United States Ambassador to Argentina; David K. E. Bruce, soon to be the American ambassador to France; Bryon C. Foy, a vice-president of the Chrysler Corporation; and actress Helen Hayes and her husband, playwright Charles MacArthur. The general membership included "several hundred men and women prominent in society, stage, screen and musical circles."[53] Held every two weeks, each of the eight dinners raised approximately $3,500, which was then given to the Wing to support its various programs.[54]

Postwar Planning

In May 1945, a week after victory had been declared in Europe, the Wing's Board of Directors first considered the subject of postwar activities. Actress Theresa Helburn

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[52] "Theatre Group Plans 8 Dances," *New York Times*, 6 December 1942, sec. 2.

[53] "United Nations Fete," *New York Times*, 7 February 1943, sec. 2.

[54] "Supper Club Will Meet," *New York Times*, 10 January 1043, sec. 2.

expressed her interest in "the idea of helping returning veterans who are connected with the entertainment world," and suggested that a survey be done to see what each of the theatrical unions had available to help those men and women reenter the civilian world.[55] Other board members agreed with those sentiments and wanted to find ways that the Wing could continue help shape the nation's future. On 18 September, as a follow-up to the 2 September Japanese surrender, a meeting of all interested parties was held at the Wing's headquarters to discuss the organization's future plans.[56] Among the prospects discussed were the continuation of the Hospital Entertainment Program and the Victory Players. In addition, a new program was outlined at that meeting. The Professional Training Program was established so that any war veteran who wished to explore the possibility of a career in the theatre could register for free training classes. Most of the major theatrical unions played a part in the program by offering introductory courses relevant to its particular realm of theatre production. Some of those who took part in the actor training program were Eli Wallach, Carl Reiner, Tony Randall, Charlton Heston, Richard Chamberlain, James Whitmore, and Bob Fosse.[57]

At the 5 December 1945 meeting, board members met again to both reflect on the history of the organization and discuss additional postwar plans. The American Theatre Wing's board understood that the war relief aspect of the Wing was coming to an end.

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[55] Executive Board Minutes, 15 May 1945.

[56] George Heller to "Fellow Member," 13 September 1945, American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

[57] "Broadway Productions" (Internal memorandum) n. d. American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

Jane Cowl, the actress who had worked so hard to make the Stage Door Canteen a success, reminisced. "I will never forget the first meeting we had when we organized ourselves as the American Wing. . . . There are approximately 3,000 people who worked at that canteen on 44th Street who said to me over and over and over again, 'if only we could keep this going for all time, this union of all the branches of the theatre, we would be willing to work our fingers to the bone for it.'"[58]

Summary and Conclusion

For the United States of America, World War II proved to be of particular consequence. Before the war, America was an isolationist country struggling to recover completely from the economic chaos and social upheavals that exemplified the years of the Great Depression. By 1945, the United States had evolved into a world superpower. During the war, American factories supplied the armies of the Allied nations, the United States, Great Britain, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and to a lesser extent, China, with the ships, planes, tanks, guns, and ammunition necessary to defeat the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan. After the war, American industrial might continued to exert its supremacy by dominating worldwide consumer markets. On the wartime American home front, the shortage of men caused by the military draft gave women, African-Americans, and other minorities new opportunities for social and economic advancement, and stimulated the momentous changes in the nation's social structure that were so characteristic of the second half of the century.

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[58] Executive Board Minutes, 5 December 1945.

Despite the apparent impact of the war on the political, economic, and social fabric of the American homeland, the United States experienced the war differently than other nations. Although the United States was a reluctant combatant, once in the war, America quickly geared up to meet the challenges of a two-front conflict. However, the bombings and battles that menaced and eventually destroyed much of Europe never seriously threatened the real property or infrastructure of the United States. Nor did America suffer the civilian casualties that afflicted the European and Pacific theaters of war. Irrespective of the fact that the United States homeland was not seriously threatened with physical destruction, millions of Americans of all types contributed, each in their own ways, to the nation's war effort.

The American Theatre Wing War Service, a war relief organization that began in 1940 as a small group of women associated with the professional theatre, during the war became a national movement with over 9,000 active members, thousands of affiliates among amateur theatre groups, and tens of thousands of volunteers working on its behalf. With the same dedication to the spiritual and physical well-being of war victims as the ladies of the theatre who formed the World War I relief group, the Stage Women's War Relief, the women and men of the entertainment industry once again took up the cause of humanity after the outbreak of the century's second great war.

Between January 1940 and the end of the war, the Theatre Wing operated a wide range of programs and enjoyed the leadership of some of the American theatre's most

important people.[59] Celebrated actors, actresses, stage technicians, directors, playwrights, critics, composers and lyricists, designers, theatre owners, and producers contributed to the success of the welfare programs originated and sustained by the Wing. Equally important to the efforts of the group were the thousands of less famous theatre practitioners who gave their time and talent, as well as the hundreds of thousands of average men and women who contributed money to support the Wing. The Wing's largely volunteer workforce educated, inspired, comforted, provided needed rest and recreation, and created safe havens of goodwill. The overwhelming majority of those who donated their time and talents to the Wing's various enterprises did so out of a spirit of patriotism and humanitarian concern for the victims of the war. These were women and men who believed the leaders of the Allied nations who declared that democracy and human dignity were both at stake in the global conflict. The efforts of the people of the entertainment industry, under the leadership of the American Theatre Wing, were perhaps, more publicized than the endeavors of other citizen groups, but they were all part and parcel of the generosity and sense of civic responsibility that was the national wartime atmosphere. With presentations and projects that were both propagandistic and entertaining, they helped to boost the production of the materials necessary to the waging of war in Europe and the Pacific, informed the populace about its responsibilities during wartime, and contributed to the morale of civilian and soldier alike.

Of course, the American Theatre Wing was not the only war welfare organization

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[59] See Appendix C for a list of all of the Wing's wartime programs and the celebrities who served in leadership positions.

operating during the war, nor was it nationally the largest or most important. However, in a period of national crisis that was characterized by a spirit of unity and citizen volunteerism, the Wing was unique in at least two areas: the wide range of entertainment and assistance programs it carried out, and the splendid and almost unanimous cooperation it received from men and women of the entertainment professions.

The American Theatre Wing War Service's many programs touched the lives of tens of millions. Unfortunately, the exact number of people, both here in the States and abroad, whose lives were affected by the Wing and its wartime activities is unknown. However, we can speculate with some certainty. For example, statistics published by the Wing prior to Pearl Harbor indicate that the sewing workroom had already sent tons of clothing, personal toiletries, food, and other comfort items to many thousands of European refugees before America ever entered the conflict. After 7 December 1941, the workroom increased its rate of production and additionally dispatched substantial quantities of knitted khaki gloves, scarves, and caps to American servicemen going overseas. As noted in Chapter Four, the New York Stage Door Canteen alone played host to more than 2,000,000 military men during the war. The seven other Stage Door Canteens located in other major cities, including London and Paris, each set equally impressive attendance records. The Broadway, nightclub, and radio performers who participated in the Lunchtime Follies appeared before hundreds of thousands of workers in hundreds of factories and shipyards in and near New York and on the West Coast. The Follies' mail-order program and phonograph records are likely to have entertained many more thousands in factories located in the heartland of the nation where celebrity

performers were scarce and war production facilities widely dispersed. In addition, hundreds of stage workers put their theatrical careers on hold and took war production jobs helping to build the machines of war needed to defeat the Axis armies.

Beginning shortly after Pearl Harbor, the Theatre Wing's Speakers' Bureau and Victory Players filled thousands of requests for war-related speeches and performances. In three of the nation's largest and most important cities, New York, Washington, D. C., and Philadelphia, they urged large numbers of the general public to support the efforts of federal, state, and local governments, the American Red Cross, and other wartime organizations.

The Theatre Wing's script distribution program and its association with thousands of amateur theatres across the nation brought similar important war-related propaganda to further millions of American citizens. It is almost certain that at no other time in its history has the American theatre had such a close working relationship with the federal government. The Wing's connections with the United States Department of Agriculture, the Treasury Department, the Office of Civilian Defense, and the War Production Board, among others, were important to the theatre organization's accomplishments, and the success of the government's efforts to regulate American attitudes and behaviors during the conflict. While all plays may be considered propagandistic, this was a period in theatre history when many plays were valued for more for their educational value than for their ability to entertain, and the Wing played an important role in the creation, production, and distribution of those propagandistic presentations.

From its earliest projects, the sewing workshop and fund raising to help the

European victims of the war, to the hospital entertainment program and the postwar training for actors, directors, stage managers, and stage hands, the men and women who guided the Wing's activities tried to make a difference. The programs run by the Wing both reflected the home front environment and helped to shape the often radical changes that were needed in American society in order to successfully wage war against enemies on two fronts. In the Wing's propagandistic speeches, plays, songs, and skits critical issues facing the nation were presented to the populace.

The Wing also created programs that spread an ideology that was not always completely compatible with all sectors of either the government or the general public. The Wing took a leading role in advocating a level of racial and ethnic tolerance not found in most of the nation before the war began. To many in America during the war, the belief that the United States should be an open and fully integrated society was abhorrent, particularly with regard to the status of African-Americans. To all those who were oppressed by bigotry, racism, and intolerance, the Wing brought messages that offered hope, faith, and the promise of a better world after the war was over, as well as those that reminded the average citizen of the ideals of democracy and freedom which were at stake in the conflict.

Although a complete accounting of the Wing's finances does not exist, it is clear from the fragmentary evidence that the Wing's endeavors required substantial monetary support. That support came from a dizzying array of sources. Corporate contributions, donations made by private individuals, both in and out of the entertainment industry, and benefit performances were combined with art shows, collection boxes passed through

audiences, card parties, and other fund-raising events to supply the necessary means of bringing to fruition the many projects created and operated by the Wing. For the first three years of its existence, the American Theatre Wing struggled to make its financial ends meet. According to the few references to the organization's bank accounts that are found in the extant records, the Wing only rarely had more than $50,000 on hand to pay performers, a few managerial employees, rent, overhead, and material costs. The expenditures associated with the operation of the Speakers' Bureau, the Victory Players, the Lunchtime Follies, the workroom, and of course, the largest expenses, the canteens, tea dances, and hospital entertainment program, were considerable. With the revenue it began to receive in late 1943 from the Sol Lesser motion picture production, *Stage Door Canteen*, and the Canteen's radio program, the Wing was finally able to adequately fund its many ventures. Although the Theatre Wing's archives do not contain a cumulative financial report for the war years, it is clear from the records that do survive that it spent, at a minimum, $3,500,000 during the war. In addition, the Wing and its programs benefitted from an equal or greater amount of goods and services, which were donated to the cause by those who supported its efforts. Particularly noteworthy are the Broadway, Hollywood, radio, and nightclub performers who graced the stages of the Stage Door Canteens here and abroad free of charge to the Wing. Despite the shortage of detailed evidence, it is clear that, with few exceptions, the support received by the Wing was skillfully used to serve the nation's war effort.

While it is impossible to estimate the precise effects of any of the Wing's programs, it is not hard to believe that they had a positive impact on the nation's ability to effectively

wage war. At the same time, it is undeniable that some of the Theatre Wing's programs served its own interests as well as those of the nation. Although it would be impossible to know exactly how many, it is likely that some of those who saw a Victory Players sketch, heard a celebrity speaker urge them to become a blood donor, or while serving in a foreign land, saw a performance of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, were inspired after the war to visit either Broadway or their local community theatre as a new theatre patron.

In that time of crisis, the men and women of the theatre, like those in other arts, knew that they had a special role to play. As the American author and editor Irwin Edman noted in 1942:

> The arts, like fresh air and open country, are wonderful restorers of health, a sense of proportion, a sense of serenity. They enable man to look beyond the acute distresses of the present to gleams of a possibly better and sweeter world. They enable men and women to return to the grim tasks of bringing about the conditions of such a world . . . with fortitude and renewed spirit.[60]

Whether they were actors, actresses, directors, scene or costume designers, or stage technicians, the people of the theatre answered the nation's call to arms with creativity, hard work, and enthusiasm. Contrary to the commonly held belief that the arts and the artist exist outside of the often harsh reality of the world, the men and women of the Theatre Wing took it upon themselves to find ways to make their creativity and energy a positive force helping others in dealing with the facts of life in war, and assisting their

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[60] Irwin Edman, "No Blackout for the Arts," *New York Times Magazine*, 19 April 1942.

country it its time of national emergency. Regardless of the divergent opinions concerning the relevance of Broadway's theatrical productions to the nation's war effort, the American Theatre Wing's contributions to the endeavor, as this study has demonstrated, were exemplary.

The final analysis of their contributions was, perhaps, best summed up in 1947 by the *New York Times* theatre critic and prominent Theatre Wing board member, Brooks Atkinson:

> When most men are bitter, cynical and exhausted it is one of the functions of the artist to preserve faith in human beings. In wartime his voice is not so loud as an artillery barrage and his word does not shake the earth like a bombing. But his disinterested devotion to human beings is more creative than war or politics and his responsibility never ends.[61]

In war or in peace, the theatre rarely stands isolated from the society it which it exists. In the modern American theatre, the example of the Wing's concern for its fellow men and women lives on in Broadway's charitable drives on behalf those stricken with AIDS, the homeless, and most recently, the victims of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. During World War II, the American Theatre Wing War Service, unquestionably, had a material effect on the lives of millions. The good they accomplished deserves to be remembered and should stand for all times as a paradigm for the men and women of the theatre profession.

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[61] Brooks Atkinson, *Broadway Scrapbook* (New York: Theatre Arts, 1947), 225.

Appendix A
Plays of the American Theatre Wing Speakers' Bureau and Victory Players 1942 - 1945

The following list of plays is taken from a chart prepared sometime after the end of the war by the American Theatre Wing. Included in the data found on the chart for most of the plays are the titles, their principal propagandistic focus, the number of scripts duplicated and distributed by the Wing, and the names of the federal agencies who were granted permission to distribute copies. The chart was found in the American Theatre Wing's New York archives. The scripts that are extant are indicated with an asterisk. All of the extant scripts can be found in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Name of Script	Author	Year	Subject
*A Very Nice Dinner	Patricia Collinge	1942	Bonds
Clarabelle Defends America	Carl Buss	1942	Bonds
America Is Americans	Hal Borland and Philip Dunning	1942	General Morale
Share the Future	Wolcott Gibbs	1942	
Aldrich Family at War	Clifford Goldsmith	1942	
For Lack of a Nail	Writers War Board	1942	Conservation
*Wise Guys	Helen Stetson	1942	Gas Rationing
Man Bites Carrot	Ben Brady	1942	Nutrition
Home Front	Therese Lewis	1942	Bonds
Whoduzzit	Staats Cotsworth & Mrs. A. Doremus	1942	Volunteerism (AWVS)
What'll I Do, Mom?	Ethel H. Gregory	1942	Salvage
I Want a Nurse	Isobel Evenson	1942	Nurses' Aides
*Jack Spratt and His Wife	Helen Stetson	1942	General Morale

*New Recruit	Isobel Evenson	1943	Children and Bonds
*Blackout Party	Helen Stetson	1943	Civilian Defense
*Seaside Porch	Tom Powers	1943	Gas Rationing
*America's Way Can Work	Esther Hawley	1943	Block Leaders
*We've Just Begun	Esther Hawley	1943	Salvage
*You Give What You Got	Esther Hawley	1943	Blood Donors
*Home is Our Nation	Olga Druce	1943	Child Care
This Way, Stranger	Olga Druce	1943	
An Average Woman	Patricia Collinge	1943	Bonds
My Son, Toni	Isobel Evenson	1943	Bonds
*Straight Ahead for Freedom	Esther Hawley	1943	Racial & Ethnic Tolerance
*I Didn't Think	Esther Hawley	1943	Security of War Information
*Fighting Proceeds on All Fronts	Esther Hawley	1943	Rationing
*To Serve Tomorrow	Esther Hawley	1944	Post-war Planning
Day of Peace	Helen Stetson	1944	Bonds
Home Front Warrior	Ned Rosing	1944	
The Favor	Lawrence Klee	1944	Bonds
*To Ease Their Hurt	Esther Hawley	1944	Bonds
*Tomorrow's Harvest	Esther Hawley	1944	Bonds (From Farm Groups)

So Women Can't Take It!	Spohie Kerr	1944	WAC Recruiting
*Little Girl With Brown Braids	Jennette Dowling	1945	Child Care
*More Than Just Love	Esther Hawley	1945	Returning Veterans
*Song of the Radish	Anne Seymour	1945	WAC Recruiting
*The Sergeant	Lawrence Klee	1945	Bonds
*The Sandbox	Jennette Dowling	1945	Child Care
*The Music Goes Round & Round	Nancy Moore & Anne Hall	1945	Bonds (For High Schools)
*Not Today, Music Box	Nancy Moore & Anne Hall	1945	
*Meet Harry	Lawrence Klee	1945	Bonds
*Crossroad	Esther Hawley	1945	Bonds
In the Minds of Men	Esther Hawley	1945	United Nations
On the Way Back Home	Esther Hawley	1945	
Somebody Talked	Peggy Lamson		Security of War Information
But That Isn't Nice Work, Darling.	Helen Stetson		
Flag Waver	Helen Stetson		General Morale
Is It Asking Too Much?	Peggy Lamson		Salvage
Through the Dark Days	Esther Hawley		Red Cross
*Missing In Action	Peggy Lamson & Clark Holladay		Security of War Information
No Door Is Shut	Esther Hawley		Veterans

A Penny in the Cup	I. J. Alexander	Bonds
At the Foot of the Tree	I. J. Alexander	Bonds

Appendix B
Types of Audiences for Victory Players - New York Area Only (% of Total Performances)[1]

Unions & Labor Groups	12.5%
Rallies	10.5%
Lodges & Benevolent Society	10.4%
Employee Groups	10.1%
Social Welfare & Health Agencies	9%
Consumer & Parents' Groups	9%
Church Groups	8.5%
Schools & Colleges	7.2%
Women's Clubs	5.3%
Professional Groups	3.8%
Miscellaneous	13.7%
	100 %

[1] "American Theatre Wing Victory Players (1942-1945)," American Theatre Wing Archives, New York.

Appendix C
American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc.
Organization and Programs

Board of Directors
Active and Honorary

Rachel Crothers, President
Antoinette Perry, Chairman of the Board and Secretary
Gertrude Lawrence, First Vice-President
Helen Hayes, Second Vice-President
Vera Allen, Third Vice-President
Lee Shubert, Fourth Vice-President
Paul Dullzell, Fifth Vice-President
Mrs. Martin Beck, Treasurer
Sidney R. Fleisher, Legal Counsel

Brooks Atkinson
Kermit Bloomgarden
Ray Bolger
Harry N. Brandt
Ilka Chase
Jane Cowl
Russel Crouse
Morton Downey
William Feinberg
Vinton Freedley
John Golden
Oscar Hammerstein, II
Marcus Heiman
George Heller
Emily Holt
Josephine Hull
Vincent Jacobi
Abe Lastfogel
Alfred Lunt
Bert Lytell
Burns Mantle
Earl C. McGill
Fred Marshall
Helen Menken
Gilbert Miller
Warren P. Munsell
Brock Pemberton
Solly Pernick
James C. Petrillo
James F. Reilly
Jacob Rosenberg
J. Robert Ruben
James E. Sauter
Oliver M. Sayler
Morrie R. Seamon
Mat Shelvey
Lawrence Tibbett
Niles Trammell
Richard F. Walsh
Dwight Deere Wiman

American Theatre Wing War Service Committees

Workroom Committee (January 1940)
Lucile Watson, Chairperson
Gertrude Lawrence, Coordinator: British workers
Michelette Burani, Coordinator: French workers
Katherine Hepburn, Coordinator: American workers
Volunteers: 2,000[1]

Stage Door Canteen (December 1941)
Jane Cowl, Co-Chairperson
Selena Royale, Co-Chairperson
Volunteers: 1,500-3,000

Speakers' Bureau (January 1942)
Vera Allen, Chairperson
Harold Vermilyea, Vice-Chairperson
Volunteers: 290

Campaign Personnel Division (January 1942)
Volunteers: 600

War Production Training Program (Spring 1942)
Edward Raquello, Chairperson
Volunteers: 1,000

Non-Professional Relations Committee (Summer 1942)
Garrett Leverton, Chairperson

Lunchtime Follies (June 1942)
Moss Hart, Co-Chairperson
George Heller, Co-Chairperson
Kermit Bloomgarden, General Manager
Aline MacMahon, Secretary
Volunteers: 300

Merchant Seamen's Club (July 1942)
Constance Collier, Co-Chairperson
Mrs. Brock Pemberton, Co-Chairperson
Volunteers: 25

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[1] These are estimated numbers only. In cases where the extant evidence does not provide a basis for an estimate, none is given.

It's Up To You Committee (February 1943)
Kermit Bloomgarden, Chairperson

Music War Committee (April 1943)
Oscar Hammerstein, II, Chairperson

Sunday Tea Dances (May 1943)
Emeline Roche, Chairperson
Volunteers: 30

Youth in Wartime Committee (May 1943)
Helen Brooks, Co-Chairperson
Olga Druce, Co-Chairperson

Hospital Entertainment (August 1943)
Bert Lytell, Co-Chairperson, National Committee
Blanche Witherspoon, Co-Chairperson, National Committee
Selena Royale, Co-Chairperson, NYC Committee
Vera Allen, Co-Chairperson, NYC Committee
Volunteers: 1,000

Victory Players (August 1943)
Harold Vermilyea, Chairperson
Volunteers: 200

ATW/USO War Players (April 1944)
Bert Lytell, Chairperson

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