



Robert Kolby Harper, left, and Chance Dean in *Next Fall* at Actors Theatre of Phoenix.

JOHN GROSECLOSE

Three-Part Rescue Plan

PHOENIX, ARIZ.: The current economic downturn has produced its share of unfortunate theatrical casualties, as well as a number of close calls—theatres on the brink of disaster that have rebounded, thanks to emergency fund-raising campaigns, from **Shakespeare Santa Cruz**

in California to **Actor's Express** in Atlanta.

Thankfully, **Actors Theatre of Phoenix** seems likely to end up in the latter rather than the former column. As of press time, it had handily exceeded the first goal in a three-part campaign to keep the \$1.2-million theatre in the black. An appeal in late October, with a

drop-deadline of Nov. 30 to raise an initial \$70,000, had already met its goal by mid-November, allowing more time to reach the Dec. 31 aim of an additional \$170,000. The final hurdle: another \$260,000 by the end of June.

One encouraging sign is that while the company's shortfall can be blamed on declining corporate giving and government funding (almost nonexistent in Arizona), the campaign hasn't simply squeezed more out of the usual suspects.

"Of those who gave the first \$70,000, 50 percent were new donors," reports **Erica Black**, the company's newly named managing director (she formerly served as the company's general manager). Producing artistic director **Mat-**

thew Wiener chimes in, "There were no big gifts in that \$70,000—the average gift was \$145."

A key fact about these new sources of support: Actors Theatre got many of them to sign for recurring donations, going from just "one recurring donor," Wiener says, to 13 percent recurring givers. "That's very meaningful."

Also significant is that while Actors Theatre produces some of the city's edgier theatrical fare (its slogan is "Off Broadway—Just Downtown"), it plans a summer season of more populist fare, including a show based on the local kids' TV show "Wallace and Ladmo." The theatre's current production of **Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's** *Hunter Gatherers* runs

A FESTIVAL AND ITS OFFSPRING

NEW YORK CITY: January might be the worst month, weatherwise, to visit New York City, but it may be Gotham's best month for experimental-theatre viewing—an array of theatre festivals bloom in the wintry landscape. The granddaddy of them all is the **Public Theater's Under the Radar** festival (Jan. 4–15), helmed by **Mark Russell** and **Meiyin Wang**. This year's event—which cleverly coincides with the annual meeting of the **Association of Performing Arts Presenters**—features a number of very important artists, or "VIAs," from home and abroad.

Among the international set is UTR veteran **Motus**, which hails from Italy and will present both *Alexis. A Greek Tragedy* and *The Plot Is the Revolution*, the latter performed in conjunction with New York's **Living Theatre**. Other international art stars gracing UTR stages include Japan's **Toshiki Okada** and his company **chelfitsch**, slated to present a deceptively spare show called *Hot Pepper, Air Conditioner, and the Farewell Speech*; Germany and the U.K.'s **Gob Squad Arts Collective**, performing a video-themed meta-play called *Super Night Shot*; and Turkey's **biriken** and **Ayça Damgci**, who will contribute the salaciously titled *Lick But Don't Swallow!* It's not false advertising: Written by playwright **Özen Yula** and described as "a hybrid of comedy, video and existential inquiry," *Lick* depicts an angel who descends from heaven to find herself trapped in the body of a porn star. The play has been performed only once in Istanbul due to protests by a fundamentalist newspaper.

Work by American artists at UTR will include **Marc Bamuthi Joseph** and the **Living Word Project's Word Becomes Flesh**; **Bambï** and **Waterwell's Goodbar**; and the **Builders Association's Sontag: Reborn**, featuring performer **Moe Angelos** as the feminist critic **Susan Sontag**.

All granddaddy festivals have their offspring, and among UTR's are **COIL** at **Performance Space 122** (Jan. 5–29), **Other Forces** at the **Incubator Arts Project** (Jan. 5–21) and **American Realness** at **Abrons Arts Center** (Jan. 5–15). Heavy hitters at COIL include **Young Jean Lee**, the **TEAM**, **Temporary Distortion** and Argentine director **Mariano Pensotti**, making his New York debut. Meanwhile, **Robert Cucusza/Transit Authority** and **Tina Satter** present work at **Other Forces**, and **American Realness** hosts **Big Art Group**, **Eleanor Bauer** and **Heather Lang**, and the choreographic collective **(M)imosa**.

Indeed, UTR'S Russell likens January in New York to the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe** in August. "People see five shows in a day, and spend the night drinking and talking with new friends, then skip work and do it again," he says. "It's a full-on theatre party." Let the fiesta begin. For more info, visit the festivals' sites: www.undertheradarfestival.com, www.ps122.org, <http://incubatorarts.org> and <http://tbspmgmt.com>. —Eliza Bent



Chelfitsch's *Hot Pepper, Air Conditioner, and the Farewell Speech*.

TORU YOKOTA



Students in Amherst Regional High School's *Midsummer*.

LEAH PARKER-BENSTEIN

through Jan. 15. The company's hunt for funds, meanwhile, looks likely to continue gathering support through the season. Visit www.atphx.org.

Fairies Vs. Humans

AMHERST, MASS.: Some theatres fret about how to bring young people to the theatre; others skip the fretting and instead

endeavor to bring the theatre to young people. That's essentially what **John Bechtold**, head of the performing arts department at **Amherst Regional High School**, did last October when he staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a two-pronged promenade production throughout the school campus. Audiences chose either the "fairy" or the

"human" track of the story, seeing the entire show but in a different order. Action played out in courtyards, hallways, an "experimental forest" area, on the football field and in the school's black box theatre.

If that description evokes the work of Ashfield, Mass.'s sprawling, rural **Double Edge Theatre** and the inventive British troupe **Punchdrunk** (the latter's immersive *Sleep No More*, a *Macbeth*-inspired experience, was a hit at Boston's **American Repertory Theater** in 2009–10), it's not a coincidence. Bechtold logged time with both: as a volunteer with Double Edge, then with Punchdrunk during both the Boston run of *Sleep No More* and its still-running New York

incarnation. From these transformative experiences, Bechtold learned that the "space dictates the story in a lot of ways." For his Amherst High *Midsummer*, Bechtold says the dialogue between space and story ran a bit the other way: "We looked for spaces that spoke to the scenes. The fairy stuff tended to be big, abstract and vast, and the human stuff was close, tight, intimate."

One favorite transition had theatregoers cross a fog-shrouded football field, where a ghostly quartet was unexpectedly playing, en route to a small space to witness "the lovers' big throwdown." Bechtold was encouraged by the audience response. "People just kept hanging around and comparing notes—they got



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American Night (2010): René Millán, Stephanie Beatriz





Duke Ellington plays for Doris Duke.

to kind of recompose the piece together afterwards.” Though Bechtold admits that not every play is suited to the multipronged promenade approach, he hopes the experience has opened his students’ eyes to the possibilities of the art form. He wonders if he might have spoiled them a bit, though. “There’s a bit of a joke right now about our next production: They say, ‘Oh, we’re just doing a play on a stage.’” Go to www.arps.org.

Duking It Out

NATIONWIDE: “The challenges that artists face in their working lives are unconventional by the standards of many professions,” observes **Ben Cameron**, program director for the arts at the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** (and former executive director of TCG). To address that, Cameron says, the foundation is taking “an unconventional grant-making approach” to support individual artists.

That explains the recently announced Doris Duke Performing Arts Initiative, which will provide the largest-ever allocation of cash grants to individual artists in the fields of jazz, theatre and contemporary dance. Recipients, who will

number more than 200 over the course of a decade, will receive flexible, multi-year cash awards of as much as \$275,000, given as an investment in the artists themselves, not necessarily for specific projects. A slated \$50-million contribution by DDCF will roll out over the course of the 10-year initiative, and selected artists will be chosen through an anonymous peer-review process (in other words, there is no open-application process).

The initiative consists of three parts: Leading Artist grants, for renowned artists who have previously been awarded national grants, including from Duke itself; the Doris Duke Performing Arts Fellowships, for 100 artists who have shown the potential to influence their field but have not yet gained notoriety; and Doris Duke Artist Residencies, to support partnerships between artists and organizations reaching out to audiences in new ways. Selected artists get not only an unrestricted grant but additional funds, depending on the tier of the grant, for audience development and retirement savings.

Says DDCF president **Edward P. Henry**, “Think of this as a radical vote of confidence in the creativity of more than 200 individual artists.” Visit www.ddcf.org.

Northwest Scribes

SEATTLE: Growing locally isn’t just for progressive agriculture. Consider **Seattle Repertory Theatre’s** new Writers Group, which recently announced the five Pacific Northwest-

ers who will participate in its new two-year program: **Emily Conbere, Vincent Delaney, Al Frank, Elizabeth Heffron** and **Stephanie Timm**. The writers will receive a modest stipend, make use of Seattle Rep resources (including comp tickets), and benefit from one staged reading for each year of the program. They’ll also meet biweekly to “challenge, encourage and motivate each other through an extended conversation about their work.” We imagine that some microbrews will be involved. Go to www.seattlerep.org/plays/newplays/writers.aspx.

Second Act, Sans Building

NEW YORK CITY AND LOS ANGELES: Two small, dedicated theatre companies on either coast have begun new chapters as independent producers—minus the alternate comfort and encumbrance of having a theatrical home base.

In New York, the **Manhattan Theatre Source** shuttered its West Village space in the face of a double whammy to its bottom line: rising real estate costs on the one hand, and decreasing numbers of rental productions to help pay those bills. The company, founded in 2000, spent its last year running a signature work, *The Greenwich Village Follies*, and in December presented **Mac Rogers’s** *Have Mercy* as its last production in the space. The show was a fitting choice, given that Rogers was frequently produced at the Source and nurtured in its Writer’s Forum. The Source plans to continue that program,

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Sam Burgess, Dahlia Mertens, Colin Sullivan and Amy Thomas in *Big Love* at SquidShow Theatre in 2010.

ALEXEIKALEINA

as well as its annual female-writer-focused **Estrogenius Festival**, while continuing to produce independently.

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, the 30-year-old **West Coast Ensemble** officially disbanded its dues-paying membership company of some 80 artists, citing its lack of a permanent home. WCE

lost its longtime La Brea Avenue space in 2005 and has been presenting shows at various venues ever since. Co-artistic directors **Les Hanson** and **Richard Israel** say they plan to continue producing and co-producing shows in L.A., but without a membership to support their efforts (not to mention populate their casts). The change

marks a significant reboot. “When you have dues-paying members, having an artistic home is a large part of what they want,” says Israel. “We spent many years saying, ‘It’s not about the four walls, it’s about the company’s vision,’ but those four walls do matter.” In the future, Israel says, the company will happily “get back into the frying pan” of producing in a rental situation, but only when it finds the right project and partners. Visit www.theatresource.org and <http://westcoastensemble.org>.

Two Into One

TELLURIDE, COLO.: Two heads may be better than one. But in the case of the southwest Colorado town of Telluride, best known for its skiing and film festi-

val, two theatre companies think one is better than two: **Telluride Repertory Theatre Company** and **SquidShow Theatre** have merged to become **Telluride Theatre**. The Rep, which has done productions of pre-existing texts since 1990, and the five-year-old SquidShow, known for creating company-based original work, will continue to offer programming unique to their respective brands, but as one company. They will also jointly implement **ACTions**, an affordable education program for young people and adults. Both the Rep and SquidShow have long-standing commitments to community education spelled out in their missions.

A host of reasons prompted the theatres

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George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* (photograph by Susan Cook)

to join forces, among them the benefits of a cooperative, the need to hire staff and the chance to serve audiences year-round. Plus, there's the economy. "Our donors have been clamoring for fewer, stronger not-for-profits, especially when organizations have such

complementary missions as the REP and SquidShow did," says **Dylan Brooks**, Telluride Theatre chairman. "We are thrilled to be streamlining and strengthening the theatre community, by lowering costs and increasing our activities." Go to www.telluridetheatre.com.

Executive Orders

ANN ARBOR, MICH.: Arts organization executives aren't necessarily the three-piece-suit type. So as starchily official as **National Arts Strategies's** new Chief Executive Program may sound, the folks who participated in the program's inaugural bow

STAGES OF OCCUPATION

NEW YORK CITY: The Occupy Wall Street movement, officially born on Sept. 17, 2011, in downtown Manhattan's Zuccotti Park, describes itself as a "leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions. The one thing we have in common is that we are the 99 percent that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1 percent."

While the press has honed in on the movement's criticism of political and corporate corruption, OWS has a less publicized arts wing, designated the Arts and Culture Working Group. Sometimes under the sub-group's aegis, sometimes spontaneously, an array of theatre events and person-ages have turned up at the NYC protests. Director and theorist **Richard Schechner**, professor of performance studies at New York University, visited the park on Halloween to conduct a "Ritual, Play and Performance" class. A Facebook invitation for the evening event directed NYU students to a preparatory reading list and noted that others interested in attending could procure additional copies of articles via e-mail.

Pulitzer-winning playwright **Lynn Nottage** visited Zuccotti Park the following week to deliver a stirring speech that demonstrated, via the inevitable viral video, how the "human microphone" works. (As no amplification is allowed at the park, an individual speaker's words are repeated, phrase by phrase, by a larger group of people so that information ripples throughout a crowd; when words get mangled the crowd calls out "mike check.") "I am here because, like you, I have greed fatigue," Nottage declared as the human mike echoed her. "Somehow our national narrative has been corrupted."

For some, OWS has been the source of artistic fodder. *Let Me Ascertain You: Occupy Wall Street*, created by the documentary-driven ensemble the **Civilians** and based on interviews with OWS participants, was presented at the **Public Theater's** cabaret space, Joe's Pub.

Occupy This, a show created by **Nellie Kurtzman**, director of marketing for Disney's children's books, was performed in November at Brooklyn Heights Cinema, just across the East River; the evening featured funny and thoughtful ruminations from **Martin Dockery**, **Mike Daisey**, **Anya Kamenetz**, **Reggie Watts**, **Gregory Smithsimon** and **Greg Barris**. While some remarks provoked roars of laughter (Watts compared the occupation to "a flavor as creamy smooth as chocolate cake"), others were exhortatory: Daisey intoned, "Everyone tonight has done an excellent job of jerking off into the darkness. This is a war. We're going to have to make some choices."



More formal theatrical performances have included a Zuccotti Park staging in early November of **Stravinsky's** Faustian musical tale *L'histoire du Soldat*, featuring **Elizabeth Stanley**, **Erik Liberman** and **Nick Choksi**. Perhaps the most poetic and quixotic of performances was a mid-October presentation of *Waiting for Godot* by the 99% Theater Company. According to the blog **Electric Literature**, when the actor playing the slave **Lucky** entered, followed by **Pozzo's** snapping whip, one woman held up a sign that read, "At least Lucky has a job!" —*Eliza Bent*

JAMES KAELENY / ELECTRIC LITERATURE

The 99% Theater Company's OWS *Waiting for Godot*.

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last October and November at the **University of Michigan's** Ross School of Business were anything but a stiff, corporate lot. They included **Jennifer Bielstein** of **Actors Theatre of Louisville**, **Jeffrey Herrman** of D.C.'s **Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company**, **Steve Martin** of **Childsplay** in Tempe, Ariz., **Patrick McIntyre** of Australia's **Sydney Theatre Company**, **Susan Medak** of **Berkeley Repertory Theatre**, **Greg Reiner** of New York City's **Tectonic Theater Project**, **David Snider** of D.C.'s **Young Playwrights' Theater**, **Bob Taylor** of Cleveland's **Great Lakes Theater** and **Megan Wannlass Szalla** of New York's **SITI Company**.

According to National

Arts Strategies president/CEO **Russell Willis Taylor**, the program, which continues through 2013, is intended as "the beginning of an international conversation about the arts and culture and their role in creating value outside of commercial markets." Visit www.artstrategies.org.

Artists by the Numbers

NATIONWIDE: Consider it a kind of artist's census: The **National Endowment for the Arts's** Office of Research & Analysis released data late last year that showed artists constituting a small but robust professional sector, with performing artists as the second most plentiful, after designers. The report, titled "Artists and Arts

Workers," stated that 39 percent (or 829,000) of the U.S.'s 2.1 million artists are designers (including for theatre), while 17 percent are performing artists. That doesn't account for the nation's entire theatre sector, though. Taking up another 20 percent of the total were two categories—fine artists/art directors/animations, and writers/authors—that clearly include stage workers.

Other significant findings were that 54 percent of artists work in the for-profit sector; that artists work at home more than three times the rate of total labor force (15 versus 4 percent), and that artists' homes are just as likely to contain spouses as those of the general workforce. Go to www.arts.gov.

Eltahawy Update

For those who attended last June's TCG National Conference in LA., a highlight was **Mona Eltahawy's** moving keynote speech about young artists' role in the revolution in her home country of Egypt.

Eltahawy herself was thrust into a dramatic role Nov. 23, when she was arrested, injured and sexually assaulted by Egyptian riot police in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Eltahawy soon appeared in photos, smiling but brandishing casts on each arm from broken bones. Via her Twitter account (@monaeltahawy) she reported her arrest, beating and release, and continues to update the world on events unfolding on one of the Arab Spring's most vital fronts. ☒

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In the Next Room or the vibrator play by Sarah Ruhl
Photo: Craig Stokle



COURTESY OF BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE

■ **Les Waters** has assumed the role of artistic director at Actors Theatre of Louisville in Kentucky. Waters served as associate artistic director of California's Berkeley Repertory Theatre for eight years.

■ **Tim Jennings** starts next month as managing director of Minneapolis's Children's Theatre Company. He was managing director of Seattle Children's Theatre for four seasons.

■ **Patrick Willingham** has begun his tenure as executive director of the Public Theater in New York City. The former president and chief operating officer of Blue Man Productions, Willingham will oversee the Public's \$18.5-million operating budget. Interim executive director **Joey Parnes** will return to his role as an independent producer and manager.

■ Olney Theatre Center in



JOAN MARGUAS

Maryland has announced that 2012 will be its 19th and final season with artistic director **Jim Petosa**, who will step down from his post in January 2013.

■ **Lauren Morris** has begun her new role as managing director of Georgia Shakespeare. She is relocating from California, where she was the executive director of the Long Beach Playhouse.

■ **Rob Goodman**, founding artistic director and managing director of First Stage in Wisconsin, will begin transitioning out of his current role during the company's current season. Goodman has been with First Stage for 25 years and will continue to work with the company in an emeritus capacity.



COURTESY OF GEORGIA SHAKESPEARE

■ **Michael Barker** has joined the Laguna Playhouse in California as associate managing director. He previously served as managing director of the Antaeus Company.

■ **Rick Dildine**, executive director of Missouri's Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, has been named director of the two-year-long MFA Arts Management and Leadership Program at Webster University. 📧

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The Madness of George III at Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

LIZ LAUREN

■ At the 43rd Annual Equity Jeff Awards, held in November to honor accomplishments in Chicago-area theatre, *The Madness of George III* from **Chicago Shakespeare Theater** took top honors—five awards, including best large-theatre play—and **Charles Newell** won the musical-directing award for his work on *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* at the **Court Theatre**.

■ The Fred Ebb Foundation and New York City's **Roundabout Theatre Company** has presented the seventh annual Fred Ebb Award to **Jeff Blumenkrantz**. The \$50,000 prize recognizes up-and-coming musical-theatre songwriters. Blumenkrantz will also receive a one-night-only showcase of his work.

■ The inaugural BEST (Building Excellence in Small Theatre) Awards were bestowed in October in Los Angeles. Ranging from \$7,500 to \$10,000, the awards were given to six small Los Angeles County-based theatres: **24th Street Theatre**, **Circle X Theatre Company**, **Cornerstone Theater Company**, **Ensemble Studio Theatre**, **TeAda Productions** and **Will Geer**

Theatricum Botanicum.

■ **Catherine Trieschmann** is the winner of the 2012 William Inge Theatre Festival's Otis Guernsey New Voices in the American Theatre Award. The honor will be presented at the Inge Festival in April, in Independence, Kans. Trieschmann's plays include *How the World Began* (see page 29) and *The Bridegroom of Blowing Rock*.

■ At the **Acting Company's** November Masquerade Gala in New York City, **Brian Stokes Mitchell** and **Joseph Benincasa** received the Joan Warburg Humanitarian Award, for their work as chairman and president, respectively, of the Actors Fund. In addition, the John Houseman Award was presented to **James Bundy**, artistic director of Connecticut's **Yale Repertory Theatre**.

■ **Catherine "Kaki" Marshall** was presented with the Penn Creative Spirit Award in November. She was recognized for her creation of the **Philadelphia International Children's Festival**, the oldest children's arts festival in the country.

■ Composer **Robert Lopez** received an award of excellence in November at the PhilDev Celebrates

Broadway: *Suites* by Sondheim gala, hosted by the Philippine Development Foundation in New York City. Lopez is a Tony-winner for *Avenue Q* and *The Book of Mormon*.



Cathy Bernard presents Joan Cushing, left, with an Imagination Award.

DANIEL CHIA

■ **Joan Cushing** received an Imagination Award at **Imagination Stage's** 2011 Gala in Bethesda, Md. She was recognized for her work in creating new musicals for young people, including her stage adaptations of *Miss Nelson Is Missing* and *Junie B. Jones & A Little Monkey Business*.

■ At the Ashland New Plays Festival in Oregon four winning playwrights received workshops and readings of their plays. The works included *Couples* by **Gary Dontzig**, *Fernando* by **Steven Haworth**, *Countdown to the Happy Day* by **Thomas W. Stephens**

and *Spin, or Twilight of the Bohemians* by **Carol Verburg**.

■ **Christopher Plummer** and Cherry Lane Theatre artistic director **Angelina Fiordellisi** were honored in December at New York Stage and Film's annual winter gala.

■ **Vanessa Redgrave** was honored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in November for her five decades in film.

■ Tony-winner **Kristin Chenoweth** has been inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, which focuses on honoring Oklahoma's musical history.

■ Five-time Tony-winner **Angela Lansbury** and theatre historian **Louise Kerz Hirschfeld** were named "Living Landmarks" in November by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The honor is given to New Yorkers who have made significant contributions to the city.

■ Actor **Ralph Fiennes** received the Shakespeare Society Medal at a December ceremony at Manhattan's Ruben Museum of Art. His stage roles include Richard II, Caesar and Romeo.



From left, at the Ashland New Plays Festival in Oregon, Steven Haworth, Thomas W. Stephens, Gary Dontzig, EM Lewis, Douglas Rowe and Carol Verburg.

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Gil Cates: 1934–2011

BY JANE ANDERSON



Cates

TYLER BOVE

■ One of my champions has passed away. This was a man who understood how extraordinarily hard it is to write a play. This was a man who would give me a big hug the first day of rehearsal and say, “I woke up this morning with a grin on my face. You know why? Because we’re doing your play!”

And then, to assure me that he understood the agony of the first table-read, he’d say, “Read-throughs stink. I’ve always hated the damn things. Don’t worry—you’ve written a great play.” Gil Cates, who ran the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, made it his mission to keep playwrights writing.

He was also a major player in film and television (he produced the Oscars and was president of the Directors Guild of America) and he understood the lure of a Hollywood paycheck. He knew that playwrights couldn’t survive on workshops alone, and he made it a point to find money in the Geffen’s budget for commissions. He didn’t care when you got your play done. He knew that any play worth writing needed plenty of time to stew. And when you finally got that first draft down,

you knew that it was safe to show it to Gil and his artistic staff. Gil understood the process. He wasn’t afraid of bad first drafts. He’d say, “Yeah, I get it, keep on going.” He always trusted that his writers would find their way out of the muck.

He also understood that dramaturgical micro-managing can kill a play’s soul. Gil had his opinions, of course, and when you asked, he’d be absolutely honest. But he’d always qualify his advice with, “This is just my opinion.” He was canny in that way.

I loved going up to his office to schmooze. It was a place to kick back and gossip and philosophize and work out whatever drama was going on with your drama. Gil was wicked smart and his résumé was staggering. But the miracle of this man was that he wasn’t all that impressed with himself. He could drop a million names but never really cared to, unless it was to make a point, as in, “So-and-so is a crazy bastard, so no, you don’t want to cast him.” He was one of those rare impresarios who didn’t need attention.

Gil handled the various crises of running a theatre with extraordinary calm. But if anyone messed with his artists, that’s when he blew. Bad reviews made him furious. In an astounding act of chutzpah, Gil would take the theatre critic of the *L.A. Times* out for a yearly lunch and tell him, for God’s sake, to stop panning new plays. The point being, Gil would

say, that a new work needs to be given a lighter critical touch. You can’t slam a brand-new work before it’s even had a chance to breathe.

The critic listened and did indeed lighten his touch. Gil made the L.A. waters safer.

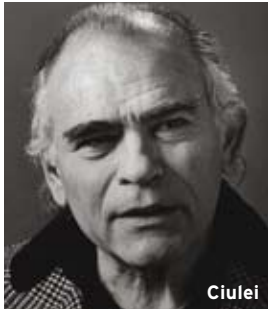
On opening night for my first Geffen commission, Gil gave me a book from his personal library with an inscription that ended “Mi Casa, Su Casa.” I have a home, I thought. And I went on to write my next commission. There’s a picture of us posed together in the lobby on that opening night: I’m staring at the camera, adrenaline-stunned, with one of those manic playwright-in-the-headlights grins. Gil is wearing his classy blue blazer. His white goatee, as always, is beautifully trimmed. He looks like a very hip Santa. He has his arm around me and there’s this expression on his face of pride and amusement and quiet delight, as if to say, “Don’t worry, kid—I’ve got your back.” That was in April 2011, the last opening I’ll ever have with my beloved Gil.

But he did leave behind my next commission. This one may take an even longer time to steep. I grieve the passing of this marvelous, passionate, decent man. Oh, what a light. Onward, good knight. 🍷

The Geffen Playhouse has produced Jane Anderson's *Looking for Normal*, *The Quality of Life* and *The Escort*.

Liviu Ciulei: 1923–2011

BY ANDREI SERBAN



■ Liviu Ciulei was an architect, a stage designer, an actor and a director. He had the spirit of a Renaissance man, brilliant in every field.

As an architect, he redesigned the Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest, his hometown in Romania, transforming it into one of the most flexible stages in Europe. He did much the same for the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, allowing it to be used in a variety of ways.

As a leader of an institution (first at Bulandra, where he was artistic director for more than a decade, and later at the Guthrie), he invited the best artistic talents of the time to work with his companies. In theatre, the glue that binds together all successful endeavors is collaboration—and Ciulei genuinely believed in collaboration.

As a director, Ciulei worked for 50 years on stage and, with equal brilliance, in the cinema. *The Forest of the Hanged* stunned the international movie crowd as a masterpiece and won him the best-director prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Then he returned to the stage with a vitality that surpassed all his colleagues. From a sweet

melodrama, like *The Rainmaker* (the first play I saw as a child in Bucharest), to an exquisitely baroque *As You Like It*, his style continuously transformed itself. The latter production revolutionized the way of making theatre in Romania, departing from post-Stalin socialist realism and opening the way to the modern stage.

Ciulei gave us the courage to free our imaginations and seek to satisfy a spiritually starved audience, taking refuge from the gray life under communism.

Soon after Ceausescu's censorship of art became unbearable in his homeland, Ciulei emigrated to the U.S. and made a significant contribution, inspiring new energy with his original approach to classical work in theatres like Arena Stage, the Public Theater, Circle in the Square, American Repertory Theater and Classic Stage Company—and, of course, the Guthrie, which under his leadership experienced perhaps the most creative five seasons in its history. Ciulei's *Leonce and Lena*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* are landmark productions in this country's theatre history. Ciulei also directed and designed opera: *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in Chicago remains unforgettable.

He worked with stars like Al Pacino, Kevin Klein and Dianne Wiest, but also liked to discover and train beginners. Being an actor himself as well as a director, he deeply under-

stood actors and helped them grow. Possessor of a volcanic temperament, Ciulei acted in many films and on stage, playing heavy characters like Lenin and Danton, always transforming himself.

In his later years he became a dedicated teacher, generously sharing his knowledge with students, first at Columbia University, then at NYU.

But mostly I remember him as a trusted friend. It was Ciulei who gave me my first professional job: to direct *Julius Caesar*, which he designed in a kabuki style. Ellen Stewart came to Romania and, after seeing *Julius Caesar*, invited me to work at La MaMa, changing the direction of my life. Both he and Ellen believed in honoring each person's contribution in the pursuit of a common goal.

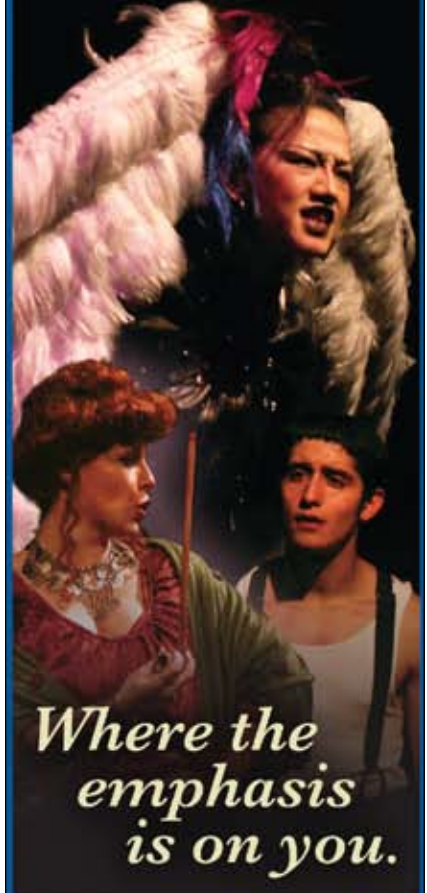
Ciulei was specially blessed with a unique quality in our competitive world—that of being free from any feeling of jealousy or rivalry. Without a trace of vanity, Ciulei was happy as a child when he witnessed great theatre.

But, as any mentor, he also had a well-kept secret. In his production of *Midsummer*, when the troupe of players led by Bottom was humiliated by the cruel indifference of its audience, their bitter dignity was a reflection of Ciulei himself: the artist suffering for his art, but keeping the purity of his search intact. ☒

Director Andrei Serban teaches at Columbia University.

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