

In Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the play which opened the new Arena space, there is a riveting scene in the middle of the first act in which Grusha, a young peasant woman with a small child, is escaping a group of soldiers. She arrives at a small rope bridge over a chasm. She has three choices: she can stay and be caught, she can leave behind the child, or she can attempt the death-defying passage to freedom with her precious bundle. She chooses the last. In Alan Schneider's opening production, Melinda Dillon, who played Grusha, stumbled across a diagonal strip of light on the floor which represented the bridge, and, according to Schneider, "the audience literally gasped." She and the child survive.

Arena in the 1960s was a little like Grusha. It had attained its precious bundle—its new home—but had to cross a perilous chasm on an often-rickety bridge. Along the passage, the audience literally gasped, but Arena would make it across. There was one very substantial reward for getting to the other side of the bridge: the Ford Foundation gave the theater \$863,000 to buy off the bonds and mortgages for the new building, as well as to purchase the land the theater occupies. But filling the building with the right things in the right way was a difficult challenge. "Buildings can set theaters back," Zelda conceded in a 1985 interview. "We did have a bad time when we moved into the new quarters. The enlarged space required a larger aesthetic and we seemed to make all the wrong artistic choices. It wouldn't fix itself, and I lived through a number of years wondering if I knew how or could learn fast enough."

One way to learn fast is to do what Zelda did. Rather than let it "sort itself out," Arena launched into a variety of experiments and visions, the diversity of which paralleled the turbulent decade in which they took place. On the occasion of the theater's fifteenth anniversary, Zelda said, "For an artist, and an art institution, there is no such thing as success. There is only process. . . . Tomorrow there is always another blank canvas, another empty page, and, for us, another play to be made into life." The theater worked towards a goal of fifteen thousand subscriptions for the 1964-65 season, hoping that this financial security would enable it to concentrate on the work at hand and the exploration of the mechanisms that would allow Arena to grow artistically. The subscriptions came in.

The Rockefeller Foundation gave Arena a \$106,500 grant to provide a three-season program of workshops for the company. Led by the theater's new associate and resident director Edwin Sherin, the workshops created a frustrating lack of immediate results, but, remember "there is no such thing as success. . . only process." The ideal of a continuing vital ensemble would reveal itself in fits and starts during the decade and blossom in the seventies and eighties. During the sixties, Arena would branch into social outreach with Living Stage and would experiment with an interracial company performing a monumental series of plays in repertory, two developments which are explored further in other essays.

Play choices got more experimental as well in the middle sixties, reflecting, once again, a broadened social and political spectrum. There was Millard Lampell's social epic *Hard Travelin'*, commissioned by Arena; Loring Mandel's view of the computer age, *Project Immortality*; Arthur Giron's portrait of *Edith Stein*; short plays by Ionesco, Pinter, and a new writer named Howard Sackler. Adding two anti-war plays, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Oh! What a Lovely War* to this banquet gave some subscribers indigestion and they left the table. More traditional fare was added, but, by the decade's end, Arena had put together two extraordinary new plays, *The Great White Hope* and *Indians*, plays which helped not only to define Arena, but to define American playwrighting in the sixties.

To produce this new work, new staff members joined Arena and brought with them a vast array of expertise and commitment. Mel Shapiro came to Arena, via Carnegie-Mellon, as Zelda's assistant, and through his imagination and initiative became an active resident director in the early sixties. Ed Sherin took on some of Arena's most important projects in the later years, including *The Great White Hope*. Designer Robin Wagner helped explore and exploit the potential of the new Arena space. Costumiere Marjorie Slaiman joined the theater in 1965 and wound up staying—designing a remarkable 118 productions and still counting. Peggy Laves would become Zelda's executive assistant in 1967, maintaining her position as the vanguard of Zelda's domain and the institution's history right up to today.

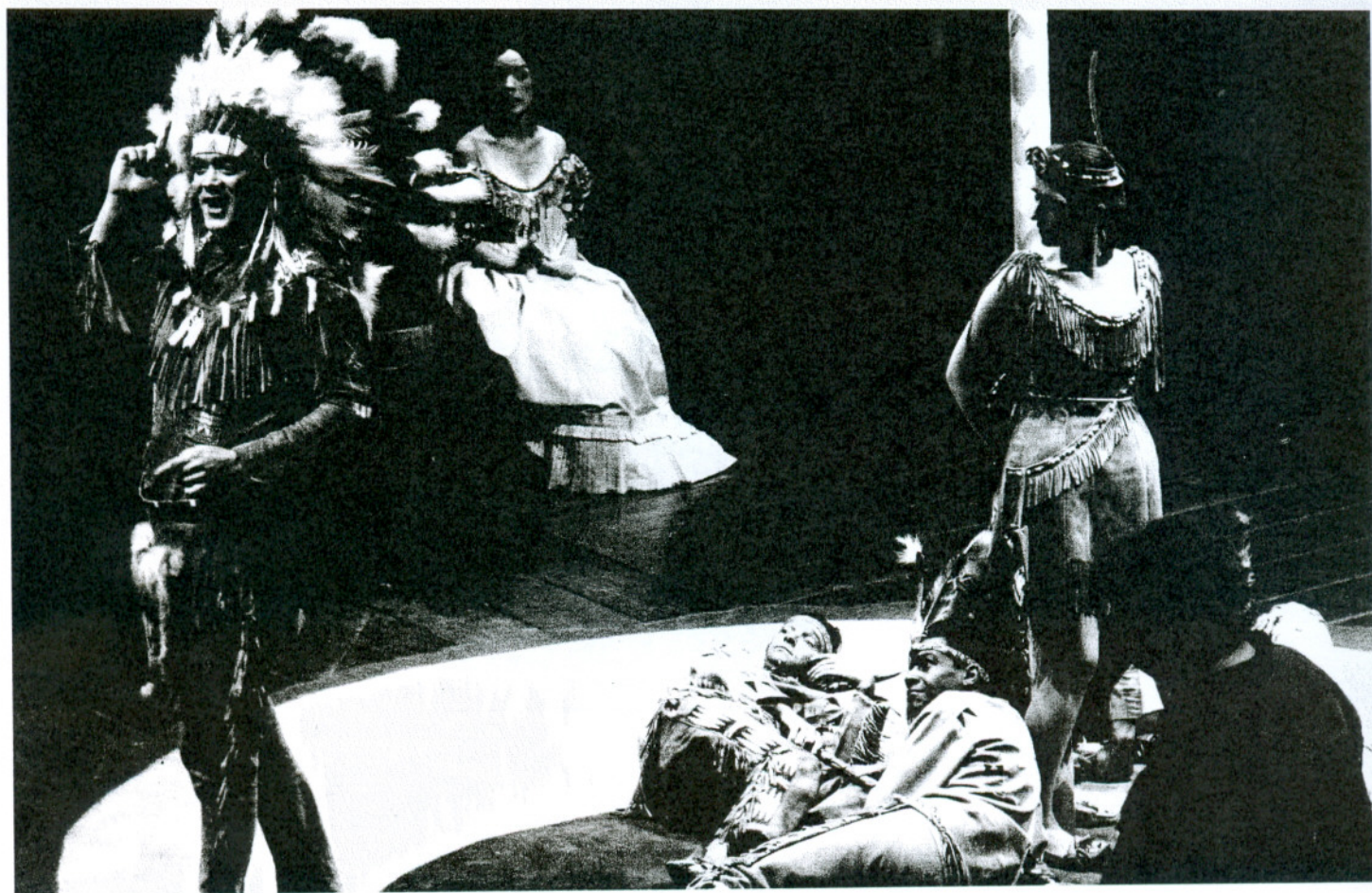
While Arena was expanding in new ways and the country was exploding in even newer ones, the resident theater movement came of age. Professional resident theaters were springing up all over the country—one new theater even advertised: "Repertory Theater is IN! Get Your Season Subscription Now!" Arena now shared the nation's stage with such theaters as the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, and the Trinity Repertory in Providence. But Arena was well beyond birth pangs. It was old enough to be criticized for that wonderful intangible—"not being what it was." While other theaters were groping for identity, Arena was trying to achieve permanence.

"Arena is seventeen years old," wrote Zelda in 1967. "How old do you have to be to be 'permanent'? How far is 'up'? Where are you when you are finally 'there'?... Arena Stage, for one, is *already permanent*. If it should die for lack of funds, it will be a permanent, I prefer the word viable, organism that dies and not an evanescent or accidental conglomeration of forces." But Arena had no intention of dying: before the decade's end, it was already raising funds for a new addition to the building, a smaller, flexible house that would produce new American plays. Although Arena was hardly impervious to criticisms or mistakes, it proved during the sixties that it could weather them and, like Grusha, survive them. The theater could even learn to live with them, as Grusha says: "Never be afraid of the wind, it's only a poor devil like us. His job is pushing the clouds and he gets colder than anybody."

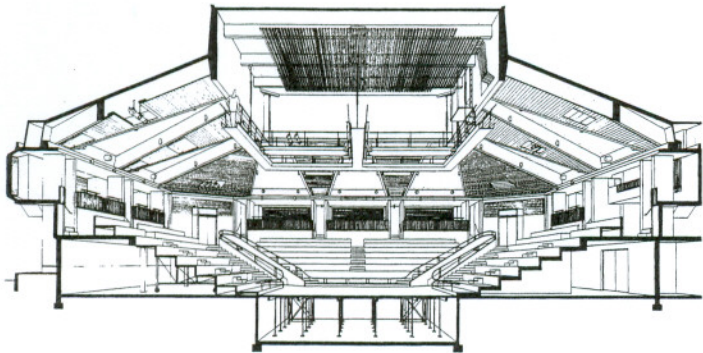
Facing page, top: Arena's permanent home at Sixth and Maine Avenue, built in 1961.

Facing page, bottom: Jane Alexander's first role at Arena was Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Of her three seasons as a company member, Alexander said, "The Arena—it started me really on the road to what was demanded of me as an actress, what I really needed to work for."

Below: Raul Julia (left) and members of the cast of the American premiere of Arthur Kopit's *Indians*.



THE NEW BUILDING



Margo Jones, whose theater was a great influence on Zelda and whom Zelda is fond of quoting, once said, "The only way to raise a million dollars is to have a million-dollar idea." The new Arena building would wind up costing a million dollars (including construction and equipment) and if there was ever a million-dollar idea, it was this one.

The need for a new and permanent home was of paramount importance for Arena's development. In 1955, in a speech entitled "Economics of the Too-Small Theatre," Zelda spoke of how an acclaimed production of *The Crucible* lost money in the Hippodrome: "When such a play as this becomes economically unfeasible to produce, and added to it are scores of others, the time has come for a change of operation that will go to the root of the matter. And the root of the matter is the number of seats that are necessary to support the kind of theater we have become and want to come to be." Four years later, having outlived the temporary home at The Old Vat, the problem became more acute.

It was not merely a question of seats. The theater's aesthetic was becoming more and more sophisticated, and there was a profound need to master and control the technical limitations of the previous two spaces. Many lessons had been learned in ten years, and it was time to apply them to a grander scheme. The Arena Board of Trustees was fully behind Zelda and Tom on this score, and dramatic measures were taken to ensure the capitalization and construction. The Board voted Arena into non-profit status, which enabled the theater to become eligible for government grants and private subsidies. Tom Fichandler took a leave of absence (it became permanent) from the Twentieth Century Fund in order to supervise the purchase of a site and construction of the building, and to raise money for the project.

Arena found a plot of land in the southwest area, a few minutes' drive from The Old Vat, and it looked as if the government's Redevelopment Land Agency would provide it. The real estate question was so acute that Brooks Atkinson wrote about it in the *New York Times*: "Having been in existence for nine years, producing plays of superior quality, Arena Stage has a host of friends and season subscribers. But everyone will breathe easier when the lease on the land is signed and the \$250,000 (the estimated cost) assured." The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation made everyone breathe easier when it promised \$50,000 towards the cost of the new home, provided Arena raised the additional \$250,000 towards the then-projected costs. With that helping hand, Arena was able to raise money for the ever-increasing budget: \$312,000 from foundations, including \$25,000 from the Old Dominion Fund, \$50,000 from Tom's Twentieth Century Fund, and \$100,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation. An additional \$62,500 came from individual gifts, and Board President J. Burke Knapp secured a whopping \$250,000 in 5½% interest-bearing bonds from the American Security and Trust Company. The crowning touch was \$225,000 in bonds at 6% raised from the community, 80% of which were bought in \$100 units.

After this display of financial heroism, it now came time for the design of the building itself. After interviewing a score of architects, Zelda settled on Harry Weese, of Harry Weese and Associates, from Chicago. Weese, who had won international acclaim for his design of the U.S. Embassy in Ghana, had designed a shopping mall in Mexico City, office buildings, residences, dormitories, and supermarkets, but never a theater. For Zelda, this proved to be ideal: first, precisely because he hadn't designed a theater and, secondly, because his previous work expressed in architecture the activity that was going on inside. Said Zelda: "I did not want to waste time arguing with an architect about the respective values of the proscenium and the arena stage. I had made up my mind on that issue a long time ago



and set my stakes with that form which reunites the audience and the play in the same 'room' where historically they used to be and where they belong in today's world."

Zelda and Weese entered into an intense collaboration, truly a voyage "where no man had gone before," and although architect was in Chicago and client was in Washington, it forced the two to be particularly specific and put things in writing. As Zelda described the relationship:

The cornerstone of the Arena building may perhaps be not of concrete at all but of material as elusive and subtle and profound as the relationship between two people—or aggregates of people: the architect and the client. And the building itself, a product of brick and glass and concrete, may even more so be the product of a client who knew nothing about architecture, not even what she liked, but was very aggressive about what she liked in theatre—and a mature, dogged, modern architect who knew nothing about theatre but was dying to find out. On one axis was the clear definition of the theatre program and the receptivity of the architect to absorbing this program within the building he was to create. On the other axis was the aesthetic sureness of the architect and the willingness of the client to learn as we went along and to acknowledge that there were those areas where poppa knew best.

Weese came to several Arena productions, talked to many people backstage, and entered into what was at times a very impressionistic correspondence with Zelda about the old Arena and the one to come. But in order to expedite the specific needs of the staff, Zelda designed a questionnaire which was sent to each person in the building. Most of the nine questions were reasonable and predictable—what were needs for privacy, for storage space, what were the present inadequacies?—but the questionnaire ended with a typical example of Arena's wonderful quixotic nature: "Do you have any wild ideas?" The staff's answers were then put onto eight hours of tape and sent to Weese. This was so helpful that it became standard practice for his firm. From that point, the "adventure in architecture" began.

There were several key agreements from the outset. There would be two separate buildings dividing the dramatic event from everything secondary to it; one, in the shape of an arena containing the theater, the other, a long, rectangular administrative wing linked to the theater. There would be a surrounding tier of boxes for more expensive seats (they eventually became less expensive ones), a fly space over the stage, the pit underneath. Plans were defined, refined, and redefined endlessly. Witness this exchange from Weese to Zelda about the lighting system: "Could it be that we could get the cove lighting from the four corners alone? In this way the instruments could be concealed. This would avoid exposed instruments and would aid design." Zelda's reply is, according to her, "testy, pedantic even: 'The heart of the arena theatre is the lighting system—we must find a way to get more instruments in the corner positions, regardless of the implications in terms of architecture. . . . We defy the special nature of the form if we limit the ways, angles, accents, diversities of light use. Please help us find a way. The room is for the lights, not the other way around. Please!!!'"

A way was found. The job was contracted to John Tester and Son and, after the October 18, 1960 groundbreaking, work began. Zelda and Tom—and their children—were frequently on the site, ankle deep in mud, to watch and learn from every phase of construction. Once the concrete was poured and the frame went up, the embryonic Arena had other visitors as well. Charles Laughton, in Washington filming *Advise And Consent*, sat in the house and trod the stage floor, spouting the Chorus' lines from *Henry V*: "O, for a muse of fire!"

Sir Laurence Olivier, about to embark on his own thrust theater in Chichester, came by to survey the work. "Fascinating," he said, "but there's no place to hide!"

There were a million and one details and some events that mirrored the farces that would soon be appearing inside: when putting up the "Arena Stage" sign, it fell to the ground and broke into a thousand pieces. Likewise, as Zelda put it, "the lounge lighting echoed the environment of King Tut's tomb on a dark day." Still, the plan of the building worked. Things were in their right places, the sequence of space through which the audience passed was logical and meaningful, the audience walked down towards the playing space which opened up before them when they entered. It was all workable and "seemed inevitable." Also, in the words of Zelda, "the heart of the theater building has fulfilled itself as a work of art for it bears, as Thomas Mann has written any work of art must bear, the scar of the utmost."

The building bore little or no physical scars. In fact, its beauty is a triumph of form expertly matched with function. From the glass-sheeted front, through the lobby of slate and travertine floors with its brick walls and natural oak paneling, along the carpeted and acoustically ceilinged link into the auditorium to reveal the heart of the theater below, the building made the confrontation of actor and audience an almost tribal experience. The rectangular space of thirty by thirty-six feet is framed by four tiers of eight rows each to provide a seating capacity of 827. The audience makes its entrance from above the seating and filters its way down into the space; the actors make their entrances from four separate tunnels, one in each corner—audience and actors are each given the respect of their own domain. A promenade aisle rings these tiers, above and behind which are a series of eleven boxes, fronted with natural oak paneling. One box was called the Presidential Box and is used for official guests of the theater.

Upon its October 31, 1961 debut, the building, the first playhouse built in Washington since 1895, was a smash success. Architects praised it: "To make a point of it, the architecture of the new show house is much like the plays its company gives. In the building, we have the same kind of illusion-free reality, the same concentration upon essentials, the same winning simplicity and naturalness," wrote the *Washington Post*, and the *Potomac Valley Architect* stated, "The Arena, by echoing one art through another, illustrates the highest purpose of our society, and its success should serve as a beacon." The theater critics raved: "A little gem of a building, modestly and beautifully designed by Harry Weese," said Brooks Atkinson, and the drama critic for the *Washington Star* described it as "a lovely, stunning functional building. . . a Washington showplace henceforth in the richest sense of the word."

But Zelda's note in the opening program probably had the last and best word: ". . . Indeed, if this building is entirely unique, it is because it is the only theatre in the world ever to be built so directly upon the experience of a functioning theatre company. And if it is beautiful and functional, it is because of the sensitivity of the architect to the nature of this experience and his artistry in giving it architectural expression."

Facing page, top: A cross-section of the new Arena.

Bottom: Architect Harry Weese shows Zelda the model for the new building. Zelda called the making of the new theater "the single most creative act of my professional life."

THE 1960-61 SEASON

The Gang's All Here

by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

The Egg

by Felicien Marceau
Translated by Robert Schlitt
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

The Rivals

by Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

Six Characters in Search of an Author

by Luigi Pirandello
In a new version by Paul Avila Mayer
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Silent Night, Lonely Night

by Robert Anderson
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Tiger at the Gates

by Jean Giraudoux
Translated by Christopher Fry
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

Three Plays:

Krapp's Last Tape

by Samuel Beckett
Directed by Alan Schneider

The End of the Beginning

by Sean O'Casey
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

In The Zone

by Eugene O'Neill
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

Man And Superman

by George Bernard Shaw
Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

THE 1960-61 SEASON



SPOTLIGHTS

The Gang's All Here

During the election night performance of *The Gang's All Here*, a roistering look at electoral politics in the Harding administration, Arena took the opportunity to make art meet life by providing, with the help of WGMS radio, up-to-the-minute Kennedy-Nixon election returns for the audience. The changing numbers were broadcast between scenes and during intermissions and tally boards were set up in the lobby to post incoming returns. "Camelot" was ushered in amidst a drama about a corrupt administration.

Krapp's Last Tape

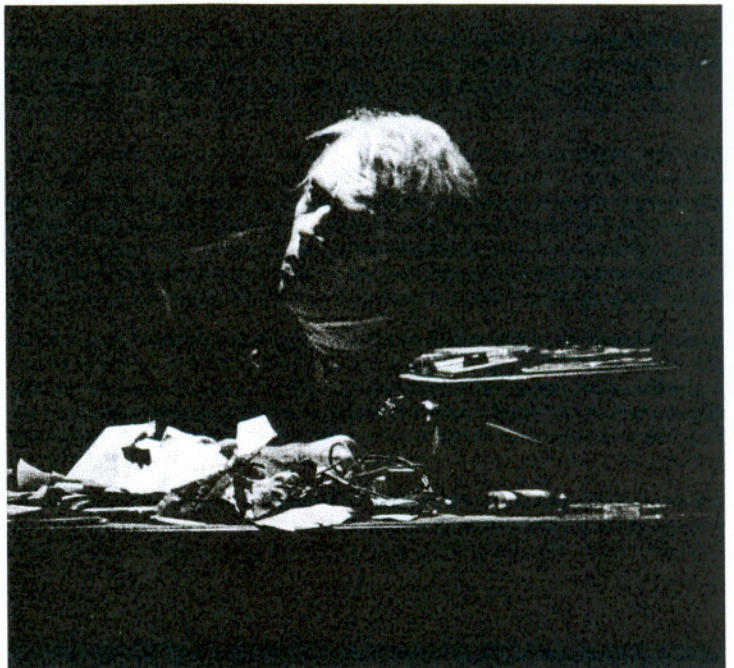
When Arena presented a bill of three one-acts in April, it included Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, marking the first time that Beckett was performed professionally in Washington. Alan Schneider, who had directed the New York premiere of the play a year before, directed again here with Donald Davis, who created the title role in that New York production. Reviews were overwhelmingly positive and Schneider continued to forge a reputation as the definitive American interpreter of Beckett.

The 1960-61 season marks the final one in the Heurich Brewery. The May production of Shaw's *Man And Superman*, complete with the often-omitted "Don Juan in Hell" sequence, marks the final production in The Old Vat.

News from the Rialto: George Grizzard, performing with Jack Lemmon in *Fall of a Hero*, becomes the "first of Arena Stage's regulars to achieve star billing on Broadway," according to the *Washington Post*. Philip Bosco is voted "most promising newcomer" by the New York critics after his Broadway performance as Hercules in *The Rape of the Belt*, and Tom Bosley celebrates one year in the title role of the Broadway production of *Fiorello!*

A Ford Foundation grant of \$244,000 is awarded to help start the Theatre Communications Group (TCG). TCG will strive to improve communications among theater artists and administrators in different parts of the country and to foster the growth of the non-profit American theater. Zelda is named to the original thirteen-member advisory board.

President John F. Kennedy invites 156 renowned American artists to his inaugural. Among those invited are Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Miller, and Zelda.



CHRONOLOGY

Top: The company with Howard Wierum (far left) in *The Gang's All Here*. Bottom: Donald Davis in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

THE 1961-62 SEASON
in the new Arena:
The Caucasian Chalk Circle
 by Bertolt Brecht
 In a new version by John Holmstrom
 Directed by Alan Schneider

Two Plays:
The American Dream
 by Edward Albee
What Shall We Tell Caroline?
 by John Mortimer
 Directed by Alan Schneider
The Madwoman of Chaillot
 by Jean Giraudoux
 Adapted by Maurice Valency
 Directed by F. Cowles Strickland

THE MOON IN THE YELLOW RIVER
 by Denis Johnston
 Directed by F. Cowles Strickland
Misalliance
 by George Bernard Shaw
 Directed by Warren Enters
The Burning of the Lepers
 by Wallace Hamilton
 Directed by Alan Schneider

Uncle vanya
 by Anton Chekhov
 Translated by Stark Young
 Directed by Alan Schneider
The Time of Your Life
 by William Saroyan
 Directed by Alan Schneider

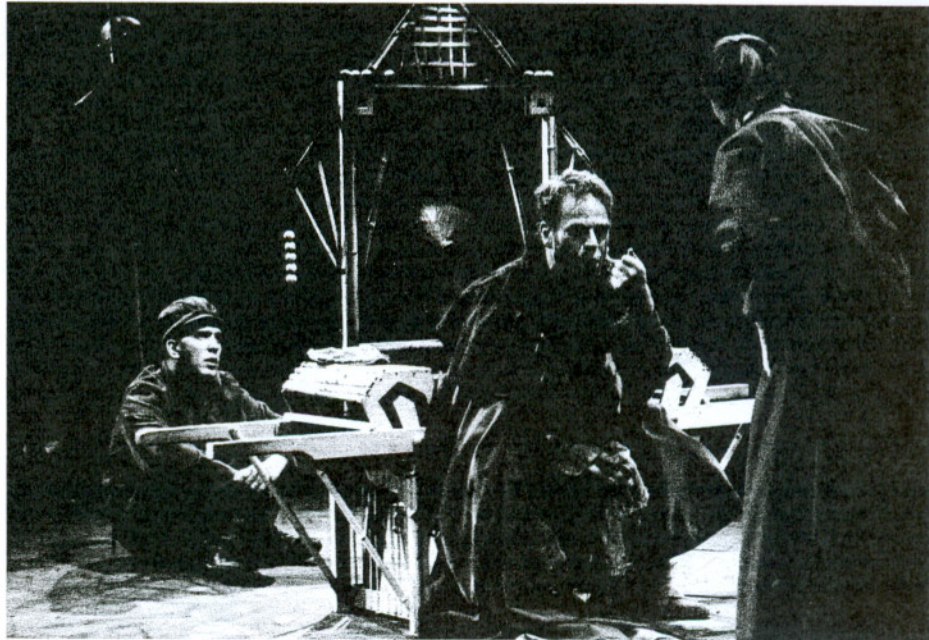
SPOTLIGHTS

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

When *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* opened, it was a first not only for the building but for Brecht's parable about the temptation of goodness as well—its American professional premiere. The epic nature of the play provided the perfect opportunity to demonstrate the flexibility of the new space, and the expansive, operatic direction of Alan Schneider exploited it to its full potential. New company members David Hurst as the judge Azdak and Melinda Dillon as Grusha made particularly memorable debuts. With the recent construction of the Berlin Wall, Arena's choice of an East German author did not go unnoticed: "[The choice] suggests one reason for Arena's success... Brecht is indisputably a controversial dramatist; Arena has offered local playgoers a chance to find out why," said a *Washington Post* editorial.

Uncle Vanya

Chekhov's tragicomedy featured Nan Martin in her first appearance with the company, playing the role of Elena. *Washington Post* critic Richard L. Coe called the production "a chance to see it performed as well as you're likely to find it in this country."



Top: Harry Bergman, David Hurst, and Melinda Dillon in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Bottom: Nan Martin and Ray Reinhardt in *Uncle Vanya*.

THE 1961-62 SEASON

The October 30th opening of the new building with the premiere of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is hailed by the *New York Times* as a "new cultural landmark." The evening was attended by the secretary of the treasury, but it was an audience of long-time supporters attending the attainment of a long-cherished goal which made the evening complete. As an editorial in the *Washington Post* put it: "What lends special significance to the Arena's festive first night is that it came about in response to a community demand. There was no official subsidy, no expense-account clientele, no single affluent donor. Instead, the playhouse was built because enough Washingtonians wanted to see serious drama competently performed."

Subscriptions increase to almost 9,000.

Arena books in "extra" performances in addition to its regular season. This season they include *The Little Circus*, *The Ceylon National Dancers*, and "Poetry and Jazz" starring Basil Langton.

The D.C. Commissioners grant Arena Stage tax-exempt status for property taxes, thus saving the theater almost \$9,000 in 1962 alone.

The Arena building wins three first-place awards in an architectural competition sponsored by the National Masonry Institute in Washington.

CHRONOLOGY

THE 1962-63 SEASON

Once in a Lifetime

by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Under Milk Wood

by Dylan Thomas
Directed by John O'Shaughnessy

Volpone

by Ben Jonson
Adapted by Stefan Zweig
Directed by Nina Vance

Twelve Angry Men

by Reginald Rose
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

The Hostage

by Brendan Behan
Directed by John O'Shaughnessy

All the Way Home

by Tad Mosel
Directed by Alan Schneider

Othello

by William Shakespeare
Directed by Alan Schneider

The Threepenny Opera

Text and lyrics by Bertolt Brecht
Music by Kurt Weill
Adapted by Marc Blitzstein
Directed by Alan Schneider

THE 1962-63 SEASON



SPOTLIGHTS

Once in a Lifetime

As Arena prepared to open this broad, farcical send-up of Hollywood in the 1920s, developing news of the Cuban Missile Crisis drew families to their radios and televisions more and more each day. On opening night, events in the crisis turned so severe that much of the audience, many of whom were employed by government agencies, left during intermission. When the crisis finally subsided, however, the production proved, for many, to be the perfect antidote to the residual tensions. Richard L. Coe commented, "Coming out of the theater one remembered what has been going on this week and, with a jolt of relief, welcomed the fact that life continues."

The Threepenny Opera

A return to Brecht, this time with his and Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*, marked the first full musical to be produced in the Arena. The play generated such an overwhelming demand for tickets that the run was extended for two weeks before the play even opened. Brecht's lower-depths work was vividly realized with the help of a seven-piece orchestra set into a pit constructed below the playing area.

Nina Vance, artistic director of the Alley Theatre in Houston, directs Ben Jonson's *Volpone* at Arena and, about to begin designing a new building with architect Ulrich Franzen, confers with Zelda about the working process.

Brock Peters appears in the title role of *Othello* concurrently with the release of the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which Peters plays the role of Tom Robinson. This production also marks the first Shakespeare to be performed in the new building.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by Edward Albee opens on Broadway with Arena Stage's associate director Alan Schneider directing and Arena alums Melinda Dillon as Honey and George Grizzard as Nick. Schneider wins a Tony, as does the play. Dillon is voted "most promising new actress" in a New York critics poll in *Variety* magazine.

Three Soviet writers—playwright Valentin Katayev (*Squaring The Circle*), screenwriter Victor Rozov (*The Cranes Are Flying*), and literary critic Frida Lurie—tour the Arena in January as part of a U.S./Soviet cultural exchange agreement.

The Tyrone Guthrie Theater opens in Minneapolis. Guthrie's first directing project there is *Hamlet* with Arena company member George Grizzard in the title role.



CHRONOLOGY

Top, l to r: Roy Scheider and Rene Auberjonois in *Once in a Lifetime*. Bottom: Bella Jarrett in *The Threepenny Opera*.

THE 1963-64 SEASON

The Devils

by John Whiting
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Battle Dream

by Herbert Boland
Directed by George L. Sherman

Hotel Paradiso

by Georges Feydeau and Maurice Desvallieres
Adapted by Peter Glerwille
Directed by Warren Enters

The Wall

by Millard Lampell
Based on the novel by John Hersey
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Affair

by Ronald Millar
Adapted from the novel by C.P. Snow
Directed by Mel Shapiro

The Taming of the Shrew

by William Shakespeare
Directed by Mel Shapiro

Enrico IV

by Luigi Pirandello
Adapted by John Reich
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Dark of the Moon

by Howard Richardson and William Berney
Directed by Edwin Sherin

SPOTLIGHTS

The Devils

British playwright John Whiting's highly acclaimed play about sorcery and religious hysteria in a 17th-century French nunnery had its American premiere at Arena. The production featured forty actors, the largest cast yet assembled for an Arena production. As directed by Zelda, the epic inhabited not only the central playing area, but overflowed into the aisles, the boxes, and even the very rafters of the building itself. After favorable reviews in the *New York Times* and *Commonweal* magazine, the play was produced on Broadway.

The Wall

Author Millard Lampell had been blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Ironically, Arena's production of *The Wall*, about the Warsaw Ghetto, raised suspicions from the other side of the Cold War. The Soviet Cultural attache attended the opening night performance, but only after the Soviet embassy called the theater twice to make sure that the "wall" of the title was not a reference to the Berlin Wall. For the Arena production, Lampell spent time in residence with the company developing an extensive revision of the script after its New York failure.

THE 1963-64 SEASON



Top: Ned Beatty in *The Devils*. Bottom: Lou Gilbert in *The Wall*.

Arena presents the world premiere of *Battle Dream* by Arena's first writer-in-residence, Herbert Boland, who based the play on his own experience with an American bomber unit in England.

Upon receiving news of President Kennedy's assassination, Arena cancels its final performance of *The Devils* and joins with other theaters across the country by remaining closed throughout the weekend.

The Ford Foundation, with the intention of drawing poets and novelists into the theater, provides a \$7,500 grant to Arena to provide for another writer-in-residence. This time it is famed Civil War novelist and scholar Shelby Foote, whose residency is for the 1963-1964 season.

Edwin Sherin, having directed the acclaimed *The Wall* and *Dark of the Moon*, which used the space in a number of new ways, becomes assistant producing director.

At a fifteenth anniversary gala for Arena, Zelda is presented with a pledge of fifteen thousand subscribers for the 1964-65 season. She explains, "With enough subscribers. . . we achieve longer runs for our productions, longer rehearsal periods in which to explore and shape the material, greater opportunity to discover the fullness and richness of our form."

CHRONOLOGY

ESSAY



The story goes something like this: In the thick of Arena's Old Vat days, Zelda was behind her desk, smothered by stacks of papers, when her assistant, Terry Joseph, stuck her head in the door. "Zelda," Joseph said, "it's the phone. It's from New York. There's a man named Mac Lowry and he wants to talk to you about money." "Tell him we don't have any," responded Zelda, peering over the stacks. It was to be a year or two before Zelda got in touch with W. McNeil Lowry, the "modern Medici" of the Ford Foundation, who helped Arena find its funding and its footing for fifteen crucial years of its development.

That legendary near-miss with the Ford Foundation proved to be one of Arena's few mishaps in the area of fundraising. As with any creative institution, money is always in short supply in a culture that has always emphasized the "business" in "show business," so Arena has had to be especially clever and persistent in its quest for funding. Its most consistent ally has been the quality of its own work. When Arena was founded, it began as a profit-making institution. In its early days, it was able to give its backers a dividend, albeit a small one. However, the economics of theater as art, rather than as a commercial venture, created a need for income greater than the box office could provide, especially since establishing a low ticket price was central to Arena's mission and relationship to the community. Arena needed to become eligible for grants and gifts. The decision to abolish Arena Enterprises in 1959 and become a not-for-profit institution was a formidable undertaking. But, as Zelda said, "Once we made the choice to produce our plays, not to recoup an investment, but to recoup some corner of the universe for our understanding and enlargement, we entered into the same world as the university, the library, the museum, the church, and became, like them, an instrument of civilization."

The reconstitution allowed Arena to receive federal, foundation, and corporate support. The Ford Foundation, the Twentieth Century Fund, and the Rockefeller Foundation were among early contributors to the theater. They were soon to be joined by the National

Endowment for the Arts, Washington's Cafritz and Meyer Foundations, and the Philip L. Graham Fund, the Ford Motor Company, AT&T, the Andrew W. Mellon and Shubert Foundations, and many other major contributors who are enumerated elsewhere in this book. Their funds have allowed Arena to build and own its theater, improve the size and quality of its acting company, and support many important artistic initiatives. In the early seventies, Arena had become strong enough to stand on its own, in the Ford Foundation's opinion, and it gave the theater smaller grants which had to be matched by the community. The community came through, responding to Tom Fichandler's requests by contributing as Associates, an entitlement program initially run by John McQuiggan which has become the backbone of the theater's local private support. A development office, under the directorship of Elspeth Udvarhelyi, was created in 1980 and, in 1983, joined with Board President Lee Rubinstein, Trustee Marcus Cohn, and Zelda to create a successful \$6.2 million Endowment Fund, the first of its kind in the country.

The country itself further compounds the fundraising challenges by its relative indifference to the support of the arts. Arena receives only 35% of its operating costs from contributed income and 65% of its support from the box office. A life-sustaining 10% comes from federal funding, which is crucial, not only in terms of actual dollars, but in creating the prestige that attracts the balance of corporate and private dollars. The rising and falling fortunes of the NEA are therefore closely monitored by the theater.

In addition, Washington D.C. has always been a notoriously difficult city in which to raise money. There are many worthy organizations competing for the same dollar and, as an urban district, D.C. has neither state funds nor a large field of great family wealth to tap. What it does have, in armloads, is civic pride. After World War II, Washington was a cultural desert. It wanted its own theater and Zelda gave it to them, choosing to stay in her hometown and building within it. The local audience has repaid her loyalty. According to Udvarhelyi, money pledged by local citizens for the endowment came in in regular installments over the years down to the last penny, achieving an astonishingly low attrition rate of 2%.

The quality of Arena's work has contributed to a symbiotic relationship with its funding sources. The work can be held up as an example of what concerned funding can provide and, on the other side of the coin, Arena is held up as an example of achievement to other theaters by its funding sources. As but one example, five years after it funded Arena Stage's humanities program, the National Endowment for the Humanities still includes the program as a model for others in its brochure. The NEA can justify its own existence by pointing to the quality of such cultural institutions as Arena; likewise, the NEA keeps theaters like Arena in business. And it has to be run like a business. In increasingly difficult financial times, the temptation to alter artistic priorities to make money at the box office is enormous. Arena has resisted this temptation and chosen instead to rely on the integrity of its work in order to sustain itself through what Brecht called "these dark times." And the gamble has largely paid off. As Frank Rich of the *New York Times* wrote, "Money flows when an institution inspires confidence. One need only look at Arena Stage, among others, to see that communities will pitch in to support . . . a theater that has demonstrated its vitality."

The dedication of the new Arena: Zelda with District Commissioner Walter Tobriner; Ford Foundation vice president for the Humanities and Arts, W. McNeil Lowry; and the president of the Arena Board of Trustees, J. Burke Knapp.

THE 1964-65 SEASON

Galileo

by Bertolt Brecht
In the version by Charles Laughton
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Rehearsal

by Jean Anouilh
Translated by Pamela Hansford Johnson
and Kitty Black
Directed by Mel Shapiro

Billy Budd

by Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman
Based on the novel by Herman Melville
Directed by Edwin Sherin

Heartbreak House

by George Bernard Shaw
Directed by Mel Shapiro

He Who Gets Slapped

by Leonid Andreyev
In a new version by F.D. Reeve
Directed by Edwin Sherin

Long Day's Journey into Night

by Eugene O'Neill
Directed by Mel Shapiro

Two Plays:

The Lonesome Train

Play and lyrics by Millard Lampell
Music by Earl Robinson

Hard Travelin'

by Millard Lampell
Directed by Edwin Sherin

Spoon River Anthology

by Edgar Lee Masters
Directed by Barry Hoffman

SPOTLIGHTS

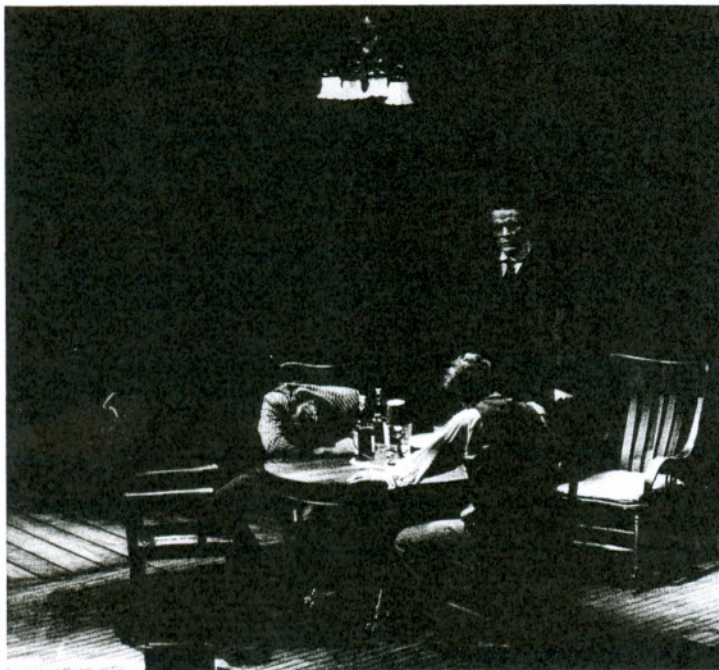
Hard Travelin'

After the success of *The Wall*, Arena had commissioned Millard Lampell to write this new piece, which took an impressionistic look at America just before and just after the 1929 stock market crash. For this fast-paced, kaleidoscopic play, two movie screens were set up at opposite corners of the playing area to project selected quotations from prominent figures of the era which often offered an ironic counterpoint to events being depicted on stage. Edwin Sherin directed a large cast headed by Arena veteran Alan Oppenheimer in this critically praised premiere.

Long Day's Journey into Night

Arena's production of O'Neill's self-described "play of old sorrow" proved to be a stunning and hard-hitting four-hour sojourn as staged by Arena resident director Mel Shapiro. The cast was headed by Michael Higgins and Dorothea Hammond as the Tyrones with Anthony Zerbe and Rene Auberjonois as their sons. The production, the fifth O'Neill offering by Arena in its first fifteen years, was described in the press as "the best evening this theater has ever offered."

THE 1964-65 SEASON



Arena's production of Brecht's *Galileo* marks the four-hundredth birthday of the Italian astronomer.

Arena provides on-the-job training in theater administration under the auspices of the Ford Foundation's Administrative Intern Program. One of the interns, JoAnn Overholt, goes on to become the theater's business manager and later administrative director. She is still with Arena twenty-six years later.

Arena receives a \$106,500 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation that will allow the theater to provide its company members with classes in speech, voice, and acting techniques during each of the following three seasons.

Arena averages 93% capacity for the season, the highest figure in the history of the theater to date. Box office receipts exceed \$500,000 for the first time.

At the behest of President Lyndon Johnson, Congress establishes a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities. Commenting on this event in the *New York Times*, Howard Taubman poses the prophetic question, "Won't some Congressman kick up a fuss sooner or later when artists and writers express unpopular ideas?"

LIVING STAGE

In the moment of artistic creation, you are whole and sane." In any other situation, this statement might remain a motto, but in the electrifying hands of Robert Alexander and his committed artistic family of Living Stage, the phrase has become a philosophy, a rallying cry, a living testament to the work of Arena Stage's social outreach theater company, the most accomplished organization of its kind in America.

The evolution of Living Stage came out of Founder and Director Robert Alexander's imagination—and the lack of imagination he perceived in theatergoing audiences in the mid-sixties, when he was an actor in New York. "Doing a play for a large audience doesn't empower the audience with their own artistry. They sit and admire and revere and respect what you're doing, but it's not about them," said Alexander. So he went out to find an audience that would have the imagination and innocence to know what *was* about them and became the artistic director of the New York's Children's Performing Arts Guild in 1964. Two years later, Zelda would see some of the company's work in Boston, and offer Alexander the job as director of Arena's theater for children.

The theater that became Living Stage (which, as a venture of Arena Stage, gets approximately 50% of its budget from Arena, the other half through contributions from the community and through the company's residencies and programs) was unlike any of the tame or quaint notions we associate with the term "children's theater." Fueled by the burning issues of the sixties and the concern for social change, Living Stage went into schools and, with a steady stream of improvisation and encouragement, led children to confront the realities of their own world, rather than retreat into fantasies of another culture. In Living Stage's performance-workshops, drug abuse, racism, teenage suicide, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, even human conflict in places like

Vietnam and Central America become themes tackled and taught with energy, dignity, and a profound respect for self-expression.

"Typical" is a word that has no meaning at Living Stage, so it is almost impossible to describe a "typical" performance, but there are several basic components to a performance-workshop, whether it is for kindergarten students, prison inmates, or older adults. The company, composed of five or six actors, such as long-term members Jennifer Nelson, Oran Sandel, and Halima Williams, and a musician and/or musical director collaborate on a play around a given theme relevant to audience members. As the audience arrives at the performance, they are immediately confronted with song, dance, and a boundary-less performance space. The performance begins, and, when the scenario reaches a heightened moment, the action is frozen and the audience is invited to complete the story—suggest endings of their own and eventually join with the company in playing them out. A final song or rap is created to culminate—thematically and emotionally—the performance. The effect is one of joyful exploration, imaginative freedom, emotional fulfillment and community in its largest sense.

The groups that work with Living Stage are as diverse as the performances themselves. From its initial concentration on elementary school students in the D.C. area, Living Stage has broadened its participants to include such groups as inmates at Lorton and the Women's Detention Center at D.C. Jail, high schoolers at Ballou, the District's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Service Administration, as well as many other groups of economically disadvantaged children, physically and emotionally disabled children, imprisoned men and women, and older adults.

Living Stage's base of operations has expanded as well. In addition to the five to seven workshops conducted every week, there are professional training workshops for adults, summer workshops, national and international residencies, documentary films, tours, and an incipient national training program to instruct artists, teachers, and social workers in the philosophy and techniques of Living Stage. The success of Living Stage has been consolidated in its new home at 14th and T Streets NW, a former blues club whose two stories have been renovated and reconstructed specifically for Living Stage's needs.

The rest of this book measures success and achievement in easily understandable and appreciable ways: awards, box office results, an acclaimed performance, a prize-winning playwright, the applause of a large paying audience. None of these standards are applicable here, because Living Stage deals in the currency of the ineffable. Here everyone wins a prize—no one can be more right than another, because no one is ever wrong. Here achievement is measured in a fleeting moment that represents a lasting change—a teenager with cerebral palsy who creates his own beautiful song, an older adult transformed into a child by a funny hat and a lot of faith, a prisoner who has been inspired to form his own drama group. "There is no mystery to this," says Alexander. "Surrounded by the love, care, and trust we give our young people while helping them explore and discover their artistic process, their visions are validated and they are actively encouraged to recreate our world in their own passionate, imaginative, and poetic image."



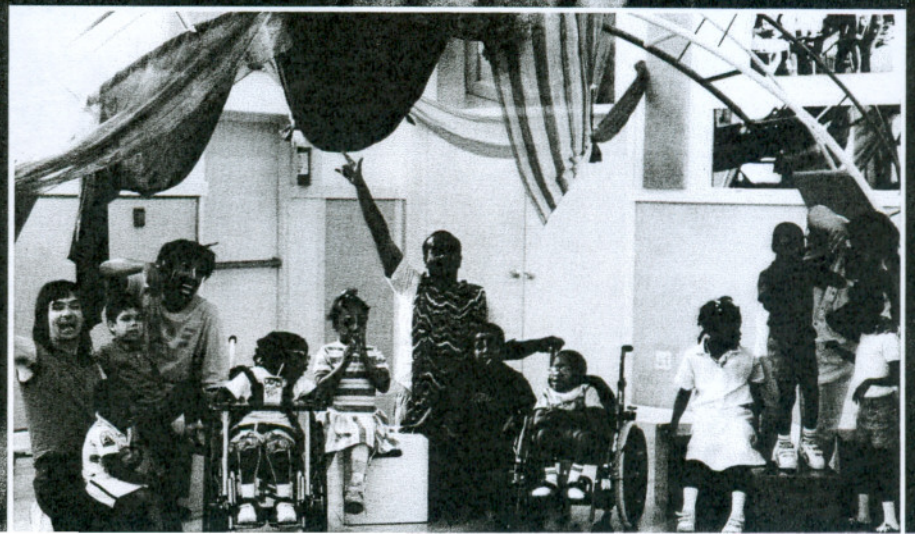
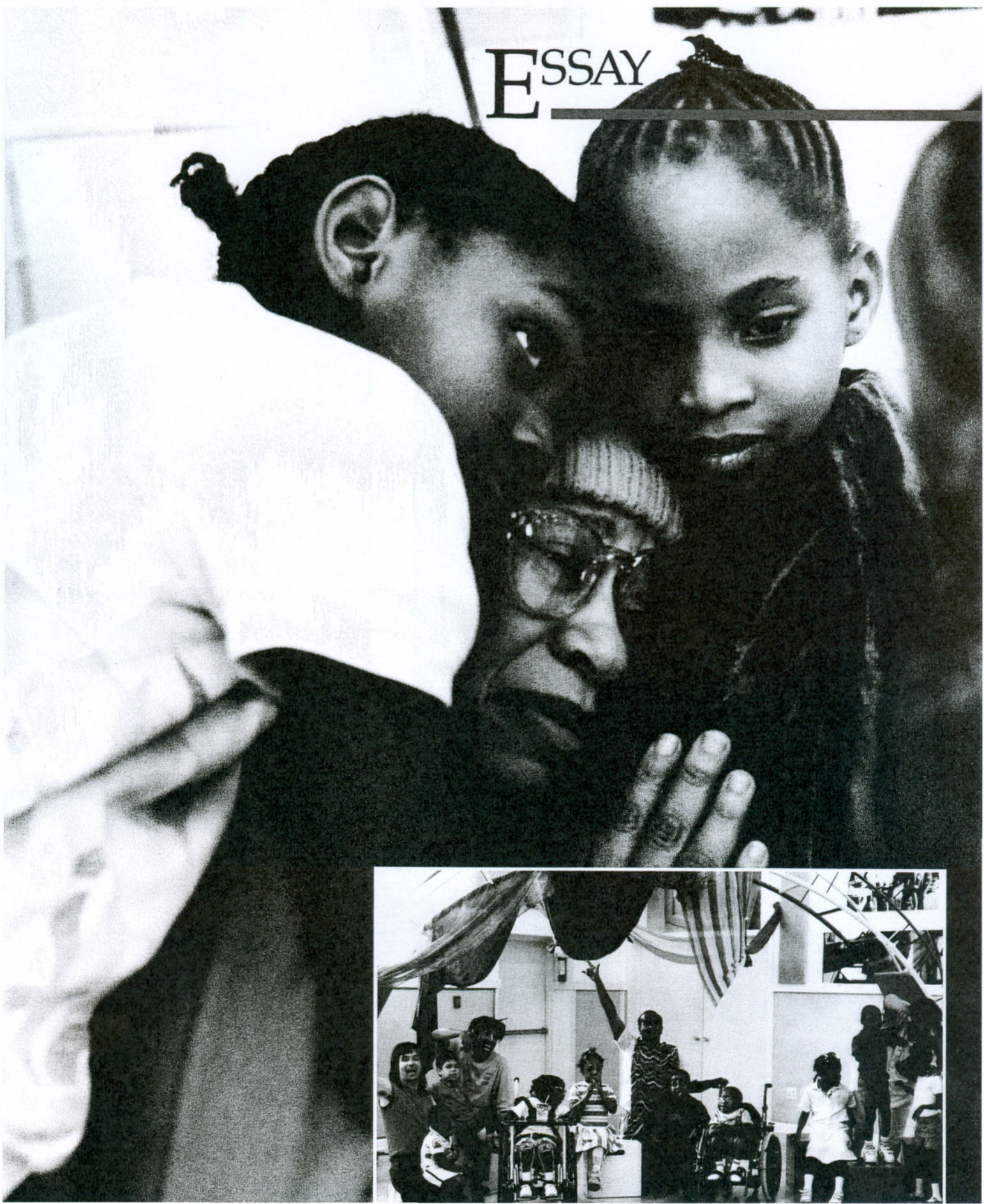
Top: Living Stage founder and director, Robert Alexander.

Bottom: Company member Halima Williams in an improvisation with a student.

Facing page: Living Stage associate director Jennifer Nelson in a scene with two students.

Inset: The Living Stage company with a workshop group inside Living Stage's home at 14th and T Streets.

ESSAY



THE 1965-66 SEASON

Saint Joan

by George Bernard Shaw
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Skin of Our Teeth

by Thornton Wilder
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Project Immortality

by Loring Mandel
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Three Sisters

by Anton Chekhov
Translated by Stark Young
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance

by John Arden
Directed by Edwin Sherin

Three Plays:

Mr. Welk and Jersey Jim

by Howard Sackler
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Lesson

by Eugène Ionesco
Directed by Edwin Sherin

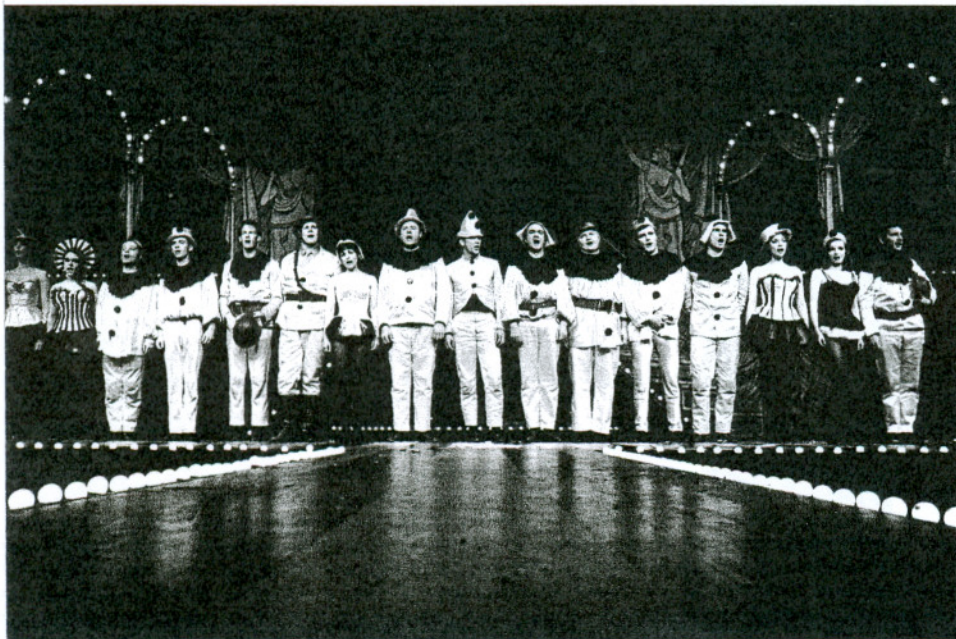
The Collection

by Harold Pinter
Directed by Dana Elcar

Oh! What a Lovely War

by Joan Littlewood's Theater Workshop with
Charles Chilton
Directed by Edward Parone

THE 1965-66 SEASON



SPOTLIGHTS

Oh! What a Lovely War

Arena kept pace with the country's growing skepticism about armed conflict in Indochina by offering two distinctly different anti-war plays. This one lampooned British enthusiasm for the First World War effort with a series of music hall numbers and vaudevillian scenes. The Arena was converted into a three-quarter thrust stage by removing the entire south bank of seats in an attempt to capture the look of a typical British music hall. The original design of the building had provided for this thrust option, but it had never been used until this production, and hasn't been used since.

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance

On a more serious note, this contemporary British play, which the *Washington Post* said "obviously speaks to our moral dilemma in Vietnam," provides a shocking evening in the theater. In the play, Musgrave, a 19th-century British officer, deserts, but his fanatical attempts to turn public opinion against war ultimately backfire. This complex, visceral production used dance along with primitive chants in an effort to, in Arden's words, "match some particular piece of violence with an even greater and more outrageous violence."

Howard Sackler's *Mr. Welk and Jersey Jim* receives its professional world premiere on a bill of three one-acts by contemporary playwrights in April. The other plays on the bill are Pinter's *The Collection* and Ionesco's *The Lesson*. In conjunction with the plays, the Washington Gallery of Modern Art sponsors a significant exhibit of contemporary painters in the lobby of the Arena.

Jane Alexander, Robert Foxworth, and Jon Voight are among the newcomers to the Arena acting company which totals sixteen for this season, the largest group to date.

The Arena acting company travels to the Martin Beck Theatre in New York to see *Marat/Sade* and to meet with the Royal Shakespeare Company which is performing the play there. Both companies join in a public discussion of the play after the performance.

Harry M. Weese, the architect who designed the Arena building, is named to design Washington's new subway system.

On April 1, 1966, twenty-six resident theaters in the U.S. join together to form the League of Resident Theaters. The main purpose of the group is to achieve a standard contract for performers with the Actors' Equity Association. Tom Fichandler is appointed vice-president of the group.



CHRONOLOGY

Top: The company of *Oh! What a Lovely War*. Bottom, l to r: Virginia Downing, Conrad Bromberg, Richard Venture, George Ebeling, and Jane Alexander in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

THE 1966-67 SEASON

Macbeth

by William Shakespeare
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Magistrate

by Arthur Wing Pinero
Directed by David William

The Crucible

by Arthur Miller
Directed by Milton Katselas

The Inspector General

by Nikolai Gogol
Version by Edwin Sherin and
Millard Lampell
Directed by Edwin Sherin

Look Back in Anger

by John Osborne
Directed by Hy Kalus

The Andersonville Trial

by Saul Levitt
Directed by Edwin Sherin

SPOTLIGHTS

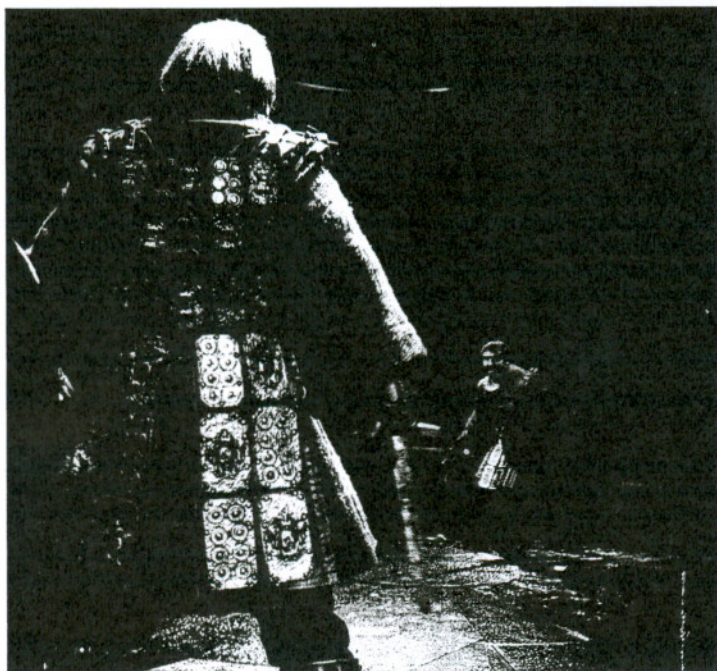
The Andersonville Trial

Saul Levitt's play *The Andersonville Trial*, which chronicles a Civil War court-martial, was double cast by Arena director Ed Sherin. Two actors played each of the four major roles, alternating from night to night during the run so that, for example, the role of the defendant Henry Wirz in the courtroom drama was played one night by Richard Venture and the next by Max Wright. Sherin said of the unusual casting, "The experience will allow an actor to examine the potential of his role by watching another actor help create it."

Macbeth

An ambitious production of *Macbeth* adopted an aggressive, eclectic design strategy, employing Mayan-inspired sets of hammered aluminum and brass plates by Robin Wagner, eleventh-century costumes by Judith Hayes, and a Kabuki musical score by Charles Gross—all in an effort to lend a sense of timelessness to the play. The production featured alums Michael Higgins and Nan Martin in the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Christopher Tanner, president of the Stage Dueling Choreography Association came to Arena to coach the actors in the very elaborate final battle sequences.

THE 1966-67 SEASON



The second production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* features Esther Rolle in her first performance in Washington, D.C., as well as Michael Higgins, returning to play John Proctor. Set design is by Ming Cho Lee.

Six local performing arts organizations (Arena Stage, the Institute of Contemporary Art, the National Ballet, the Washington Performing Arts Society, and the Washington Theater Club) join together to form the United Performing Arts of Washington (which would later become the Cultural Alliance), a group whose purpose is to promote greater performing arts attendance in the city. Later, Lynda Bird Johnson becomes the very active chair of the group's Student Committee.

Richard Bauer joins the Arena acting company.

For the first time, Arena offers a special student discount rate on individual tickets.

Zelda announces that she will take a four or five month leave of absence so that she can focus her attention on the plans for a second performing space adjacent to the Arena.

The National Endowment for the Arts provides the Arena with its first official federal support: a \$25,000 matching grant.

THE GREAT WHITE HOPE

ESSAY



The phrase "great white hope" came out of black fighter Jack Johnson's victory in an Australian ring over white boxer Tommy Burns in 1908—a fight which made him the first black Heavyweight Champion of the World. His victory threw down a gauntlet in the form of a boxing glove to the white world and they sought a white champion who could defeat Johnson and thereby, as papers of the time put it, carry on his shoulders "the hopes of the white race."

In a 1968 thirty-eight-page essay entitled "Towards a Deepening Aesthetic," Zelda wrote, "If we seek the Negro audience, we should integrate our acting companies and seek out plays that speak to Negro concerns. . . . [W]e must attract them with the directness of our work, its abrasion, its physical energy, its source within life itself." Arena itself was searching for a champion of a sort, a play that could give flesh and blood to the ideas that Zelda articulated and also be a worthy theatrical vehicle.

It arrived as an uncompleted manuscript the size of a Manhattan phonebook. In 1966, Zelda arranged for a Ford Foundation New Playwrights Grant to bring playwright Howard Sackler over from Europe. Sackler was an American, living abroad, who was not only a writer and director, but the founder and primary director for Caedmon Records, the British company famed for its spoken-word recordings. While Arena was producing his one-act play *Mr. Welk and Jersey Jim*, he gave Zelda sections of an unfinished play based on the life of the boxer Jack Johnson.

Zelda was intrigued and sought a \$25,000 grant from the National Foundation of the Arts. The grant was initially turned down—the Foundation wouldn't fund a play that existed only as unwieldy sections and a synopsis of scenes to follow—but Zelda appealed the decision, and eventually Arena was awarded the full sum, with \$7,500 of the money going to Sackler. The production was originally scheduled for the spring of 1967, but further revisions were necessary and it was postponed until the winter, allowing Zelda to go to Spain to work with Sackler and help put theatrical flesh and sinew onto the play's carriage. Sackler began the play in 1964, intrigued by the character of Johnson. As he saw it, Johnson was a man in an existential situation, full of pride, power, and talent in a world that had no use for the color of his skin. "The pressures I used in the play—racial and social—are refined, but they haven't changed today. I didn't want the play to address the times in a corny, propagandistic way. I really wrote it despite its topicality."

What emerged was a sprawling epic of three acts, twenty scenes, and 247 separate roles. The play, written in blank verse, turns Johnson into "Jack Jefferson" and traces his life and career from the heavy-weight championship in 1908, through his trials and persecutions triggered in part by his romance with a white woman, through his exile to various European countries for violating the Mann Act, and culminating in the loss of his championship in Havana in a rigged fight. This synopsis barely begins to sum up the play's wealth of detail, characterization, style, and scope.

Arena entered into the ring undaunted by this formidable challenge. Even with the grant money and potential box-office receipts, the production, according to Tom Fichandler, was budgeted to lose \$50,000, but "we thought the play was important and that it should be done." Associate Producing Director Edwin Sherin held open auditions for over four hundred people in order to cast the twenty-five additional roles to supplement the acting company, as well as ten other actors from New York.

Prominent among the guest actors was James Earl Jones, who was celebrating a ten-year Broadway and off-Broadway career. Jones, of course, played Jefferson and spent weeks on a diet regimen losing twenty-five pounds. Although Jefferson never actually fights in the



play, an ex-prizefighter named Bill Terry was brought in from Chicago to teach Jones the appropriate fighting stances. Jane Alexander, a member of Arena's company, played Eleanor Bachman, Jefferson's mistress, and rounding out the cast were such company actors as Robert Prosky, Max Wright, Richard Bauer, Robert Foxworth, and Ned Beatty, joined by Hector Elizondo and Tana Hicken. The sixty-three-member company certainly knew how to launch a mammoth project—early rehearsals were held aboard a boat anchored in the channel.

Sherin guided his cast through their paces while half the cast performed *Poor Bitos* in the evening; guest artists from New York and the local community rehearsed with him into the night. Set designer Douglas W. Schmidt was inspired by a boxing ring for his design concept which, of course, the Arena is ideally suited to resemble. Above the stage was a metallic abstract sculpture, symbolizing both a boxing ring and Jefferson's own turmoil. A complicated system of winches and wagons allowed for the twenty scene changes. Costume designer Marjorie Slaiman worked with over 250 costumes, including an accurate replication of Johnson's purple satin robe from a fight in Reno. Costume changes were so fast and complex that Jones had to wear three different layers of costumes at one point.

The production that opened on December 7, 1967 weighed in at three-and-a-half hours. It drew standing ovations, national press, and critical acclaim. Martin Gottfried in *Women's Wear Daily* wrote: "Probably the most important new American play ever to come out of a resident theater and certainly the most impressive one that I have ever seen anywhere in a long time." The *Saturday Review* wrote: "The Great White Hope of the resident theatre movement is that these organizations will be able to tackle large, serious works that would be financially prohibitive on the current Broadway economy. Therefore one has nothing but admiration for Arena Stage." The performances were acclaimed as superior and Jones' virtuoso portrayal singled out as having changed him from "a very good actor to a great one." The resonances of the treatment of Muhammad Ali, who was then being fined for refusing to join the army because of his Muslim beliefs, did not go unnoticed.

During the six-week run at Arena, the play was optioned by Herman Levin, who originally produced *My Fair Lady*, for an October 3rd opening at the Alvin Theater on Broadway. Sherin, Jones, Alexander, and twelve other actors repeated their Arena roles. It was the first major resident theater production to reach Broadway and, although there were several other significant resident productions in New York during the 1968-69 season, none achieved the acclaim of *The Great White Hope*. Sackler cut the play down to two hours and fifty minutes and won not only the New York Drama Critics' Award and the Pulitzer Prize, but the Tony Award for Best Play. Jones and Alexander also won Tonys for their roles and the production ran for 546 performances. A film was made in 1970, in which the leads reprised their roles.

The triumph for Sackler's play was a solid TKO, but for Arena, the success was bittersweet. Not only did the transfer break up Arena's company, but the theater received neither program credit nor any financial benefits from the Broadway production, the subsequent film sale, or any other performances of the play. But such are the uses of adversity—the League of Resident Theaters, with Tom Fichandler's guidance, quickly reevaluated their contracts with Broadway transfers and such mutual acknowledgement and remuneration is now standard. What was the exception in 1968 is now the rule: Broadway gets most of its significant serious drama from the resident theater. But the triumph of *The Great White Hope* was really an institutional one: that Arena could muster its resources and, like a great fighter, go the distance against great odds. Probably more than any one single project, this play won Arena its championship belt.

Facing page, top: Director Edwin Sherin gives notes to the sixty-three-member cast before a dress rehearsal. Norma Donaldson, Lou Gilbert, James Earl Jones, Jane Alexander, Richard Bauer, Max Wright, and Robert Prosky can be seen in the first row.

Facing page, bottom: James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander both won Tony Awards when *The Great White Hope* moved to Broadway following its world premiere at Arena.

Above: Norma Donaldson, Jimmy Pelham, James Earl Jones, George Mathews, George Ebeling, Eugene Wood, Jane Alexander, and Lou Gilbert in a scene from *The Great White Hope*.

THE 1967-68 SEASON

Two-Play Repertory:

Major Barbara

by George Bernard Shaw
Directed by Edwin Sherin

Poor Bitos

by Jean Anouilh
Translated by Lucienne Hill
Directed by Harold Stone

The Great White Hope

by Howard Sackler
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Blood Knot

by Athol Fugard
Directed by Gladys Vaughan

Three-Play Repertory:

The Tenth Man

by Paddy Chayefsky
Directed by Donald Moreland

Room Service

by John Murray and Allen Boretz
Directed by Donald Moreland

The Iceman Cometh

by Eugene O'Neill
Directed by Edwin Sherin

THE 1967-68 SEASON



SPOTLIGHTS

The Blood Knot

Arena took advantage of James Earl Jones' temporary presence in the company to stage a special one-week run of Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot*, in which Jones performed opposite company member Robert Foxworth. The play explores the disparate experiences of two South African step-brothers.

Three-Play Repertory

Arena scheduled *The Iceman Cometh*, *Room Service* and *The Tenth Man* in rotating repertory. Resident scene designer Ming Cho Lee designed all three sets, each of which had to be capable of being moved in and out of the performance space overnight. Tom Fichandler explained, "We didn't go to rotating repertory because it was more economical. In fact it costs more than a straight run. We did it because we think it contributes to the art of the theater." Acting in rep also presented some new challenges to the actors. Company member Richard Bauer noted, "You need a couple of weeks to get into the routine, to make sure you don't put on the wrong pair of shoes."

The 1967-68 season is the first season with a rotating repertory: a two-play rep begins the season and a three-play rep closes it. Thus the season opening of *Major Barbara* on September 14 is followed the next evening by the opening of *Poor Bitos*.

Prisoners ages eighteen to thirty-five are the audience for the Living Stage's first performance in a prison at Virginia's Lorton Youth Center where the troupe uses excerpts from Shakespeare, Molière, Tennessee Williams, and Lorraine Hansberry. According to the *Washington Post*, "No motion picture nor TV show has so excited the young prisoners at Lorton Youth Center as did the Arena Stage's Living Stage in its live and lively production of drama and music that night."

On June 4, 1968, Arena takes in 1,055 subscriptions for the 1968-69 season, the largest single-day effort in the theater's nineteen-year history.

Arena receives \$250,000 from the Ford Foundation in order to add a "significant number of black actors" to the acting company. Zelda Fichandler says of this new initiative, "By means of pointed and creative casting, it is the intention to draw the world that is outside the theater into the theater and give heightened, contemporary meanings to plays from the Greeks to the present day."



Top, l to r: James Earl Jones and Robert Foxworth in *The Blood Knot*. Bottom, l to r: George Ebeling, Tana Hickman, Jane Alexander (sitting), Frederick O'Neal, Max Wright, Richard McKenzie, Richard Venture, Eugene Wood, and Barton Heyman in *The Iceman Cometh*

CHRONOLOGY

THE 1968-69 SEASON

Three-Play Repertory:

The Threepenny Opera

by Bertolt Brecht
Music by Kurt Weill
Adapted by Marc Blitzstein
Directed by Donald Moreland in
association with Zelda Fichandler

Six Characters in Search of an Author

by Luigi Pirandello
Translated by Paul Avila Mayer
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

King Lear

by William Shakespeare
Directed by Edwin Sherin

The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade

by Peter Weiss
English version by Geoffrey Skelton
Verse adaptation by Adrian Mitchell
Music composed by Richard Peaslee
Directed by Alfred Ryder

Indians by Arthur Kopit
Directed by Gene Frankel

The Cage

by Rick Cluchey
Directed by Ken Whelan (SP)

Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris

Production conception, English lyrics, additional material by Eric Blau and Mort Shuman
Based on Brel's lyrics and commentary
Music by Jacques Brel
Directed by Moni Yakim

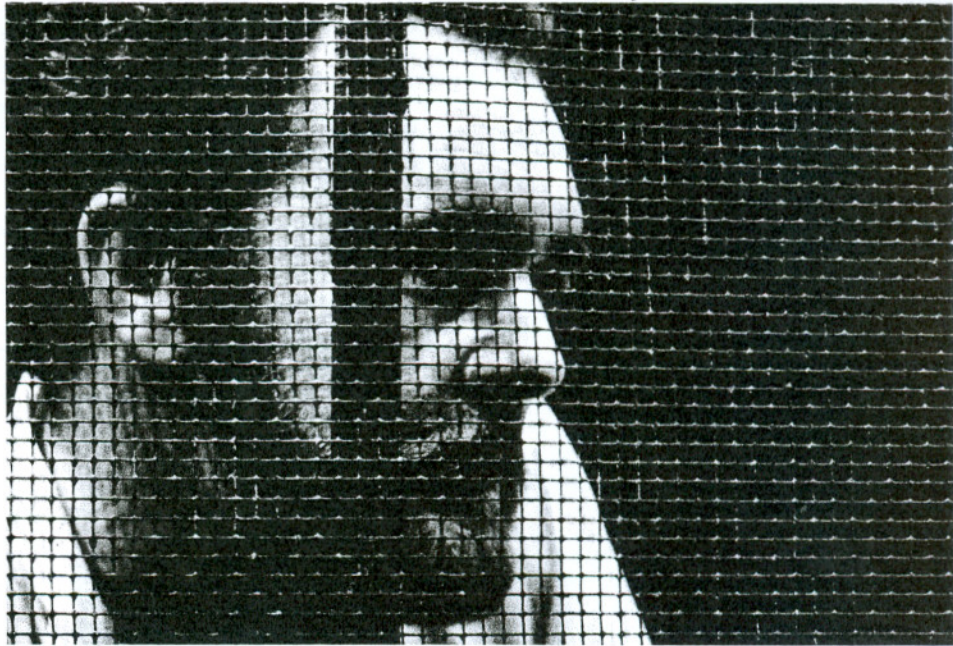
SPOTLIGHTS

The Cage

This special two-performance run was developed by Rick Cluchey in The Barbedwire Theatre Company, a non-profit group made up entirely of ex-convicts. In Cluchey's own words, "What we hope to do is to bring about a change in the country's penal system by showing the junkyards and scrapyards for human-beings that our prisons have become." Citing a "responsibility to present the play to a wider audience," Zelda, who was bestowed the title of "Honorary Convict" by the group, presented the play again in the fall.

Indians

Arthur Kopit's landmark play had its American premiere in Gene Frankel's Brechtian production which transformed the Arena into both a space for the performance of tribal rituals and a side-show of white hucksters. The production, which featured Stacy Keach as Buffalo Bill and Raul Julia in three roles, later moved to Broadway in a revised production, where, although it shared the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play, it lacked the vitality of the arena staging. Having learned from their experience with *The Great White Hope*, Arena this time made arrangements to represent itself in the Broadway production.



THE 1968-69 SEASON



Living Stage begins its first improvisational company working in communities in Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland, improvising on themes that are immediately relevant to its audiences and encouraging the audiences to create endings for each of the plays the company creates.

Arena receives \$2,500 from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation to supply free tickets to D.C. high school students.

The official ground-breaking for STAGE II, the new fan-shaped theater being built adjacent to the Arena for the exploration of new American plays, is held on September 10, 1968. STAGE II is later renamed the Kreeger Theater in appreciation of David Lloyd Kreeger's generous support of the building.

In February, Arena is host to a program entitled "The Black Man's Meaning for America: Past, Present, and Future." The program, described as a "celebration of Black American culture," features the African Heritage Dancers, The D.C. Youth Chorale, and the "New Thing" jazz quintet, which performs John Coltrane's "Dr. King."

The Living Stage conducts Arena Stage's first Summer Theatre Workshop, titled "Introduction to Improvisational Theatre."

1968 REPERTORY

ESSAY



Noble experiments offer three possibilities: they can succeed completely, they can succeed as experiments while losing their nobility, or they can retain their nobility while failing as experiments. The 1968 repertory of *The Threepenny Opera*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and *King Lear* must be placed in the latter category.

In March of 1968, Zelda delivered a powerful and prophetic paper entitled "Towards a Deepening Aesthetic." The times, as it has been often noted, were indeed a-changin' and Zelda's paper reflected this:

Washington, D.C., the nation's capital city, is the first city in the country to become predominantly (63%) Negro. Its school system is over 90% Negro. Yet we have no Negro actors in our permanent company and attendance by Negro members of the community, except for plays like *The Great White Hope*, *Blood Knot*, and *Othello*, which have Negro actors on stage, is practically nil. . . . [Arena] proposes to enlarge its present company to include a substantial number of Negro actors. And it proposes, for a minimum period of three years, or for as long as the most pervasive circumstance of human reality is the relationship between black people and white people and their self-definition and self-determination, to select a repertory that makes organic sense—that is to say aesthetic sense—to be presented by an interracial company. In this way we feel we can best discover and release the power that lives within our art.

The following fall, on September 18, twenty-five actors assembled to begin the 1968-69 season. Joining the resident company, which contained, among others, Robert Prosky, Ned Beatty, Ronny Cox, and Richard Bauer, were eight black actors, including Mary Alice, Olivia Cole, Cynthia McPherson, Garrett Saunders, and Jay Fletcher. The Ford Foundation had given Arena a grant of \$250,000 to fund the enlarged company and help train the new company in ten weeks of workshops in improvisation, voice, and movement. Earl Prater, a black writer, said, "Certainly Zelda Fichandler is to be commended for her effort in giving young black talent the opportunity to perform and in thus inviting Negro audiences to attend live theater productions. If they had no reason before, they do have a reason now." And on the opening day, the *Washington Post* wrote, "This is, in the broadest sense, a nervous season. But Mrs. Fichandler and her new company have already cracked the mold, and the coming season at the Arena

Stage will have all the fascination of their difficult job of trying to shatter it."

The first show to open the rep on November 26 was *Threepenny*. Mack the Knife was played by black actor Hugh Hurd and Cynthia McPherson played Jenny, a prostitute who remains Mack's greatest—and most treacherous—love. Played against a predominantly white world, the play's treachery, betrayal, and cynicism would take on new meaning. But, the shark's teeth in this production were generally thought to be blunted—no matter what color the actors were. As Richard Coe wrote, "What I did notice of [the integrated casting] was that it was perfectly acceptable and has nothing to do with promoting or negating the overall effect."

Pirandello's reflection and refraction of reality opened the following night. To sound a further Pirandellian note, the audience arrived to find the Arena company rehearsing the very same *Threepenny Opera*. When the six characters arrived to interrupt the actors, the Stepdaughter and the two young children were black. On one level it made sense that their father might have been black; on a more figurative level, it reaffirmed the "otherness" of the character, her inability to feel a part of her family, her resistance at seeing the actors make a mockery of her life in trying to portray it. Zelda's production fared better than *Threepenny* (which she was called in at the last minute to direct as well), but the noble experiment was still misunderstood. The *Baltimore Sun* wrote, "Concerning the effect of the biracial casting, I admit I found it dramatically irrelevant—though I imagine it might be confusing to some unfamiliar with the plays or Mrs. Fichandler's aesthetic argument."

King Lear, which opened in January, had the acclaimed black actor Frank Silvera as the maligned monarch and Ned Beatty as the Fool under Ed Sherin's direction, with Mary Alice playing Cordelia. Silvera, who was part-Jamaican, part-Sephardic Jew, had formed a theatrical aesthetic on the West Coast, which he called "The Theater of Being." When Zelda went out there to talk with him, they found their philosophies of interracial casting to be extremely compatible. Although there were some confused comments from critics about Lear's three mixed daughters, the production was well-esteemed.

The stress of the experiment came at a time when Arena could least afford to endure it. Many company members were on extended or permanent leave in New York with *The Great White Hope*, Zelda had to take over on *Threepenny* (which had already suffered the replacement of its Macheath), a key actor bolted to New York during *King Lear*. The company returned, mended, and glowed during *Marat/Sade*, but the first half of the season was a long haul. The repertory notion suffered from the banal effect of logistics and the perplexing problems of spirit.

"It was either five years too late or five years too soon," said Tom Fichandler of the rep. Towards the end of the sixties, black theater groups and black artists were coming into their own all over the country. The movement was one of self-expression and self-affirmation. The black theater had to form its own identity before it could be creatively integrated into a large white institution. The impulse to expand the cultural landscape was there, but, after the rep, it went in and out of focus, only to be clarified with Arena's cultural diversity program in the late eighties. Arena would continue its on-going search for the revelation of multicultural themes and the cultivation of a multicultural audience. The times were definitely a-changin' in 1968-69, but at that particular point in time, Arena had trouble setting its watch to be in synch with them.

A Ford Foundation grant helped fund the expansion of the Arena acting company to include eight black actors in a three-play classical repertory. Edwin Sherin directed *King Lear* (above) with Mary Alice as Cordelia, Frank Silvera as Lear, and Ned Beatty as the Fool.

THE 1969-70 SEASON

Edith Stein

by Arthur Giron
Directed by Zelda Fichandler

You Can't Take It with You

by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman
Directed by Alfred Ryder

The Cherry Orchard

by Anton Chekhov
Translated by Stark Young
Directed by Alfred Ryder

The Chemmy Circle

by Georges Feydeau
Translated and adapted by
Suzanne Grossmann and Paxton Whitehead
Directed by Alfred Ryder

Two Plays:

Enchanted Night The Police

by Slawomir Mrozek
Translated by Nicholas Bethell
Directed by Norman Gevanthor

Dance Of Death

by August Strindberg
Freely adapted by Paul Avila Mayer
Directed by Alfred Ryder

No Place to Be Somebody

by Charles Gordone
Directed by Gilbert Moses

SPOTLIGHTS

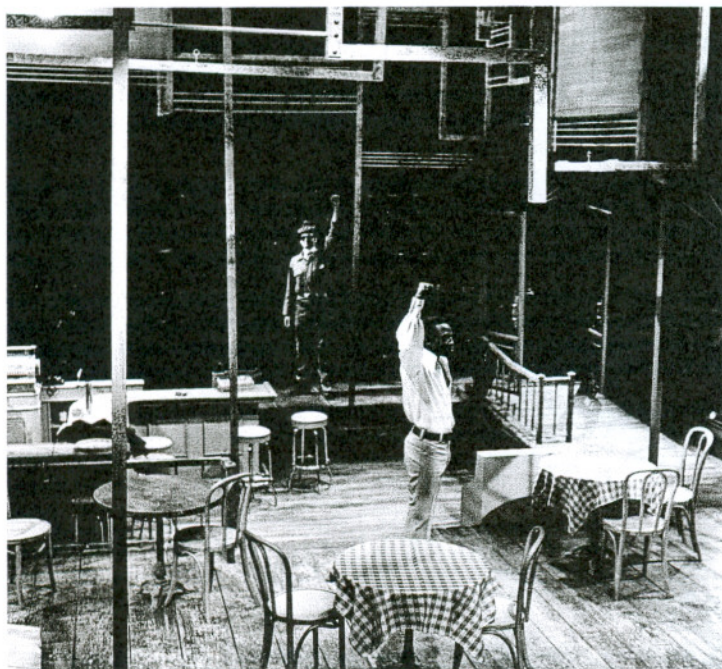
Dance Of Death

Arena's only production of Strindberg featured powerful performances from guest artists Rip Torn and Viveca Lindfors in the leading roles, and Mitch Ryan, Julie Garfield, and Robert Walden. Though written in 1889, the play proved to be a remarkably durable portrayal of a destructive spousal relationship—clearly a precursor to more contemporary treatments of the theme, like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Anticipating major traffic problems as a result of a demonstration to protest the bombing of Cambodia, Arena cancelled its scheduled May 17 matinee performance of the play. Torn and Lindfors took advantage of the unexpected day off by joining in the march.

No Place to Be Somebody

Charles Gordone's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama received its first production outside of New York at the Arena. The play, about a black saloon owner and the poets, prostitutes, and mobsters—both black and white—who frequent his bar, had been the first off-Broadway production to receive a Pulitzer, as well as the first play by a black writer to be so honored. The Arena production, which featured Robert Guillaume as owner Johnny Williams, was held over for an extra week.

THE 1969-70 SEASON



Zelda directs the world premiere of Arthur Giron's *Edith Stein*. The play is set in a Carmelite nunnery, and, during rehearsals, the eleven actresses in the production visit a branch of that order in Towson, Maryland in order to experience convent life first hand.

For the production of *You Can't Take It with You*, Arena takes out an ad in the *Washington Post* classified section to solicit 78 rpm recordings of 1930s hits such as "Pennies From Heaven." The records are used both as props and in the sound design.

In a joint grant, the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts provide Arena with \$900,000 to cover anticipated operating deficits over the next three seasons in an effort to create a measure of financial security for the theater.

Living Stage works with Rhozier H. Brown, an inmate at Lorton Reformatory, and helps Mr. Brown create a theater company comprised of prisoners called "Inner Voices," which, under its new name, "Lorton Voices," is still active in 1990.

In June of 1970, Zelda receives an Alumni Achievement Award from George Washington University for "a singular contribution which has greatly enhanced the cultural and artistic life of the city."