



NYTW NEWS

LATE CITY FINAL

WINTER 1995 / Weather: Familiar ★

50¢

THIS FAMILY PERFORMS...

UNNATURAL ACTS!

This March, New York Theatre Workshop and Pick Up Performance Company, will present The Family Business, a wise and playful meditation on the business of family, presented by a show biz family. The product of a unique collaboration, The Family Business was written, directed and choreographed by Ain Gordon with his father David Gordon. Both perform in the piece, along with actress and dancer Valda Setterfield, Ain's mother and David's wife.

TICKETS AND INFORMATION: SEE PAGE 2



EDITORIAL

capital gains

Usually this column is devoted to current and philosophical issues confronting the Artistic Director. However, with the incredible achievement of the completion of the active portion of our Capital Campaign, it seemed like a good moment for the Managing Director to muse on the state of the institution, the past and the future.



MANAGING DIRECTOR:

Nancy Kassak Diekmann

The staff moves downtown in June, and all our activities will finally be united on one block, which will greatly increase the opportunity for all members of the NYTW community to meet and interact.

Long-range planning for a theatre is a curious undertaking. The management staff is asked to predict, with confidence, financial and institutional structures that are in large measure out of our control, based on the shifting sands of economic uncertainty, waning government support, and artistic success. We are making big plans for the future at the same time that we are trying to figure out how to possibly pay the past-due bills of the present. So what keeps us going, and how have we done so well this time? Are we the best management team in nonprofit theatre in New York?—well, no. We're pretty smart, but the reason things have turned out well, I believe, is that all the plans and decisions of this theatre are based on, and grow out of, the theatre's artistic imperatives. We dream about who we are artistically and where we want that dream to take us; then we put in place the management systems that can make that dream happen. And those special moments, when artist, audience and community come together to create theatre, keep us going.

For me, there are very individual moments in time that mark the momentum and growth of New York Theatre Workshop: John Kani in *MY CHILDREN! MY AFRICA!*, as he stood alone center stage and watched the page of a book burn; the glorious cast of *MAD FOREST* standing shoulder to shoulder and filling the tiny Perry Street Theatre stage; staff and artists listening spellbound in our studio to the first versions of *ANGELS IN AMERICA*; Claudia Shear's exuberant dance of joy ending the opening night performance that literally took her life to a different place; a silent little girl sitting alone on a vast stage in this season's *SLAVS!*

I hope you will all be part of the NYTW community long enough to have your own list of favorite moments. And as we start this month to write a new long-range plan, I hope you will take a moment to dream with us. What are your hopes and ambitions for New York Theatre Workshop? Catch us in the lobby, or write us a note. We'll be here, building new offices next door, raising money, trying to pay bills, and dreaming about the future.

We're still accepting donations to our Capital Campaign through June 30, 1995. If you haven't yet made a pledge or if you want a tax write off for 1995, do it now! Write a check and send it to New York Theatre Workshop, 220 West 42nd Street, New York, NY, 10036. Questions? Please call Glen or Karen at (212) 302-7737.

Yes, we really have met the Kresge (and Kornberg!) Challenge, with all of your help, and although there is still some money to be raised—and we are happy to continue accepting your donations—the full-scale campaign is completed and a very tired board and staff are almost back to business as usual. Except that business as usual is a very different state of affairs than it was in 1990, when it first seriously occurred to us that we, as a community, could take charge of our future, and when we instituted the first part of a long-range plan.

I am still, after ten years as NYTW's Managing Director, exhilarated and amazed when predictions of that long-range plan actually come to pass—we really do have two buildings, and a summer program, and over 2,500 members and a large community of artists, audience, staff, board, funders and

IT'S ALL

by MAGGIE ROBBINS
Special to NYTW News

There are two families intimately involved in *The Family Business*: the family the play is about, and the family that wrote it. In the second family, everybody talks at the same time.

David Gordon and Ain Gordon, the father and son who wrote and are co-directing New York Theatre Workshop's upcoming production, can't stop interrupting each other. And the main thing they keep interrupting each other to say is how dangerous it is for a family like theirs—or any family at all, for that matter—to be doing a project like this.

"The whole idea of collaborating on the material itself—" says Ain.

"And then to agree, preposterously, to co-direct," says David, "this thing we had co-written—"

"And then—" says Ain.

"And then," says David, "for Valda to agree, heroically—"

"To act in this thing being co-directed by us..." said Ain.

"Valda" is Valda Setterfield, dancer and actor, David's wife, and the mother of Ain. The three are talking in the parents' Soho studio, the rhythm of their conversation reflecting the kind of intimacy—and trust—that have made it possible for them to collaborate on a show that focuses on affections and tensions among family members.

The play centers on father-and-son plumbers (Phil & Son, Inc.) taking care of an increasingly incapacitated elderly relative. Just how autobiographical is *The Family Business*? "There is indeed a real aunt," says Ain. "She did indeed have a real fall. My father was indeed out of town."

For three months Ain shuttled between his elderly aunt's home or hospital room and his day job (tending the office of the dance company Urban Bush Women). "I started to write down everything she said to me," Ain says. "She was taking up a lot of my time, so I said, 'Okay, I will take care of her, but *this is mine*.' It made it easier for me."

When David finally got back to New York and shouldered his share of the caretaking duties, he got interested in what Ain was doing with the experience. More than just interested.

"I would be sitting with the real person," he says. "And she would be saying something that was just amazing. And I got to the point where I didn't want to try to go outside and



BEATRIZ SHILLER PHOTO

LIQUID PLUMBER: Ain Gordon plunges for family values.

write it down, I would say, 'Do you have a pencil? Now, what did you just say? Say it again.' And she would say—" Suddenly David Gordon winces, then roll his eyes heavenward. In an instant his face, bushy mustache and all, is the fleshy mug of a Russian-Jewish matron. "She would say, 'Is this for that play?' 'Yes,' I'd say. 'The one about me?' 'No, no. The one about a woman like you. Not you, a woman like you.' David pauses for a moment, then shakes his head. "It is about a real person," he says.

"But it is also about all old people—" says Ain.

David interrupts "—of a certain generation."

"And the people like us who have to take care of them," says Ain.

"Becoming your parent's parent," David adds.

"You take them on or you give them up..." says Ain.

"To a home or something."

"And when are your needs more important than theirs?"

"It's awful."

"And sometimes awfully funny."

"Any why do you do it?"

"And how?"

"And how!"

Father and son began to write scenes, hastily passing their single laptop computer back and forth. After a few hours' work, they would shout for Valda and read dialogue out loud over and over, then discuss it all together.

Though the creative frenzy was always exhilarating, it wasn't always amicable. Writing the fight between the principals of Phil & Son, Inc., the authors say, the two relived every fight they'd ever had. At times they were so angry that they typed together but refused to speak.

The two had no idea their piece would turn out to be so difficult to perform. "Originally we'd said, 'Let's keep it really simple,'" Ain recalls. "Like this, scripts in our hands. A radio play."

"And then," says David, "we made

RELATIVES!

RELATIVE-LY AUNTY-SEPTIC

the most complicated show we possibly could make—"

"And they made it for us to do!" says Valda.

Historically, the cast of *The Family Business* has made their careers in the world of performing arts. David Gordon has choreographed for American Ballet Theater, Rambert Dance Company, Dance Theatre of Harlem and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Project. His video work has been seen on PBS and the BBC. He is the Director of the Pick Up Performance Company. Valda Setterfield, a featured

performer with the Company, was a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for nine years and has appeared in the work of JoAnne Akalaitis, Richard Foreman, and Robert Wilson; and in films by Yvonne Rainer, Brian DePalma and in an upcoming film by Woody Allen. Valda has also performed in the work of Ain Gordon. Work written and directed by Ain Gordon has been presented by Dance Theater Workshop, Performance Space 122, SoHo Rep, Dancing

CONTINUED NEXT COLUMN



ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN PHOTO

ALL IN THE FAMILY: The father of the family plays the aunt and the son of the family plays the grandfather, father and son and the mother of the family plays the secretary who also plays the answering machine. David Gordon, Ain Gordon and Valda Setterfield.

in The Streets, The Baltimore Museum of Art, and Dance Place in Washington DC. Recently he wrote original text and directed an inter-disciplinary project for choreographer Bebe Miller which premiered at The Wexner Center.

Recalling rehearsals for the show's two-week presentation at Dance Theater Workshop a year ago, Ain says, "It was so difficult, if you had a bad rehearsal, to just leave at the end. You couldn't just go away. I mean, at the end of rehearsal—guess what!—you

were mother, father and son again. You couldn't just say, 'Hell with you, other actors, I need to go home—'."

"But simultaneously," says Valda, "we were willing to take a lot of risks

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

AT A GLANCE

- WHAT:** *The Family Business*
- WHO:** written and directed by Ain Gordon and David Gordon
performed by Valda Setterfield, Ain Gordon and David Gordon
- WHEN:** March 10 thru April 16, 1995 Performances Tuesday thru Friday at 8:00 p.m., Saturday at 5:00 and 8:30 p.m., Sunday at 3:00 p.m.
- HOW MUCH:** Tickets \$22 and \$25. Discounts available for students, senior citizens and groups of 10 or more.
- SPECIAL:** Family ticket offer in March: One parent's ticket half price when accompanied by a child. No age limit for parent or child, but limit two discounted parent tickets per family.
- HOW:** Tickets may be purchased by phoning the NYTW box office at (212) 302-NYTW (that's 302-6989). Box office hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 1:00 to 6:00. No advance ticket sales at theatre box office.
- WHERE:** New York Theatre Workshop
79 East Fourth Street
between Second and Third Avenues
- SIGN:** Sign-Interpreted Performance of *The Family Business* will be held on Thursday, April 6 at 8:00. Tickets and information available by calling Hands On at (212) 627-1070 TTY or (212) 627-4898 Voice/Fax.
- ACCESS:** Infrared listening devices for hearing impaired patrons and large print programs are available at the Box Office.
- NOTE:** NYTW Members and Friends: Check out our new weekend performance schedule. Give it a try and let us know what you think.

THE FUNDING BUSINESS

The Family Business was commissioned by Dance Theater Workshop in partnership with Helena Presents in Montana and the National Performance Network's Creation Fund, which is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

The NPN and the presentation of *The Family Business* at DTW (February 23 - March 6, 1994) was made possible with major funding from The Ford Foundation; The Pew Charitable Trusts; Philip Morris Companies Inc.; Lila Wallace—Reader's Digest Fund; and the Dance, Music, Presenting & Commissioning, Theatre and Challenge III programs of the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency). This work was also commissioned by DTW's First Light program with funding provided by the Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation.

Generous support for this engagement at New York Theatre Workshop was provided to the Pick Up Performance Co. by grants from the Booth Ferris Foundation, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust Co. of New York and with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

The Extended Family Business (a marketing initiative) is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP and PICK UP PERFORMANCE COMPANY

present

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

written, directed and choreographed by
Ain Gordon & David Gordon

Cast

Mrs. Wonder Valda Setterfield
Paul, Phil, Sol Ain Gordon
Annie Kinsman David Gordon

There will be one intermission.

lighting designer Stan Pressner
sound designer David Meschter/Applied Audio Technologies
additional set and costume pieces Anita Stewart
drama coach Joan MacIntosh
production manager Susan R. White
production stage manager Ed Fitzgerald
assistant to the directors Chuck Finlon

VALDA SETTERFIELD

(Performer) is from England where she performed in pantomimes and with Ballet Rambert. In 1958, she came to America and joined the companies of James Waring (1958-62) and Merce Cunningham (1965-74). She has appeared on stage with The Grand Union and in the works of Katherine Litz, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, JoAnne Akalaitis and on film in the works of Ms. Rainer and Brian DePalma. She performed in the works of David Gordon at the Living Theater and the Judson Church and she is a founding member of the Pick Up Company. In 1984, she received a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie) as an outstanding performance artist. In 1987, she co-starred with Mikhail Baryshnikov in David Gordon's *MADE IN U.S.A.* for WNET/Great Performances, and in May 1988, returned as a guest artist to the Rambert Dance Company in Gordon's *MATES*. She played Marcel Duchamp in the Bessie and Obie Award-winning *THE MYSTERIES AND WHAT'S SO FUNNY?* and toured Europe and Japan with the White Oak Dance Project. She has also appeared in the work of Ain Gordon at Soho Rep, Dance Theater Workshop, and The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. In December 1994 she completed work on Woody Allen's upcoming film. She studies acting with Michael Howard.

AIN GORDON

(Writer/Director/Choreographer/Performer) has been writing and directing since 1984. His work has been produced in New York City by Soho Rep, Dance Theater Workshop (five times), Performance Space 122, Dancing in the Streets, and the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. His work has also been presented by Dance Place (Washington, D.C.), The Baltimore Museum of Art (MD), Spirit Square (NC), and the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (MA) where he was Artist-in-Residence. He has performed in the works of Yoshiko Chuma, Stephen Petronio and Stephanie Skura. He has collaborated with Gayle Tufts, Julian Webber, and with Wally Cardona on a project developed at Dansens Hus, Stockholm, Sweden. In June 1993, Gordon completed a collaboration with choreographer Bebe Miller. He directed and wrote original text for her inter-disciplinary project *NOTHING CAN HAPPEN ONLY ONCE*, which had its premiere at the Wexner Center (OH). He is a 1992 NYFA Playwriting Fellow. His newest play, *HARD WORK*, has been presented as a work-in-progress at Soho Rep and New York Theatre Workshop.

SPECIAL THANKS

The company would like to thank David White and Dance Theater Workshop for the kick-off, Mrs. Pauline Cooper, and the Vineyard Theatre.

DAVID GORDON

(Writer/Director/Choreographer/Performer) performed in the companies of James Waring and Yvonne Rainer in the 1960s. In the 1970s he was a founding member of the improvisational group, The Grand Union. In 1971 he codified his working process by incorporating as The Pick Up Co. His work has been commissioned by American Ballet Theater, Dance Theater of Harlem, Rambert Dance Company, and White Oak Dance Project. He is a Guggenheim Fellow (1981 and 1987) and has been a panelist and chairman of the dance program panel of the NEA. His video work has appeared on Great Performances, Alive From Off Center, the BBC, and Channel 4/Great Britain. *PUNCH AND JUDY GET DIVORCED* aired on the PBS national series ALIVE TV and has continued in workshop, as a live theater work, with the Mark Taper Forum and UCLA, and the Guthrie Theater. An evening-length stage production will be presented by the American Music Theater Festival in the spring of 1996. *THE MYSTERIES AND WHAT'S SO FUNNY?*, written and directed by Gordon with music by Philip Glass and visual design by Red Grooms, was awarded a Bessie and an Obie. The script was published in *Grove New American Theater*, edited by Michael Feingold. Gordon recently directed and choreographed a musical, *SHLEMIEL THE FIRST*, for American Repertory Theatre and American Music Theater Festival, and on tour throughout the U.S. He received a National Theatre Artist Residency Grant (funded by Pew Charitable Trusts) to work with the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, MN.

STAN PRESSNER

(Lighting Designer) has created the lighting design for, among others, the New York City Ballet, Lyon Opera Ballet, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane, Ralph Lemon, Bayerische Staatsballet, Ballet du Grand Theatre de Geneve, Boston Ballet, Stephen Petronio and the Netherlands Dance Theatre. His recent work includes: *LIGHT SHALL LIFT THEM* for John Kelly/Next Wave Festival, *FOUR SYMPHONIES* for the Geneva Opera Ballet and Robert Lafosse's *RAGS*. He is the recipient of a 1988 NY Dance and Performance Award (Bessie) for cumulative achievement and a 1988 and 1991 American Theatre Wing Design Award nomination. He has come to prefer Stein.

DAVID MESCHTER/APPLIED AUDIO TECHNOLOGIES

(Sound Designer), audio consultant, engineer and composer, was the sound consultant and repertory musician with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1981 to 1988, and has since designed and engineered for a variety of organizations and artists including John Cage, Philip Glass, La Monte Young, Pandit Pran Nath, the Kronos Quartet, the American Ballet Theatre, Lincoln Center and Houston Grand Opera. His recent sound designs include *AMERICAN ARCHEOLOGY* by Meredith Monk, *NJINGA THE QUEEN KING* by Pauline Oliveros and Ione at the Majestic Theater at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

ANITA STEWART

(Additional set and costume pieces) NYTW Set Design Associate: *THE REZ SISTERS*, *C. COLOMBO, INC.*, *THE MEDIUM*. Recent designs: *TURONDOT* (Minnesota Opera), *LOVE'S LABORS LOST* (Folger Shakespeare Theatre). Regional theatre: American Repertory Theatre, Portland Stage, Seattle Rep, Center Stage, Yale Rep, Dallas Theater Center, Hartford Stage, Women's Project, and Classic Stage Company.

CHUCK FINLON

(Assistant to the Directors) has assisted David Gordon on various projects including *THE MYSTERIES AND WHAT'S SO FUNNY?* and the PBS production of *PUNCH AND JUDY GET DIVORCED*. He is presently the Associate Director of *SHLEMIEL THE FIRST*. He has choreographed and taught both in and out of New York City and has danced for a number of choreographers including David Gordon (1984-1990), Kenneth Rinker, Robert Kovich and Jane Comfort.

ED FITZGERALD

(Production Stage Manager) has worked as stage manager, production manager, and sound designer in New York, both on Broadway (*CARRIE*, *TAP DANCE KID*, *A LITTLE FAMILY BUSINESS* and *DA*) and extensively off-Broadway. His most recent credits are Philip Kan Gotanda's *DAY STANDING ON ITS HEAD* at Manhattan Theatre Club, *SHLEMIEL THE FIRST* at A.R.T., American Music Theatre Festival on tour, and *NOW ELEANOR'S IDEA* by Robert Ashley at BAM. He is the co-writer of

Levelhead Recording and creative consultant to the neo-pop dance band *Dee Wade*.

NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP

(James C. Nicola, Artistic Director; Nancy Kassak Diekmann, Managing Director) Founded in 1979, New York Theatre Workshop is an Obie Award-winning off-Broadway theatre company dedicated to producing challenging and unpredictable new theatre and fostering the creative work of artists with whom we share a vision. NYTW seeks to establish a community of artists, to develop new plays, to support young directors through New Directors/New Directions, and to nurture solo performing artists through the annual O Solo Mio Festival.

PICK UP PERFORMANCE CO.

(June Poster, Managing Director) *The Family Business* is a project of the Pick Up Performance Co. Inc., a not-for-profit organization that produces the work of Ain Gordon and David Gordon. All contributions to the company are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Information or booking requests concerning the Company should be addressed to: Pick Up Performance Co., 131 Varick Street, Room 901, New York, NY 10013 Tel: (212) 627-1213 Fax: (212) 627-1005

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

The Family Business was commissioned by Dance Theater Workshop in partnership with Helena Presents in Montana and the National Performance Network's Creation Fund, which is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies, Inc.

The Pick Up Performance Co. wishes to express its appreciation to the following foundations, corporations and government agencies for their generous support of this engagement at New York Theatre Workshop: Booth Ferris Foundation, Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust Co. of NY, and public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

The Extended Family Business (a marketing initiative) is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

Act I of *The Family Business* was presented as a work-in-progress on July 27, 1993 at Lincoln Center's Serious Fun! Festival, curated by Jedediah Wheeler.

Additional support to the Pick Up Performance Co. is provided by the AT&T Foundation, the Harkness Foundations for Dance, the Greenwall Foundation, the Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, S.I. Newhouse Foundation and Consolidated Edison Company of New York.

Touring and residency support is provided by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Support for rehearsals and new work development is provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

First Performance: March 14, 1995

NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

NYTW'S \$2.3 million Capital Campaign to finance the purchase and renovation of 79 & 83 East 4th Street was awarded prestigious challenge grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and The Kresge Foundation. With the help of hundreds of loyal supporters NYTW has met these challenge grants and will successfully complete the campaign this season. Thank you!

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NYTW would like to thank the Elizabeth Steinway Chapin Real Estate Loan Fund of Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York for their support of our Capital Campaign.

NYTW also thanks the over 90 generous individuals who have participated in the "Kornberg Challenge."

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Due to limitations of space, New York Theatre Workshop cannot list the many generous individuals who have donated under \$50. We wish to gratefully acknowledge their continuing support.

NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP THANKS THE FOLLOWING CORPORATIONS, FOUNDATIONS AND PHILANTHROPIC FUNDS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR ACTIVITIES DURING THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS.

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WRITING RECIPES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

we wouldn't have taken with other people." She glances at her husband and son. "I don't know how it is in a million other families. There's no blueprint for family life—nobody warns you at any point, tells you when things are going to change, what the issues are going to turn out to be. I mean, here we are, working very intimately with each other..."

In one of the plays more intimate moments, a budding romance between one of Ain's characters and a character played by his mother is enough to quicken the pulse of even the most detached Freudian analyst. "I love that moment," says Ain. "I love stretching it out."

From time to time, Gordon, Gordon and Setterfield find it embarrassing just how happy they are to be working together and feel the need for a little self-mockery. "Sometimes we call ourselves 'The Wonderful Family,'" says Ain. All three pretend to puke.

"We do realize it's unusual though," says Valda. "Most parents and their children couldn't begin to work with each other."

"It's weird," says Ain.

"Weird," agrees David. "Too sweet. Of course, it's not always sweet."

"But," says Ain, "sometimes it is."

Maggie Robbins is a playwright and collage artist living in New York City.



COLLABORATIVE TERROR: Lisa Kron and Peg Healey in *The Secretaries*.

by GORDON DAHLQUIST
Special to NYTW News

Even the most casual eye's glance over the last couple of seasons at New York Theatre Workshop could not fail to notice a startlingly wide range of work, a crazy-quilt of plays tackling a host of different subjects, written and collaborated on by an equally unpredictable collection of artists from all across the socio-demographic map (if you could find a map to hold them all). Could it be true that such a gathering of work captured in some way the "late 20th century art scene as we know it"? Could it be equally true that by looking deeper into the way these plays were made, examining just a bit the different working methods of these authors and collaborators, that a kind of secret door could open—between what an audience sees on the stage and the minds and hearts of the work's creators? Well, anything's possible, and it's certainly true that theatre artists are fascinated by the mixture of willfulness and chance that makes up their own creative processes, and happy to talk about it!

These artists range from solo performers exploring different formats like John Epperson, Fanni Green or Claudia Shear to more traditional (though wildly diverse) playwrights such as Tony Kushner, Sybille Pearson

IN THE KITCHEN WITH NYTW

or Tomson Highway, to artists working in collaboration like Anne Bogart with *The Medium*, the Five Lesbian Brothers on *The Secretaries*, or Ain and David Gordon on *The Family Business*. For each of these pieces the author(s) set up their own individual recipes for how to write a play, and each time perhaps this formal process sheds light onto the play that was written.

In the case of Sybille Pearson, *Unfinished Stories* was written in a tiny, bare apartment, "all alone at a kitchen table. It's on the first floor, so it's very dark—it sounds dreadful—but it wasn't at all." Pearson says she did exhaustive research for the play, of which she used "about a tenth of it. At a certain point I had to just let the research be and write the people, listen to their voices telling the story." Though the process as a whole was very smooth, there was one period where to get over a block the author forced herself to write three pages a day—allowing that she might very well throw it out first thing the next morning, and frequently did just that. "You never know when something like that's



MARTHA SWOPE PHOTO

WRITING ON THE RUN: Claudia Shear's life was *Blown Sideways*

going to end," says Pearson, "You make these deals with yourself to keep working, and then one day you've written your way through it and it's gone. Very nice."

For a collaborative group like the Five Lesbian Brothers, never quite knowing when the writing will end is less a case of slogging it out in an isolated garret as it is knowing your collaborators are always going to add one more twist to what's been done. While the Brothers were able to continue work on *The Secretaries* after it had traveled around the country, the initial writing process evolved from constant conversation among the five group members, establishing a group consensus about the characters and the ideas of the play. While actual writing sessions might involve eating, watching television or a lot of talk, the Brothers feel strongly that once they've established "The Bubble" ("a group mind-meld," says Lisa Kron, "that helps us focus on the work") about a new play, all other activity is still con-

nected to the task and issues at hand.

Tomson Highway describes the process of writing a play "always astounding. You have no idea what you're doing." In Highway's experience, each play has its own character. Some plays, like *The Rez Sisters*, tend to grow after contact with actors and director, "but you never know. You have to trust the creative process," Highway says, "which is very magical and very painful. Twyla Tharp compares starting on a new work to walking across a field of freshly fallen snow. It's only after you look back in wonder do you see your footprints and realize where you've been, what path you've created. I think that's a wonderful notion of how it works. I may write from the characters, until I'm stuck, and then I try to write from the plot, until I go back to the characters. It's actually not something I like looking at too closely."

Looking closely at her own thoughts is exactly what led Claudia Shear to

Blown Sideways Through Life. Shear wrote the play over two years, in lumps of ten or so pages, which were then discussed in a wide range of restaurants with her director, Christopher Ashley. Generally these discussions would yield about one page out of the ten for the final draft of the play, a slow process that made Shear a bit impatient, always wanting the work to be finished. Above all, the process demanded that Shear find a balance between her explicitly autobiographical material and the need to locate a dramatic structure that fit the play. This was perhaps the central concern in the writing process, selecting from a wealth of events that had (however deceptively) "simply happened" and framing these moments of insight in such a way that they would cascade into a full evening in the theatre.

As a writer, the progression from becoming intrigued by a specific incident or a character's voice to locating that event or character in a finished play is shared by Fanni Green, whose work always flows from these small moments. "Usually, it's a bit of dialogue," she says, "a line that someone says that lets me know who they are. Over time I've learned to ask the characters to tell me who they are. It's the individual voices that generate the overall story." Green will frequently try writing a stream-of-consciousness mode for her main characters to fully immerse herself in that character's way of speaking. "Sometimes it's the best way to find them, to let them say what they want to say for as long as they want to say it. I can always sit back and think about what I've come up with and where it might go, but I find that even this final structure comes from my earliest impressions."

For all the high powered control and physical mastery in evidence during performances of *The Medium*, the creation of the piece recognizes the same need to listen to many voices in creating the work. Anne Bogart, who conceived and directed the play, collaborated extensively with the actors making up the cast. Says actor Tom Nelis of their collaboration on *The Medium*, "Anne didn't come in with a pre-conceived notion of where the piece—or even the day's work—was going to end up." Adds actor Will Bond, "She provides the score—we take off and she conducts it. At the end of the day you keep what works and throw out what doesn't. It's terribly exciting to be on that kind of ride." For

Bogart, the freedom this approach grants the actors is matched by the discipline and will with which her ensemble attacks the problems of putting the play together.

A ride all its own, of course, has been charted by Tony Kushner's *Slavs!* While some of the play was originally conceived to be part of *Angels in America* (and one major speech still appears in both works), when these scenes were expanded and restructured into the new play much of the original context changed. Kushner insists that while he may describe *Slavs!* as a "coda" to that well-known seven-hour opus, it charts a dramatic trajectory all its own: from satiric ideological posturing in the first act to the extremely specific and heartfelt examples of a child stricken through environmental poisoning in the third. Whether or not it was part of the original intent, the stylistic contrast showing up over the course of *Slavs!*



BOXED IN: Tom Nelis and Ellen Lauren in *The Medium*.

sets up a dialectic that mirrors the Soviet thinking it takes as its subject.

Clearly there are practically as many notions of how to write a play as there are plays themselves. The difficulty of saying anything helpful beyond this is doubtful, much less identifying objectively which are the important details in that process: working out a work's political agenda before the first word gets written or listening to the right kind of music while writing it; establishing the proper



LENIN-A-GO-GO: Marisa Tomei in *SLAVS!*

atmosphere for collaboration or making sure to write drafts in longhand using purple ink. The theatre artists mentioned above would most likely be the first to claim both the inevitability of their own writing process (depending on the specific play they're work-

RE-MEMBER WHEN

by JULIA WHITWORTH
Special to NYTW News

James McPherson and Phyllis King are not sure what first brought them to New York Theatre Workshop. "I guess it was just one of those things," says Ms. King of their longstanding membership with the theatre. "We go back quite a ways," agrees her husband. "We have moved with you from place to place."

As NYTW faces a new chapter in its physical life, it looks to community members—from artist to audience—to maintain its steady spirit. Members like McPherson and King, who have stuck by NYTW in feast and famine, help



LONGSTANDING MEMBERS: King and MacPherson.

achieve the feeling of family and cooperative creativity.

Describing themselves as "middle-income," this Upper West Side couple has found off-Broadway theatre an enriching and affordable means to experience Downtown during their twenty-five year life in New York. Both had participated in amateur and professional theatre in previous homes, including Florida, California and Ohio. Phyllis frequently found herself playing "the second maid or something in the chorus of many things," but loved playing such stand-out roles as the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Now they're happier watching from behind the footlights, being professional audience members and faithfully following the Workshop as it's moved around town. "And we've enjoyed discovering restaurants with each new location you've found," reminisced Ms. King. (Their current favorite: Cucina de Pesce—"the seafood lasagna is remarkable.")

A poet, Ms. King recently retired from her librarian position at the New York Public Library, while Mr. McPherson, a novelist, continues to work part-time in the Ideal Bookstore near Columbia University. "We sell second-hand books there, mainly scholarly subjects—classics, history, Judaica—no cookbooks!" Citing Caryl Churchill and Tony Kushner among their favorite writers at NYTW, the couple has enjoyed discovering new and "interesting" writers in our midst. "And we love your Five Lesbian Brothers," enthused Ms. King, with a chuckle. "They were incredible!"

They always try to attend at least one of the "Just Add Water" events and this year jumped at the chance to see Damon Wright's "literarily" inspired *Mr. Baldwin Goes To Heaven*. "It was fascinating and very different for us. We didn't know James Baldwin's works as much as we thought we did."

When they're not attending the theatre (and with all of the activity at NYTW as well as some of the other theatres to which they subscribe that hardly seems possible), the couple makes a yearly excursion to Greece, one of their favorite places. The couple also like weekends away from the city, visiting relatives, friends, daughters, and sons in every corner of the country.

James McPherson and Phyllis King aren't sure how long they've been members at New York Theatre Workshop. It certainly doesn't matter to us. Who's counting when it comes to family?

Gordon Dahlquist is a playwright and a NYTW Usual Suspect.

TO TELL THE RUTH

One spring-like evening in December, NYTW Literary Associate Chiori Miyagawa spoke with Ruth Maleczek over red wine at Cafe Orlin in the East Village. Ruth is a performer, a founding member of Mabou Mines, and Artistic Associate of NYTW. The following day, Miyagawa spoke briefly by phone with JoAnne Akalaitis, who was busy teaching at the American Repertory Theatre in Boston. Ruth and JoAnne are long-time friends and collaborators who are planning to direct (Akalaitis) and perform (Maleczek) in Genet's *Prisoner of Love* with NYTW this season.

Chiori Miyagawa: How did you find each other?

Ruth Maleczek: I first met JoAnne in San Francisco around 1960. We did a little piece of work together called *An Event for Actors*.

JoAnne Akalaitis: No, we worked on *Antigone*. We didn't do *An Event for Actors* until years later in New York with Mabou Mines.

CM: Hummm...

RM: JoAnne subsequently left San Francisco and went to New York and then to Europe. I lived in San Francisco and worked in the theatre for five more years and then moved to Europe for five and a half years. I saw JoAnne in Europe when I was there. She returned to New York to work in the theatre. This is now the late 1960s. She would write me in Paris, and we eventually agreed that it would be good to form our own company. I returned from Europe and Mabou Mines was formed in 1970. We found each other by accident in San Francisco, re-found each other by accident in Europe, and re-found each other again by design in New York.

CM: What made you feel committed to JoAnne?

RM: I felt we shared the future. At the time JoAnne was performing, and I thought she was wonderful. We were both very insistent that this was the way we were going to spend our lives—that we would have children, still work in the theatre, have strong relationships with our companions and collaborators and that we weren't going to go under. If I wouldn't give up, she wouldn't give up. That's what I felt.

CM: What's the most memorable project you've done together?

RM: The most memorable project is yet to come. But I guess as a production, it was *The Screens*. The gathering together of that many resources, that many artists, that much intelligence is very difficult to manifest. I thought it was a very singular project.

JA: It was very exciting to work on *The Screens* with Ruth at *The Guthrie Theater* because it was a monumental project, a first class production, really interesting theatre, and a major piece of literature. It was memorable because of its scope and size and the designers and actors involved.

CM: In your collaborative process, what do you find easy or difficult?

RM: The larger, more institutionalized situations are harder for me to be a real collaborator with JoAnne. I'm not great on hierarchy. I feel in those circumstances it's my responsibility to become more of the group, more like everyone else. What is easiest is that I think I know what JoAnne is interested in, and I try to put those ideas forward in the rehearsal. I think JoAnne is a wonderful director. She is one of my favorite directors along with Elizabeth LeCompte, Lee Breuer, and Richard Foreman.

JA: I think it's easier when you work with an actor who understands your taste and who is in the same world. A lot of the pleasure for me in working with Ruth is that I've known her a long time. She understands me as a director, and I think I understand her as an actor. Ruth is one of my favorite performers.

CM: How similar or different are you in your approaches to work?

RM: The first piece we ever did as Mabou Mines was called *Red Horse Animation*, and in it, David Warrilow, JoAnne and I each played an essence of a horse: a story line, a life line, and an outline. JoAnne played the outline and I played the life line. As long ago as it was and as different as we may be now, I still think JoAnne is a great outliner, a great getter of promoters, a great definer of shape, direction, and rhythm. And I breathe a life into that.

JA: There is something interesting about Ruth. It's a little thing. Ruth stays with a script for a long time. I recall saying to her "maybe you should get off book," and she would say, "yeah, you are right." I think she is very involved with the text. The words actually have a physical imprint on her body and voice.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT: *Prisoner of Love*
WHO: from the novel by Jean Genet translated by Barbara Bray directed by JoAnne Akalaitis performed by Ruth Maleczek
WHEN: May 12 through June 25, 1995 Performances Tuesday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m.; Sunday at 3:00 and 7:00 p.m.
HOW MUCH: Tickets \$22 and \$25. Discounts available for students, senior citizens and groups of 10 or more.
HOW: Tickets may be purchased by phoning the NYTW box office at (212) 302-NYTW (that's 302-6989). Box office hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 1:00 to 6:00. No advance ticket sales at theatre box office.
WHEN: Tickets on sale: Monday, March 20
WHERE: New York Theatre Workshop 79 East Fourth Street between Second and Third Avenues
ACCESS: Infrared listening devices for hearing impaired patrons and large print programs available at Box Office.

CM: How would you like your relationship to evolve from this point on?

RM: I would like to do more work with JoAnne and other collaborators that moves in directions we haven't gone together. I would like to keep growing in my world, and part of that growth could be with JoAnne.

JA: I think we will just continue to work together for years and years. It's a wonderful thing to have an old colleague, to have colleagues like Ruth, [composer] Philip Glass and [lighting designer] Jennifer Tipton, that I can return to through the years and know it's going to be a joyous and creative ride.

Chiori Miyagawa's play *America Dreaming* was produced by the Vineyard Theatre and Music-Theatre Group.

EAT HERE, GET AKALAITIS

Art is food, but at Dartmouth,
 Food is art.
 a play in three acts and intermission



MARTHA SWOPE PHOTO

Conceived and Directed by JoAnne Akalaitis
 Performed by Ruth Maleczek, Lola Pashalinski, Linda Chapman and Christopher Grabowski.

Props: Sweet Corn, dew kissed baby eggplants, zucchini, potatoes, squash blossoms, fresh garlic (flowing greens intact), fresh basil, parsley, dill, oregano, thyme, coriander, peppers of all colors, black beans, olive oil, sun dried tomato pesto, tomatoes, pasta, fresh mozzarella, fresh bread, and plenty of wine.

Act One: Saturday morning, 8:00 a.m., Hanover, NH and surroundings.

The action: Meet for breakfast in Thayer Hall. Eat hi-fat cafeteria food. Pile into van. Stop at cash machine. Empty account. Stop at Dartmouth Food Co-op. Chris gets gas (pun intended). Cross Connecticut River and take Route 5 to the Wilder, Vermont organic farmers market. Black clad New Yorkers take farm stands

COOKIN': JoAnne Akalaitis

by storm in search of the perfect tomato, the sweetest ears of corn, and the tiniest and most uniform baby potatoes. Collaboration breaks down over quantity of fresh basil—JoAnne prevails; buy it all. Everyone carries arm loads of brown bags as JoAnne orders us back to the van.

Act Two: Dartmouth Coop (again!).

The action: Fill the shopping cart with pasta, wine, bread, fresh herbs, cheeses, more wine, seltzer. Collaboration bogs down over pasta shapes, more tomatoes (JoAnne wants more; we buy more). Pick up more wine.

Act Three: Ruth and Chris' apartment. 10:00 a.m.

The action: In inadequate kitchen, start chopping. Lola chops garlic, washes greens, chops the coriander (separating the stems from the leaves because JA says that if you use the stems it's too strong) and potatoes. Linda shucks corn. Chris re-chops garlic to JoAnne's exacting standards. Lola prepares herbs. Ruth boils pasta; begins ritual sacrifice of baby vegetables. Fries squash blossoms. Brushes eggplants, zucchini and squash with pesto and bakes. JoAnne pours glass of wine, creates black bean and sweet corn salad; baby potatoes and zucchini salad (olive oil, never mayo!); ziti with fresh tomato, mozzarella, and basil. Massive clean up. Leave delicacies to come to room temperature (never refrigerate). It is noon. Cancel all afternoon activities to recover.

Intermission: Anagrams coined during preparations: An Alien Jokasta and Is It a Joke Alanna

Midnight Performance: Feast attended by the ever-hungry NYTW Usual Suspects, following the reading of Doug Wright's *Quills*.

Audience reaction: Akalaitis critical of zukes in potato salad. Popular acclaim goes to corn salad. Squash blossoms SRO.

'Shop Talk

Usual Suspect **Anne Bogart** was honored this month at the Actors Theatre of Louisville as part of their Modern Masters series. The Saratoga International Theatre Institute performed *The Medium* (NYTW '94), *Small Lives*, *Big Dreams* and Anne directed Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*. Usual Suspects involved in the theatre events were **Kelly Maurer**, **Will Bond**, and **Ellen Lauren**.

Alice Jankel is the new Artistic Associate of Williamstown Theatre Festival. In the past, she directed *As You Like It* and taught numerous workshops at the Festival. She'll be directing a



SISTAH!: NYTW Dramaturg/Literary Manager Greg Gunter is off...really off.

production this summer, stay tuned for more information.

Tyrone Henderson is playing George Merchuson in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* at George Street Playhouse and at the Ford's Theatre in D.C. In July, he returns to Atlanta to play Belize in the Alliance Theatre's production of **Tony Kushner's** *Perestroika* (Part II of *Angels in America*).

New York Theatre Workshop hosted the wedding reception of designer **Anita Stewart** (C. Colombo Inc., and *The Rez Sisters*) and **Ron Botting** (actor, scenic artist and house manager, etc. etc.). They met at NYTW and thought it played a perfect part in their nuptials.

Speaking of weddings: *Slavs!* set designer **Neil Patel** missed the show's big opening so he could marry Usual Suspect/director **Maria Mileaf**. They were married on December 10th and spent a lovely weekend in New Mexico. He barely had time to clean off the paint from *Slavs!* before donning his tux.

On a sad note NYTW has lost three valuable

staff members: Ticket Master **Gary Flynn** is now Box Office Manager of Ticket Central at Playwrights Horizons. He celebrated his parting at Marie's Crisis singing showtunes. **Trad A Burns**, lighting designer extraordinaire, acts in his stead until a permanent replacement can be found.

California has torrential rains, violent quakes and now a drag queen dramaturg. Literary Manager/Dramaturg **Gregory Gunter** moves to LaJolla Playhouse to work with Usual Suspect **Michael Greif**. He continues his relationship with **Anne Bogart** and the Saratoga International Theatre Institute.

And long-time Associate Artistic Director **Christopher Grabowski** finally gets to join the Usual Suspect gang that he helped create. He moves from his administrative position into full time freelance directing. This spring he's directing Feydeau's *An Absolute Turkey* at Juilliard, *The Libation Bearers* at Vassar College as well as a reading of **Elizabeth Egloff's** *The Devils* at NYTW.

On a happier note: Producer/director **Linda Chapman** steps into the Associate Artistic Director position after Chris leaves. Linda is one of the Executive Producers of DYKE-TV and long-time squeeze of **Lola Pashalinski**. She was also Managing Director of the Wooster Group (1983-1991), a curator since the beginning of the New Directors Series, part of the first Just Add Water Festival with *The Opium War*, and co-directed *The Rez Sisters* at NYTW last season.

In the "When will they be in?" department: We welcome **Holly Wolf** as our new education outreach coordinator for *The Family Business*. She also works with our friends at CSC, is a fabulous talker, and a great addition to the family.

Until next time... keep that info coming to 'Shop Talk c/o NYTW, 220 W. 42nd Street, 18th floor, NY NY 10036

FUN STUFF YOU MISSED



L.A. WOMAN: NYTW Trustee **Barbara Howard**, NYTW Artistic Director **Jim Nicola** and *Blown Sideways Through Life* star **Claudia Shear** celebrate at a Los Angeles benefit performance for NYTW's Capital Campaign. 100 West Coast friends of NYTW saw a performance of *Claudia's* hit show (originally produced at NYTW) and partied all night at Barbara's Hollywood home.

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NEXT AT NYTW

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

A new play about family, by a family.

Written and Directed by Ain Gordon and David Gordon
Performed by Valda Setterfield, Ain Gordon and David Gordon

The father of the family plays the aunt and the son of the family plays the grandfather, father and son and the mother of the family plays the secretary who also plays the answering machine.

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WARNING: PERFORMANCES LIKE THIS ONE COULD BECOME AN ENDANGERED SPECIES!

Support for cultural and arts institutions throughout the country is under attack, and arts organizations in New York State are experiencing a double whammy—not only is Congress threatening to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts, but Governor Pataki's proposed New York state budget includes a whopping 31% cut in funds for general operating support for the arts, in addition to the elimination of many key positions at the New York State Council on the Arts.

IT IS URGENT THAT OUR FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATORS HEAR FROM YOU—ARTS PATRONS, TAX PAYERS AND VOTERS—ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS TO YOU.

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