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The Drama Review

Historical Performance Issue

Rip Van Winkle (1865)
The Black Crook (1866)
Meyerhold's *Sister Beatrice* (1906)
Nijinsky's *Jeux* (1913)

The Magnanimous Cuckhold (1922)
Hopkins/Treadwell *Machinal* (1928)
Four Saints in Three Acts (1934)
Theatre Reports

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The Drama Review

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Historical Performance Issue

An Introduction

Originally, we had planned to call this our "Re-Creation" issue. The word caused some confusion, however. Were we interested in the work of those who actually re-create—in as much detail and as accurately as possible—historical performances on the stage? Or were we merely interested in the re-creation of past productions in words and photographs (and, hopefully, in the imagination of the reader)? Since it was the latter, we are calling the issue "Historical Performance." As usual, we are not limiting it to drama; the issue includes dance and opera as well.

Such historical re-creation is not new for THE DRAMA REVIEW. In the past, we have attempted to re-create productions ranging from Kokoschka's *Murderer, the Hope of Women* (1909); T-67) and Cocteau's *Le Beouf sur le toit* (1920; T-55) to Meyerhold's *D.E.* (1924; T66) and Artaud's *Les Cenci* (1935; T56). In part, this is a reaction to the still–powerful belief that the script is the performance and that by reading a script we know what took place on the stage of an historical production. We are not rejecting the script. A script is a useful element in re-creation. Indeed, we have published, as part of larger documentation, several significant historical scripts, including Kruchenykh's 1913 *Victory Over the Sun* (T52) and Tzara's 1924 *Handkerchief of Clouds* (T56). It is the total production, however, that concerns us.

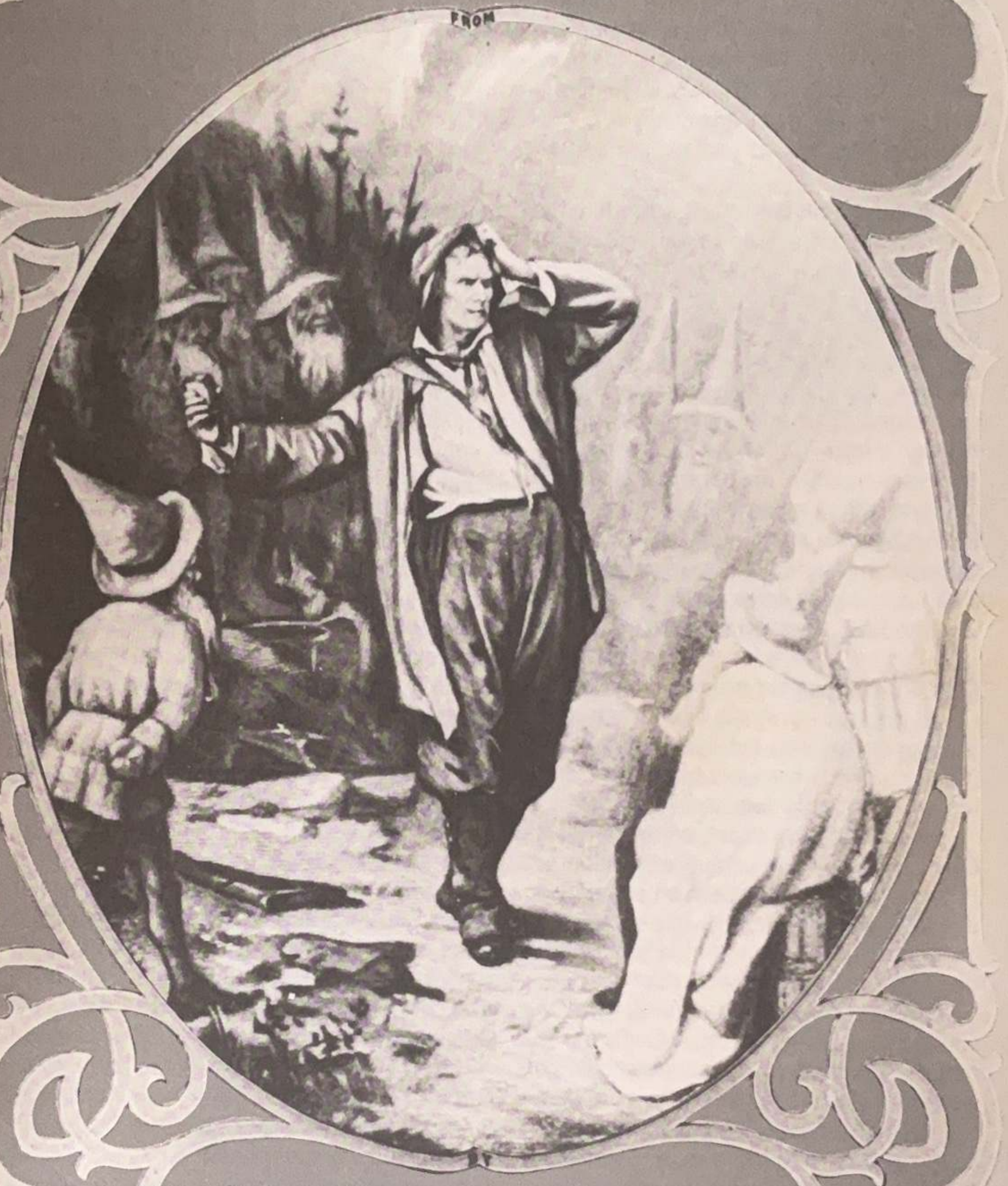
(The scripts for at least some of the productions described in this issue are available—or have been until recently. *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Black Crook* can be found in *The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth–Century American Plays* edited by Myron Matlaw; *Four Saints in Three Acts* appears in Stein's *Last Operas and Plays.* Crommelynck's *Le Cocu magnifique (The Magnificent Cuckhold)*—which became *The Magnanimous Cuckhold* when transposed to Russian and then into English—is available in a translation by Marnin Gijsen in *Two Great Belgian Plays About Love*.)

Primarily, these re-creations are presented with the belief that only through a detailed understanding of production methods and of specific productions can we understand the history of theatre. Without them, we may have a literary history or a social history or a history of theory, but we will not have a history of the art. The art of theatre exists in what actually went on on stage—and in the experience of the spectators at those presentations. That is the material we attempt to present here.

M.K.

Joseph Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle

FROM



Stephen Johnson

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Joseph Jefferson's production of the story of Rip Van Winkle was one of the most popular stage productions of 19th century America. Jefferson first opened this production in London's Adelphi Theatre in 1865, and he continued to play in it until just before his death in 1905. He toured America in the role for almost 40 years, and virtually everyone in the country—with little exaggeration—saw him play Rip at least once. It was not uncommon for three generations of the same family to have seen the production. Jefferson was responsible for indelibly imprinting the image of Rip Van Winkle on the imagination of America and was himself, as Rip, one of the most widely disseminated images of the time. He was, for 40 years, the most widely known, best loved, and wealthiest actor in America.

Joseph Jefferson III was born in 1829, the third generation of a family of actors. He first appeared on stage at the age of four and began his association with the story of Rip Van Winkle early in his adult acting career. His father had starred as Rip in an early theatrical version of the story, but the first version with which the youngest Jefferson was associated, in 1850, was that of his half-brother, Charles Burke. Burke, by all accounts, was a fine showman and an innovative man of the theatre. Before him, for whatever reasons, the many stage versions of *Rip Van Winkle* had all begun after Rip's twenty year sleep. The audience never saw Rip as a young man and never saw "Hendrick Hudson's crew" up in the mountains. Burke's version was complete and chronological—and very much a melodrama, with asides to the audience, amazing coincidences, and a marriage-and-money contract that involved a contrived twenty-year-option clause. In the third act of this version, when Rip meets the ghostly crew (called "demons") of Hendrick Hudson, these demons sing and dance around him. In this production, Jefferson had a small part as the Innkeeper in the last act.

By 1861 Burke was dead, and Jefferson opened his own stage version of the Rip Van Winkle story, pieced together from all the previous versions. For the most part he kept Burke's plot but he made the "demons" silent, so that he had the only speaking part in the third act. This act was a tour-de-force of comic monolog and pantomime with the fantasy characters, but initially this version of the play was not a great hit. He kept it in repertory with a series of plays in which he performed the comic leading roles and toured the world with his own stock company.

Jefferson's big break came in 1865 when he was in London, still touring. He visited Dion Boucicault, the century's foremost writer of what we would call "formula" melodrama. Formula melodrama relies on physical spectacle, opulent scenery, manipulative, coincidence-ridden plots and a particularly presentational style of acting that includes asides to the audience, exaggerated emotional gestures, and the intrusion into the plot of stereotyped comic characters. Nineteenth century audiences revelled in this kind of theatre, as the status quo, and Boucicault was the master at giving the audience more than they wanted at a feverish pace. His dictum (as will be seen in the synopsis that follows) was that, in a script, two characters should not be alone on stage together for more than "two inches at a time" (Eugénie Paul Jefferson, *Intimate Recollections of Joseph Jefferson*).

Boucicault had used Jefferson in the New York production of his own *The Octoroon* in the 1850's, and the two were professional associates. He rewrote Jefferson's play for him, changing the plot to involve a standard (but nevertheless quite workable) variation of the "pay me the rent or I'll marry your daughter" formula that was palatable to the audiences of the day. He also considerably expanded the character of young Rip in the early scenes, making him both likable and irresponsible, well-meaning but naive. The part of a daughter, Meenie—upon whom the plot, and the pathos, of the piece depended—was added. Act III, with Rip in the mountains, remained the same.

The new *Rip Van Winkle* opened at the Adelphi theatre in London on September 5,

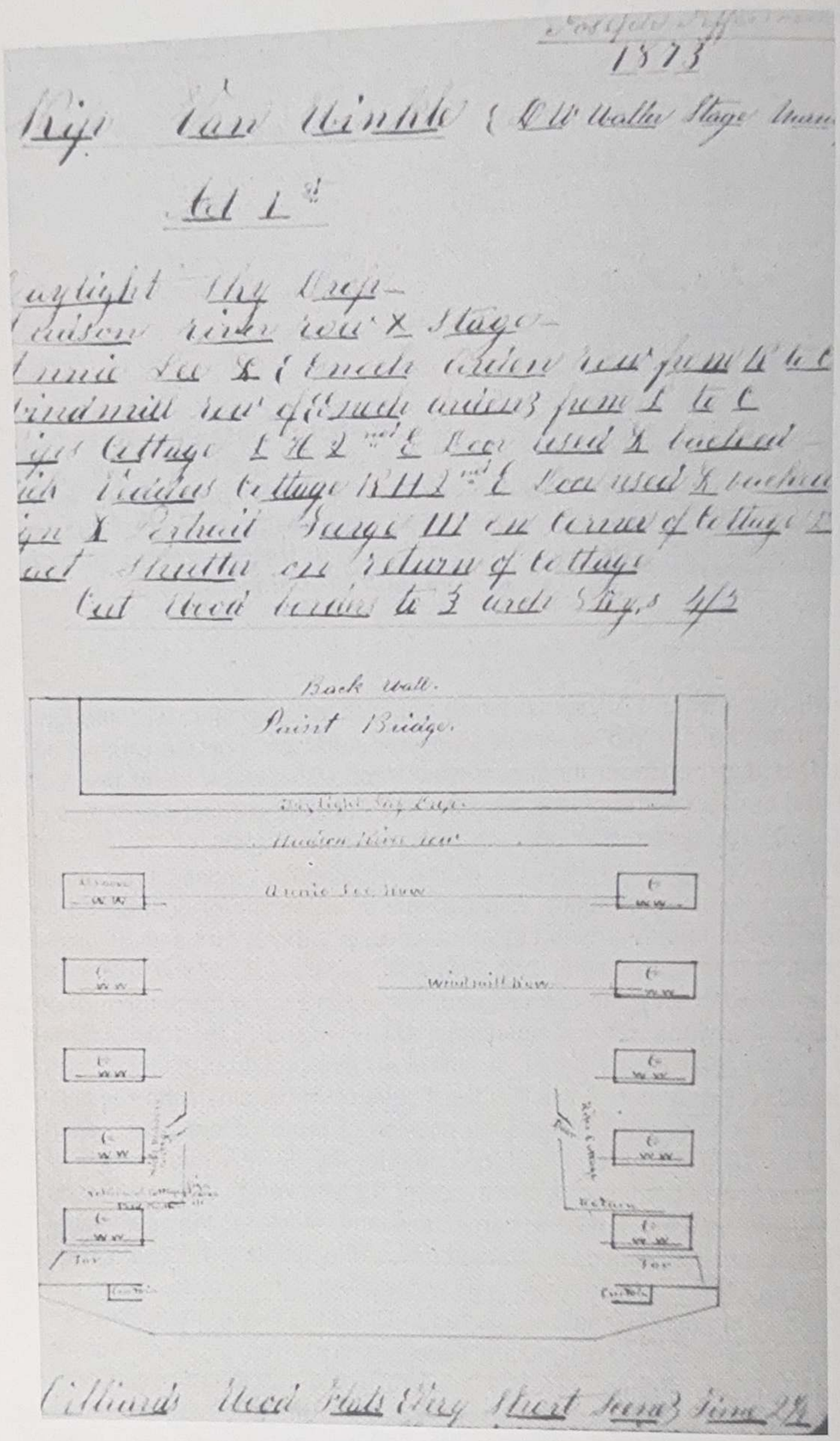
A studio shot of Joseph Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle, the young man. The costumes of this production were praised for the authenticity of the period depicted; they looked as though "copied from Darley prints".

1865, and ran to rave notices for 170 nights, which astonished Boucicault, who thought that no one would go to see an "old" character. Joseph Jefferson took the production back to America and, using the Booth theatre in New York as his base, spent the rest of his life touring in that version of the play in America and England. His last performance of it was on May 2, 1904, 39 years after opening night. He died in 1905.

Although the initial productions of *Rip Van Winkle* were opulent indeed, the actual designs for the sets were simple, formulaic, and capable of expanding or contracting to fit any stage. The smallest of theatres during this time usually had only four sets of wings and flats—back room, front room, timber and town. Those are exactly the four sets necessary for *Rip Van Winkle*: Act I, the town square; Act II, Rip's cabin (back room); Act III and Act IV, scene 1, the woods in the mountains; Act IV, scene 3, the town square 20 years later; Act V, the fashionable parlor of the villain landlord (front parlor). From available photographs, it is apparent that, whether the theatre be the Booth (technologically sophisticated) or a rural meeting hall, the general position of props, doors, and indeed the blocking, were all consistent and remained the same for the 39-year run.

Also important to the understanding of a re-creation of *Rip Van Winkle* is that Jefferson despised "realism." During the early part of his career, this term referred to the spectacular effects common to melodramatic production—large crowds of accurately dressed extras, stage tricks depicting "real" natural wonders such as waterfalls, mountain passes, a storm at sea. In the latter part of his career, realism referred to David Belasco's predilection for re-creating an interior scene to the most minute detail. Jefferson rejected both from a practical point of view—neither of these types of "realism" could tour to the people who loved the production most. He also rejected it as inconsistent to the folk–magical nature of the story. In his introduction to *Rip Van Winkle as played by Joseph Jefferson* he wrote:

> *I have never "staged" Rip with the realism in fashion of late years though I have had various suggestions made to me for elaborating the spectacular and scenic effects of the play, among which were the introduction of several fat old Knickerbockers smoking their long pipes and quarrelling in Dutch; a large windmill, with sails to work; dairy-*



The Act I set, from the Booth Theatre stage manager's book of late 1860's, had 6 wings. In 6, there is a daylight sky drop and a Hudson river ground row across the stage. In 5, a ground row of a town from right to center. In 4, a windmill row from left to center. Stock wood wings are used all the way back. Above, cut wood borders are used back to the third wing, and arched sky borders in 4 and 5. Downstage left is the inn. Downstage right is Rip's cottage.

maids with real cows; mechanical effects for the sudden and mysterious appearance and disappearance of Hendrick Hudson's crew; and, in the last act, the Continental army with drums and fifes; a militia training, and further introduction of patriotic speeches about American independence.

So unreal a theme could not have been interwoven with all this realism without marring the play.

Perhaps the epitome of his concept of the production is the fact that Rip talks to, and refers to, his dog Schneider throughout the first half of the play. There is, however, no dog present on stage; he is always just off stage or out of sight, an assumed character. Jefferson wrote:

> *. . . when a lady once asked me, "Why don't you have a dog in the play?" I replied that I disliked realism in art; and realism alive, with a tail to wag at the wrong time, would be abominable. . . .*
> *. . . hold the mirror up to nature, if you like, but don't hold nature up. . . .*
> ***(Introduction to* Rip Van Winkle*)***

Jefferson was universally praised, for the entire 40 years, as being natural, believable, and a superb actor who carried the show. One critic said of the most opulent production at Booth's theatre: "External accessories with him are almost useless. One scarcely thinks of the beautiful scenery that accompanies this representation at Booth's while Jefferson is on the stage" (Fugitive Clipping, Billy Rose Theatre Collection). Even critics who hated the play and believed it "impossible," thought that Jefferson played the part "as if to the manner born."

Because the star controlled the commercial theatre in the 19th century, most actors operated on the "point" system of acting, a procedure of playing to the audience, showing off rhetorical and physical skills while the plot ground to a halt, and "upstaging" other actors. They made a habit of anticipating the characters' emotional reactions to turns of plot and exaggerating dialects and gestures. Jefferson himself, as Rip, did none of these things.

Jefferson's acting style had four major attributes. First of all, he was praised for his "mechanical precision." He himself said about acting:

> *In the acting of a part, nothing should be left to chance. . . . Acting under these purely artificial conditions will necessarily be cold, but the care with which the part is given will at least render it inoffensive. . . . The inspired warmth of passion in tragedy and the sudden glow of humour in comedy cover the artificial framework with an impenetrable veil. . . . It is then, and then only, that the audience feels that it is in the presence of a reality rather than a fiction.*
> ***(The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson)***

The critics, from the first to the last performance, referred to this approach, saying that Jefferson was "inventing a marked idiosyncracy, and working out its details in the highest possible degree of finish." One reviewer said that "minuteness of detail is the grand consideration" (Fugitive Clippings, BRTC). Another wrote:

> *Every look is thought over, every gesture is given its proper value, every tone of the voice is modulated with care. . . . His most intricate and*

Act I. Nick the innkeeper, Rip, and Derrick the villainous landlord raise a toast. This photograph, taken in 1900, shows how small a space Jefferson could play without substantially altering the staging.

> *delicate mechanism worked with flawless accuracy, precision, and smoothness. . . . It cost him long years of hard and varied stage work in his youth, to acquire this mechanical proficiency.*
>
> **(E. B. Watson, "Joseph Jefferson," Theatre Arts Monthly, Vol. 3, p. 422)**

This would explain the apparent consistency in the iconography of the production over 39 years, down to the head and hands of the actor and his position on stage.

Secondly, Jefferson advocated sudden changes of emotion, which means simply that the character reacted as if he were living through the plot for the first time, instead of anticipating, as could an actor who has played the part for years in a story everyone knows. Jefferson wrote:

> *never . . . anticipate a strong effect; in fact, . . . lead your audience by your manner, so that they shall scarcely suspect the character capable of such emotion; then, when some sudden blow has fallen, the terrible shock prepares the audience for a new and striking phase in the character. . . .*
>
> **(Autobiography)**

At least one reviewer saw this characteristic when he wrote that a "lazy, slouching gesture is arrested instantly, and its significance utterly changed, when a new idea strikes the mind" of Rip (Fugitive Clipping, BRTC, C. 1896).

Act I. Derrick tries to convince Rip to accept just one more loan. Notice the sign of George III above, the name of the inn on the left.

Thirdly, Jefferson experimented with the dialect of his character, which had until that time been a "Dutch" comic accent. Jefferson toned down the dialect; it was emphasized only because none of the other characters used it. To Jefferson this was an example of just how non-realistic his production was. He wrote:

> *I have never felt that the dialect was an important element in the presentation of the character. I do not make it so prominent or so consistent as they would do in a variety show. If I were to do that, I would destroy the larger element. . . .*
>
> **(*Introduction* to Rip Van Winkle)**

One reviewer described the accent:

> *The sharp hissings at the end of a word, the substitution for an English word of a German word nearly the same in sound, the quaint translation of German idioms, the little remnant of German construction that sticks to his tongue, the accent—not of an American talking broken Dutch, but of a Dutchman talking English—are delightful to hear.*
>
> **(Fugitive Clipping, BRTC, c. 1896)**

Jefferson also changed the tone and style of his voice as the play progressed. Age changed his tone from "clear and low and sweet" to a voice "broken to a childish treble" (*Rip Van Winkle as played by Joseph Jefferson*). Furthermore, as the tone of the production changed, so did his speech pattern. He wrote:

> *. . . from the moment Rip meets the spirits of Hendrick Hudson and his crew, I felt that the colloquial speech and lazy and commonplace actions of Rip should cease. . . . the play drifts from realism into idealism, and becomes poetical.*
>
> **(*Introduction to* Rip Van Winkle)**

Finally, both Jefferson and his reviewers referred to the French manner of his acting and to the fact that Rip uttered no stage asides. The reviewer for the *Nation,* writing in 1869, hated the play but loved Jefferson, and wrote:

> *Jefferson is as quiet as a French actor. He never rants, he never gives utterance to a stage laugh, his asides are not stage asides. From the moment when he first appears on the stage . . . all is as natural as if there were no footlights, no audience, no orchestra, no scenery, and no prompter. He seems unaware of the audience's presence. He is thoroughly filled with his part. And the audience evidently enjoys the reality of the performance immensely.*
>
> **(Fugitive Clipping, BRTC)**

Jefferson had visited France as a young actor, and the theatre there (for whatever reason) prompted him to write years later:

> *Comedy has but little to do with the violent exhibition of . . . passions. Its effects are more subtile and depend much upon minute detail accompanied by slight but most important inflection of the voice, and by delicate pantomime. . . . We should act* for *the audience, not* to *the audience. . . . An actor who cannot speak a speech with his back to the audience . . . has much to learn. As soon as we acknowledge the presence of the public we dispel its attention and ruin its enjoyment.*
>
> **(Autobiography)**

Jefferson referred, in this same passage, to the "unnatural trick of speaking soliloquy and side speeches directly to the audience." Instead, he relied upon small and efficient movements to draw the audience's attention toward him. One reviewer wrote:

> *The impersonation is full of what are technically known as "points"; but the genius of Mr. Jefferson divests them of all "staginess," and they are only such points as the requirements of his art . . . suggest. . . . the remarkable beauty of the performance arises from nothing so much as its entire repose and equality.*
>
> **(Fugitive Clipping, BRTC)**

Style of acting is just what is most elusive in the re-creation of an historical production. All the more important, then, that there exists an 1896 film of Joseph Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle in selections from the mountain scenes (Acts III and IV, Scene 1). The film was shot outside on Jefferson's New Jersey farm, where he had had built a natural re-creation of the set for the mountain scenes. It provides us with a unique insight into Jefferson's style of acting, the best example being an episode called "Rip's Toast." As in available photographs, he sits, relaxed, with his elbows resting upon his legs, and speaks his toast while turning his head easily from character to character. At one point during his toast, Rep casually flicks the hand holding the cup to one side as he talks. He does this for emphasis, and yet the emphasis is made not by the grandness of the

movement, but by its smallness. It combines mechanical precision with those "subtile," "slight," and "delicate" mannerisms. Of course in other scenes, notably "Rip's Toast to Hudson and his Crew," the gesticulation is more pronounced, and Rip falls asleep in a very violent, exaggerated manner. Existing prints show Rip holding his hand to his head and waving his other hand wildly, exactly as in the film. But the key to understanding Jefferson's acting style is to remember that it was *relatively* unmelodramatic, that he was capable of "out-pointing" all others on the stage by understatement as well as overstatement.

Jefferson's production was popular enough that, in addition to the film, he was asked to recite selections for Edison's sound recording cylinders. These include Act III, scene 1, Rip's monolog to his dog, and his reunion with his daughter in Act V. They present a soft dialect with a surprisingly musical, sonorous intonation. Jefferson speaks slowly, perhaps partly because of the technical limitations of the medium.

Act I

The scene is the village of Falling Waters, "set amidst Hudson River scenery." At the left of the foreground stands an inn, bearing the sign of "George III." This inn has a working door and window-shutter, and an exit behind it off-stage. At the right of the stage stands an old cottage with a working door. In front of the cottage is a bench holding a wash-tub, with washboard, soap, and clothes in the tub. Center stage stand a table and two chairs; on the table sit a stone pitcher and two tin cups.

The curtain rises on Gretchen, Rip's wife, washing and Meenie, Rip's 6-year-old daughter, watching. There is a chorus of laughter from the inn. Derrick, the local money-lender, landlord, and villain of the piece, enters from the inn with Nick the inn-keeper, arguing about Nick's rent. Gretchen, characterized as a "shrew" in this Act, accuses them of ruining her husband through drink and unfair loans. Rip Van Winkle used to own most of the village, but, through unpaid loans, Derrick has come into possession of all but the one small cottage on stage, which is owned by Gretchen. To prove her point, she opens the inn's window-shutter, which has Rip's credit for drink chalked on it. During this exchange, it is revealed that 10 years before Gretchen had chosen Rip over Derrick in marriage, rejecting Derrick because of his miserliness. Nick returns to the inn, Gretchen to her house.

Cockles, Derrick's nephew and wise-cracking henchman, enters from behind the inn with a letter from Derrick's lawyer. The letter informs Derrick that the papers Rip signed for loans were not deeds to his land but in fact mortgages, and that the value of that land had now increased so much because Derrick has built upon it that Rip could sell off only one small piece to pay his loans in full. Enclosed in the letter is a deed that Rip must be forced to sign if Derrick is to remain solvent. The two villains plot to trick Rip, who cannot read, into making his mark. Cockles exits into the inn.

At this point Rip Van Winkle enters from behind the cabin. He is carrying one child on his back and is surrounded by several others. Derrick calls for drinks from the inn, and he and Rip talk about Gretchen. Rip lounges casually on the table, drinking, during this scene. Reviewers refer to his "lounging, careless grace," saying he "leans lightly against the table, his disengaged hand holding his gun." (Fugitive Clipping, BRTC). Nick brings the drinks out from the inn, joins in a toast, and then exits. Derrick offers Rip a bag of gold on easy terms, saying that, since he has made a lot of money from Rip's land, Rip doesn't have to pay back this next loan "for, say, 20 years." Derrick steps into the inn to write up an acknowledgement.

Rip hears Gretchen and slinks off behind the inn as she and Meenie and Hendrick,

the inn-keeper's son, enter from the cottage. She complains about Rip aloud, waving her broom. In the meantime, Rip enters, watches from behind her, pantomimes fear, and exits again. Gretchen goes inside the cottage, and Rip re-enters. He, Meenie and Hendrick have a brief sentimental scene in which they all express their mutual love, and Hendrick and Meenie inform Rip that they intend to be married when they grow up.

Derrick re-enters, and Rip sends the children back to the cottage. Cockles brings in pen and ink, and Derrick reads the deed to Rip, lying about its contents. Rip accepts the money but hesitates to sign. Derrick suggests to Rip that they have a little celebration of his new-found fortune, and Rip without thinking agrees to buy everyone a drink. Derrick and Cockles leave to round up as many villagers as possible, counting upon Rip's spontaneous generosity to force him to sign the document.

Meenie and Hendrick enter to retrieve the baskets of washing they have forgotten, and Rip keeps Hendrick behind to ask him to read the document to him.

> **RIP:** What you learn mit that school—pretty much something? (laughing at his own mistake) I mean, everything?
> **HENDRICK:** Yes; reading, writing, and arithmetic.
> **R:** Reading, and what?
> **H:** And writing, and arithmetic.
> **R:** (puzzled) Writing, and what?
> **H:** Arithmetic.
> **R:** (more puzzled) Whatmeticks is that?
> **H:** Arithmetic.
> **R:** (with profound astonishment and patting Hendrick's head) I don't see how the little mind can stand it all. Can you read?

Act I. Gretchen stops the villagers' revelry, and Rip accuses his dance partner of corrupting him. This final tableau is held for several seconds before the Act ends.

H: Oh, yes.
R: (with a serious affectation of incredulity) I don't believe it; now, I'm going to see if you can read. If you can't read, I won't let you marry my daughter. No, sir. (very drolly) I won't have nobody in my family what can't read. (Taking out the paper that Derrick has given him) Can you read ritmatics like that?
H: Yes, that's writing.
R: (nonplussed) Oh. I thought it was reading.
H: It's reading and writing, too.
R: What, both together—(suspiciously looking at paper).

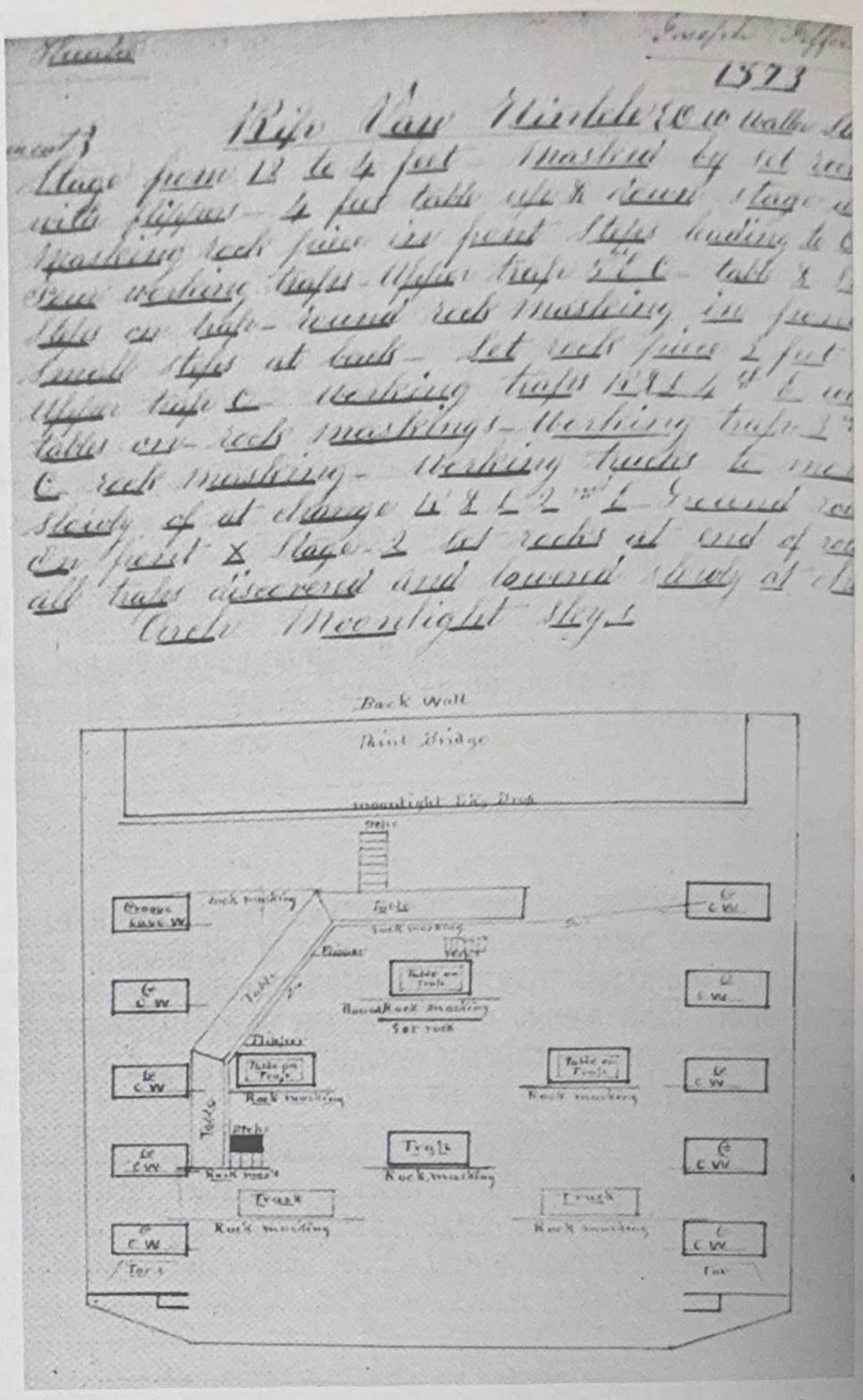
Hendrick reads and has just exited when a large group of villagers enter with Derrick, Cockles and Nick. Rip is angry at first at the contents of the deed but says nothing; eventually he cannot resist the drink and the opportunity to dance with a village girl. This he does, dancing until Gretchen enters and stops the fun, pointing accusingly at Rip, who in turn points accusingly at his dance partner. The Act ends on this tableau. Rip has not signed the deed.

Act II

Some sources indicate that between Acts I and II there was a Carpenter's Scene—a brief scene performed near the front of the stage to allow time to change the set on the rest of the stage. The script lists the setting as a street at night, although such scenes were often done simply in front of the curtain. In this case there is a brief exchange between Cockles and Derrick, in which they indicate that Rip is drunk in a local barn, and worry about the signing of the deed.

The setting for Act II is the dimly lit kitchen of the Van Winkle cottage. It is night, and a storm rages outside, with thunder and lightning. The room is lit by a hearth to the right and a candle on a table in the center of the stage. There are a working door and window in the back wall of the set and a door at the left of the stage leading into the other rooms of the house. Between the door and the window of the back wall is a clothes-horse with some clothes on it. Meenie is sitting by the window, waiting for Rip, who has not been home for 24 hours. Gretchen enters, by turns railing against Rip and worrying about him. Hendrick arrives, and just after that Gretchen exits through the backstage door into the storm to search for Rip. Hendrick and Meenie huddle together by the hearth, afraid of the storm, and Hendrick tells Meenie that this is the night when the ghosts of Hendrick Hudson and his crew visit the mountains nearby—the thunder is really the sound of their bowling, and the lightning is Hudson lighting his pipe. Gretchen re-enters, unable to find Rip.

Just then Rip raps at the window, signalling Meenie and Hendrick. He does not see Gretchen, who hides behind the clothes-horse and waits for Rip to enter. The children try to warn Rip, but he misunderstands them, opens the window, and asks, "Is the wildcat here?" Gretchen grabs him by the hair and drags him inside. The children run into the next room. What ensues is a classic piece of comic business that ends sentimentally. Rip has a bottle of liquor, which Gretchen takes away from him. He attempts to get it back, first by breaking up the kitchen, which brings Gretchen to tears, and then by distracting Gretchen with a tall tale while he attempts to sneak the bottle from her apron pocket. This succeeds, and Rip, while he sneaks drinks from the bottle, admits all his sins to Gretchen and promises to reform. Gretchen happily exits into the other room and re-enters with the children. She sees Rip drinking from the bottle, and she explodes. The comedy here very suddenly turns serious. Gretchen tells Rip that the cottage is hers and that he has no


1573
Back Wall
Flat Bridge
moonlight Silk Drop
Traps
Rock working
Table
Rock working
Set rock
Rock working
Rock working
Rock working

have been a roar of applause. But . . . the curtain falls . . ., and for a few moments no one speaks.

(Daily Telegraph, Nov. 6, 1875)

The script of Act II made the character of Rip look very bad, but, as one critic pointed out, the actor in this case could alter the implications of the script:

Sometimes we feel, as in the scene with his wife, ere he is turned out of doors by the indignant virago, that so good a fellow ought to be a better one. He should relent and pay her back in honesty and truth for all the affection she really cherishes toward him, and having finally "swore off" drinking, stick to his word, like the good big-hearted fellow he is, and sin against the household peace no more. Even at this point, when the sympathy of the auditors would naturally be with the wife, he manages by the inimitable drollery of his attempts to steal the gin flask from her pocket, to dull the edge of their resentment, and almost justify himself in their affections.

(Fugitive Clipping, Museum of the City of New York)

Act III. The only known still photograph of the Act III set, and of the "ghostly crew" or dwarfs. They are played by adult actors wearing long cloaks to hide the fact that they are crouching. They wear long white beards and large hats that make their bodies look even smaller. The set serves for Act III, scenes 1 and 2, and for Act IV, scene 1, when Rip awakens 20 years later.

Act III. A print of Rip feeling the effects of Hendrick Hudson's drink. Jefferson can be seen in exactly this position in the 1890's film of Rip Van Winkle.

Act IV, scene 1. This is a studio shot of Rip. Leaning on his gun barrel, he overlooks the town of Falling Waters, which has grown so much in 20 years that he does not recognize it. Rip holds this tableau for some seconds, to end the scene.

Act III, Scenes 1 and 2

These scenes are the most unusual and innovative of the production. They are unusual because they involve many characters but only one speaking part, and innovative because they inject a dream-like atmosphere into a genre labelled in its day "realistic." A raked platform stretches from the center almost to the back of the stage, a three-dimensional set-piece painted to look like a steep hill. Rip enters to the front center of the stage and delivers a monolog about his dog Schneider, the comfort that the mountains offer him, and the legend of Hendrick Hudson's crew. One of that ghostly crew, a dwarf, enters, and Rip tries to get him to speak. The dwarf won't speak, and a pantomime results. Rip finally understands that the dwarf wants him to carry his keg up into the mountains for him. As described in the published script:

> *Rip and demon leave, and the rain that follows blots out the landscape. For a few moments, all is darkness. Gradually, the topmost peak of the Kaatskill Mountains becomes visible, far above the storm. Stretching below, the country lies spread out like a map. A feeble and watery moonlight shows us a weird group, gathered upon the peak, . . . In the foreground, one of them poises a ball, about to bowl it, while the others lean forward in attitudes of watchful expectancy. Silently he pitches it;*

and, after a momentary pause, a long and rumbling peal of thunder reverberates among the valleys below. At this moment, the demon, carrying Rip's gun, appears over the crest of the peak in the background, and Rip toils after with the keg on his shoulder.

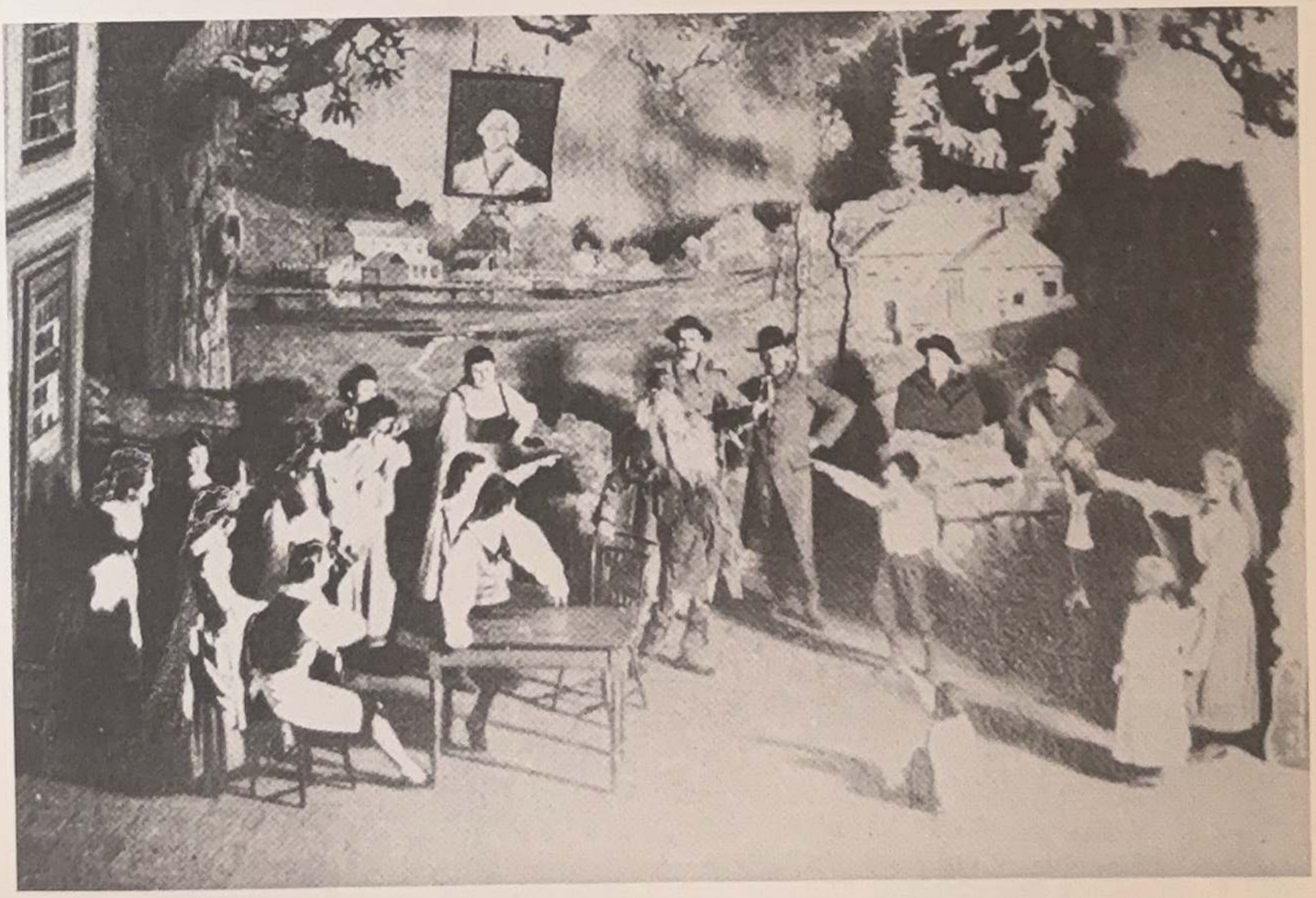
Practically, Rip and the first dwarf exited, travelled behind the set-piece, and climbed up the back. The other dwarfs entered during that brief moment when "the rain blots out the landscape." Thus one set was used for two locations.

According to the script, Rip proceeds with another pantomimic encounter, mixed with comic monolog, in which he attempts to carry on a conversation with the mute ghosts. He is offered some drink, and toasts their health with lines that were universally recognized by 19th century audiences: "I drink to your good health, and to your families, and may they live long and prosper." Then he faints.

Act IV, Scene 1 (*After Intermission*)

This scene also was filmed, and it follows exactly the extant script and reviewers' descriptions. The setting is the same as for the last scene, except that 20 years have elapsed; it is a clear morning rather than a stormy night. Rip is an old man, with a long white beard and ragged clothes. The script reads:

As he stirs and slowly rises to a half-sitting posture, we see that his former picturesque rags have become . . . dilapidated. They have lost



Act IV, scene 3. Rip re-enters the town, and the people jeer him. The set is the same as Act 1, except that the inn's sign now shows George Washington, and Rip's cottage at right is now only a chimney.

all traces of color and have assumed the neutral tints of the moss and lichens that cover the rocks.

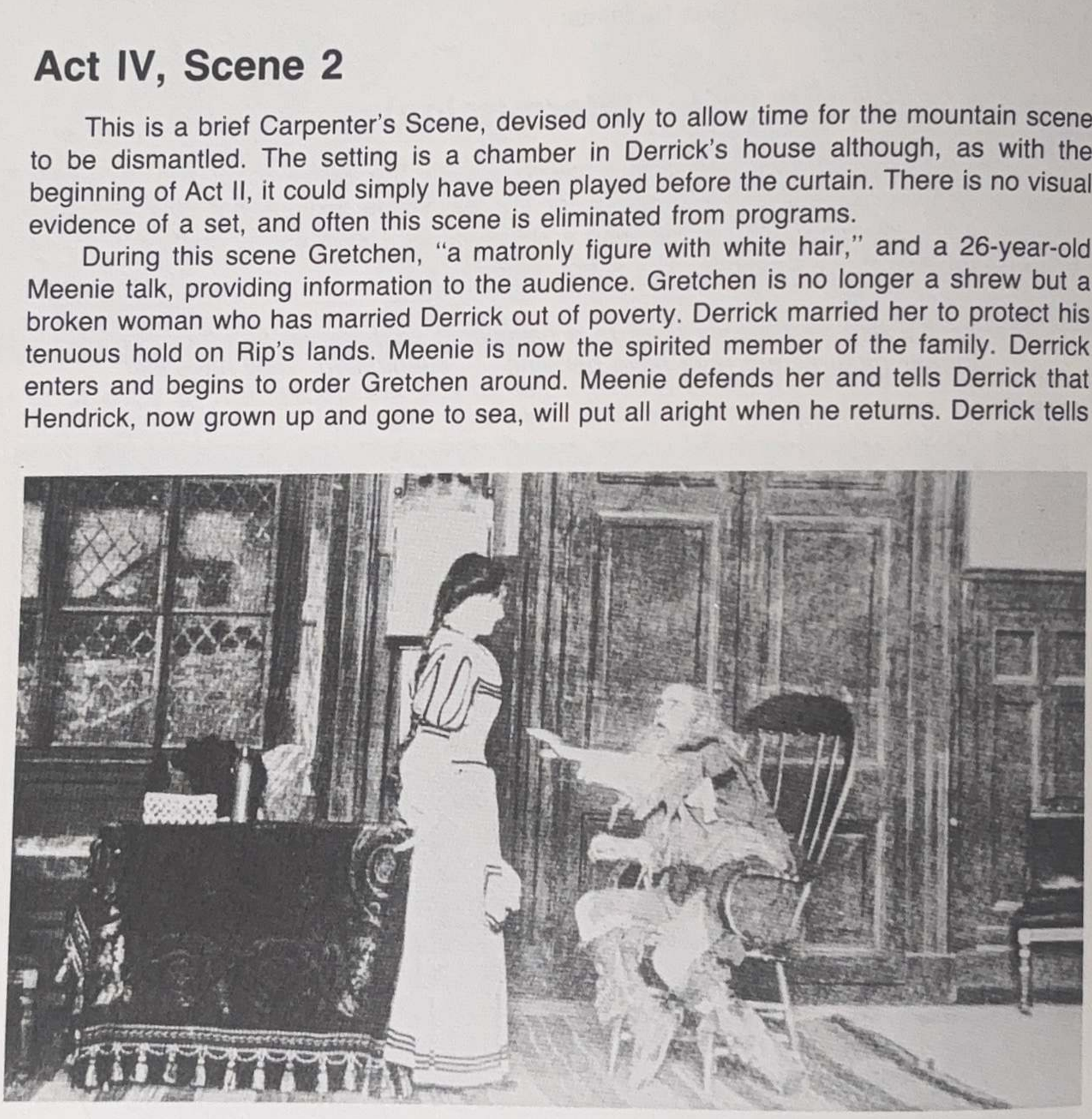
He awakens, expressing fear of what Gretchen will do to him. Then he complains of pain in his elbows. His voice, according to newspaper reports, is high and weak. When he picks up his gun, it falls apart in his hands. He then climbs to the top of the mountain set-piece and sees below him the town of Falling Water. It has grown so much that he does not recognize it. The scene ends in a tableau of Rip looking down the mountain.

This scene had a minor, but interesting, sidelight. Schneider, Rip's dog, who is constantly spoken to in the first three Acts but never seen, made his first and only appearance; the props added during the intermission included a dog's skeleton.

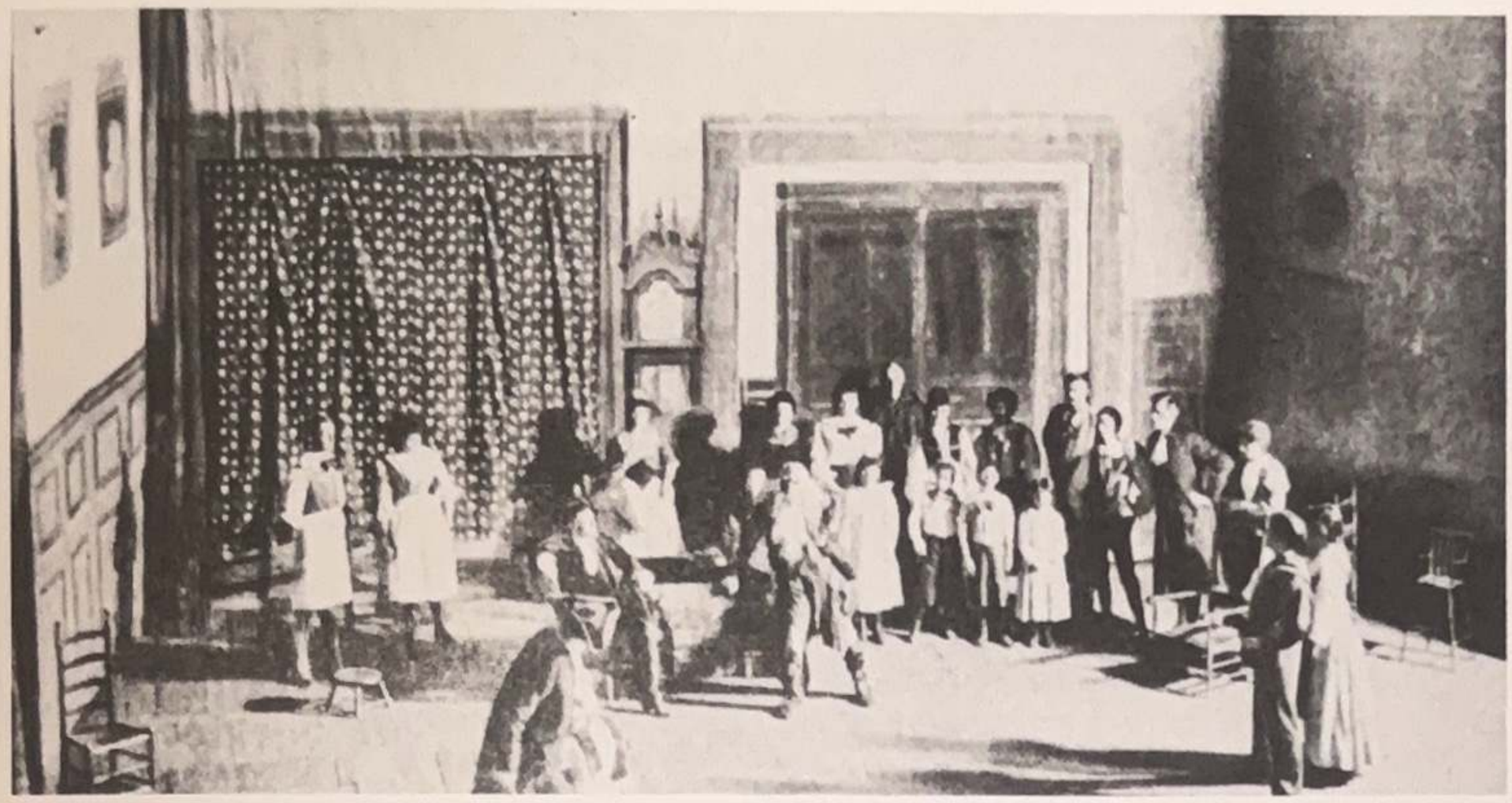
Act IV, Scene 2

This is a brief Carpenter's Scene, devised only to allow time for the mountain scene to be dismantled. The setting is a chamber in Derrick's house although, as with the beginning of Act II, it could simply have been played before the curtain. There is no visual evidence of a set, and often this scene is eliminated from programs.

During this scene Gretchen, "a matronly figure with white hair," and a 26-year-old Meenie talk, providing information to the audience. Gretchen is no longer a shrew but a broken woman who has married Derrick out of poverty. Derrick married her to protect his tenuous hold on Rip's lands. Meenie is now the spirited member of the family. Derrick enters and begins to order Gretchen around. Meenie defends her and tells Derrick that Hendrick, now grown up and gone to sea, will put all aright when he returns. Derrick tells



Act V. Derrick's fashionable drawing room, with working door and windows. Old Rip appeals to his daughter Meenie to recognize him. This was the sentimental climax of the production, and represents another of Jefferson's infrequent forays into exaggerated gesture. BRTC.



Act V. The set, with working doors and windows, is of the standard "front room." This is the play's climax. Rip rises, and comes downstage to unravel and resolve the plot. The villains are vanquished, and all ends in a toast.

Meenie that Hendrick's ship has been lost at sea and gloats over the information. He then declares that Meenie will marry Cockles (now grown but still a wise-cracking henchman). Gretchen objects, and the scene ends.

Act IV, Scene 3

The setting is the village of Falling Waters. It is the same set as Act I, except that the sign of George III above the inn has been replaced by one of George Washington, and nothing is left of the cottage at right but "a blackened and crumbling chimney." A table and chair sit in front of the inn.

Rip enters as an old man, but, unlike his entry in Act I, he is followed by a jeering crowd of villagers, and the children run from him. The present owners of the inn, Seth and Katchen, offer him a chair and a drink. During the ensuing conversation, Rip begins to realize what has happened. He notices his beard for the first time, finds out that all of his friends are dead, and that he supposedly has been dead for 20 years. He finds out about Meenie's present situation and that Gretchen has married Derrick ("Poor Derrick," he says).

At this point the villagers try to force Rip, whom they see as a tramp, out of town, but he is saved by the timely (and coincidental) arrival of Hendrick—now a strong, handsome sailor—who has survived his ship's misfortune at sea to return to Meenie. He defends Rip, and the villagers exit. Rip tries to tell Hendrick who he is, but Hendrick does not believe him. Hendrick tries to tell Rip who he is, but Rip remembers only a small boy and does not believe him. This comic dilemma is stopped by the arrival of Gretchen and Derrick. Hendrick sneaks off so as not to be seen by Derrick; the innkeepers have gone into their inn. On stage now are Rip in a chair center stage, and Gretchen and Derrick on either side of the stage. They do not recognize nor notice Rip and proceed to argue over Meenie's betrothal to Cockles. Meenie has agreed to marry him provided her mother is allowed to separate from Derrick with an annuity. Throughout this argument, Rip comments as a man missing for 20 years: he fully expects Gretchen to win the argument. She instead submits and cowers in fear. Rip says, "If Rip were alive, he wouldn't believe it."

Derrick exits. Gretchen takes pity on Rip, whom she still does not recognize, and exits with him.

Act IV, Scene 4

The setting is the same as for Act IV, Scene 2—as is the intent. In order to allow time to set up for the last scene, Derrick and Cockles plot the marriage of Meenie.

Act V (sometimes Act IV, Scene 5)

The set is a sitting room in Derrick's house. A table stands in the center with several chairs around it. There are cups, a jug, and a work-basket on the table. Meenie is busy sewing when Gretchen enters with Rip. Gretchen leaves Meenie alone with Rip, who appeals to Meenie to recognize him. This is the most sentimental scene in the production and a tour-de-force for Jefferson. One reviewer wrote:

> *But incomparably the most powerful piece of acting, to our way of thinking, is in the scene between himself and his daughter Meenie. . . . The weary, forsaken, wretched look of the heart-stricken Rip, the clasped hands and arms out-stretched in an agony of beseeching love and entreaty, the desolation that gleams from those eyes, as if her desertion . . . would kill him, and the choking grief with which he announces his identity, are a specimen of art which, in sublimity, pathos, and intense concrete force we never expect to see equaled.*
>
> ***(Fugitive Clipping, MCNY)***

Meenie does recognize him, and Rip says, in a line that brought tears and cheers from the audience, "Ah, somebody knows me now. Somebody knows me now."

Derrick enters with Cockles, and then Gretchen enters opposite. Derrick is ready to force Meenie's marriage to Cockles. Gretchen refuses, saying Meenie is betrothed to Hendrick.

> **COCKLES:** But Hendrick is dead.
> *The door is flung open, and Hendrick enters.*

Defending the women, Hendrick stands between them and the villains. Derrick threatens to throw them all out, penniless, and declares power over Gretchen, because she is his wife. Rip, who has been sitting center stage rear throughout this stand-off, slowly rises, comes downstage, and says, "I don't know about that." As villagers crowd around the door and windows at the rear of the stage, Rip produces the deed, 20 years old, that he has never signed. It serves as proof that the property is still Rip's. Derrick and Cockles are run out of their own house, there is rejoicing by the crowd, and a reconciliation between Rip and Gretchen. Rip ends with the toast:

> *I'll drink all your good health, and your families', and may they all live long and prosper.*

Stephen Johnson *works as a freelance researcher, specializing in the Performing Arts Collections of New York City.*

The Black Crook
at Niblo's Garden

Leigh George Odom

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> *The scenery is magnificent; the ballet is beautiful; the drama is—rubbish.*

Such was the reaction of the *New York Tribune* critic to the opening night performance of *The Black Crook,* September 16, 1866. Other critics—as well as the cast, crews, designers, and producers of the production—shared his opinion. Even the author, Charles Barras, had little basis for defending the drama because his original script was scarcely recognizable. However, since the show was an enormous hit, criticism was easier to bear.

The plot of Barras' play was retained, but only a skeleton of his dialog remained. The bulk of the evening's entertainment was supplied by music, dancing, and scenic extravaganza. The great alterations in the script were largely accidental and/or coincidental. A pair of theatrical managers, Henry C. Jarrett and Harry Palmer, had signed contracts and commissioned scenery and costumes for a lavish production of *La Biche au Bois* at the Academy of Music in New York City. Before they could install their dazzling collection of trick scenery, the opera house burnt to the ground. In order not to lose all they had, Jarrett and Palmer sold the imported costumes and scenery and the dancers' contracts to William Wheatley of Niblo's Garden. At the same time, Charles Barras was trying to get Wheatley to produce his play, *The Black Crook.* Wheatley, with encouragement from Jarrett and Palmer, simply injected the properties he bought from the two opportunists into Barras' play. Wheatley's contemporary, William Winter, did not see the merit in this venture:

> *Opinion will differ as to the degree of mischief he wrought by introducing* The Black Crook *upon the American stage . . . Wheatley cannot be charged with having invented it. The sensual spectacle, however, is a kind of theatrical display that has done injury, and it is a subject for regret that his name was ever associated with its evil influence.*
>
> **(Shadows of the Stage: Second Series)**

Niblo's Garden was located on the northeast corner of Broadway and Prince Streets. Established in 1822 on what had been a horse field and circus ground, it was enlarged in 1829. After a fire in 1846, it was rebuilt, and it reopened in 1849. In 1852, a hotel was built adjoining the theatre. Its next major construction was the rebuilding of the stage for *The Black Crook* with all of its spectacular scenery.

The first run of the show lasted 475 performances, opening on September 16, 1866, and closing January 4, 1868. In the next forty years, *The Black Crook* played across the country and was revived in New York. The first revival, in December 1870, ran 102 nights and 20 matinees. The second, in December 1871, ran only 57 nights. The third, in August 1873, proved more substantial with a 120-night run. (*The Black Crook* was revived again in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1929 with ballets by Agnes De Mille; later reincarnations are seen in such pieces as Sigmund Romberg's *Girl in Pink Tights* and *Gone are the Days,* a Twentieth Century-Fox musical with Monty Woolley.)

The Black Crook heralded a new era in the American theatre. It opened up dancing, especially for women, and marked the decline of the spoken tradition of heavy wit and impersonation. H. E. Cooper, writing on musical theatre history in *Dance Magazine,* October 1926, cited the show as "the line of demarcation between the spoken and the musical."

The plot revolves around a pair of lovers, Amina and Rodolphe. An evil Count Wolfenstein carries Amina away to his castle and chains Rodolphe in his dungeon. Hertzog, the Black Crook, has made a pact with the devil, Zamiel, in which he must win one soul to evil for every year he is allowed to live. He learns of Rodolphe and thinks him an easy

mark. Hertzog frees Rodolphe and sends him on a fatal journey in search of treasure. On the way, Rodolphe rescues a dove by slaying a serpent. The dove turns out to be the owner of the treasure, Fairy Queen Stalacta. She in turn saves Rodolphe and grants him many favors. By means of a magic ring, she comes to his rescue whenever his life is endangered by the desperate Hertzog or the treacherous Count. The Count is killed and Amina freed. Hertzog is hurled into a flaming chasm for breaking his pact, while Rodolphe marries Amina and receives bountiful treasures from Stalacta.

Barras was heavily criticized for his play, especially for its resemblance to existing works:

> *Mr. Barras, an old reader and an old actor, has picked up a great many literary and theatrical properties, in his time, and they have been more or less useful to him, we dare say; but we must remember that the fields of literature are open to all gleaners, and hence that plenty of people will infallibly recognize Mr. Barras' properties. To call* The Black Crook *"original" is merely to trifle with intelligence.*
>
> **(New York Tribune, *September 17, 1866*)**

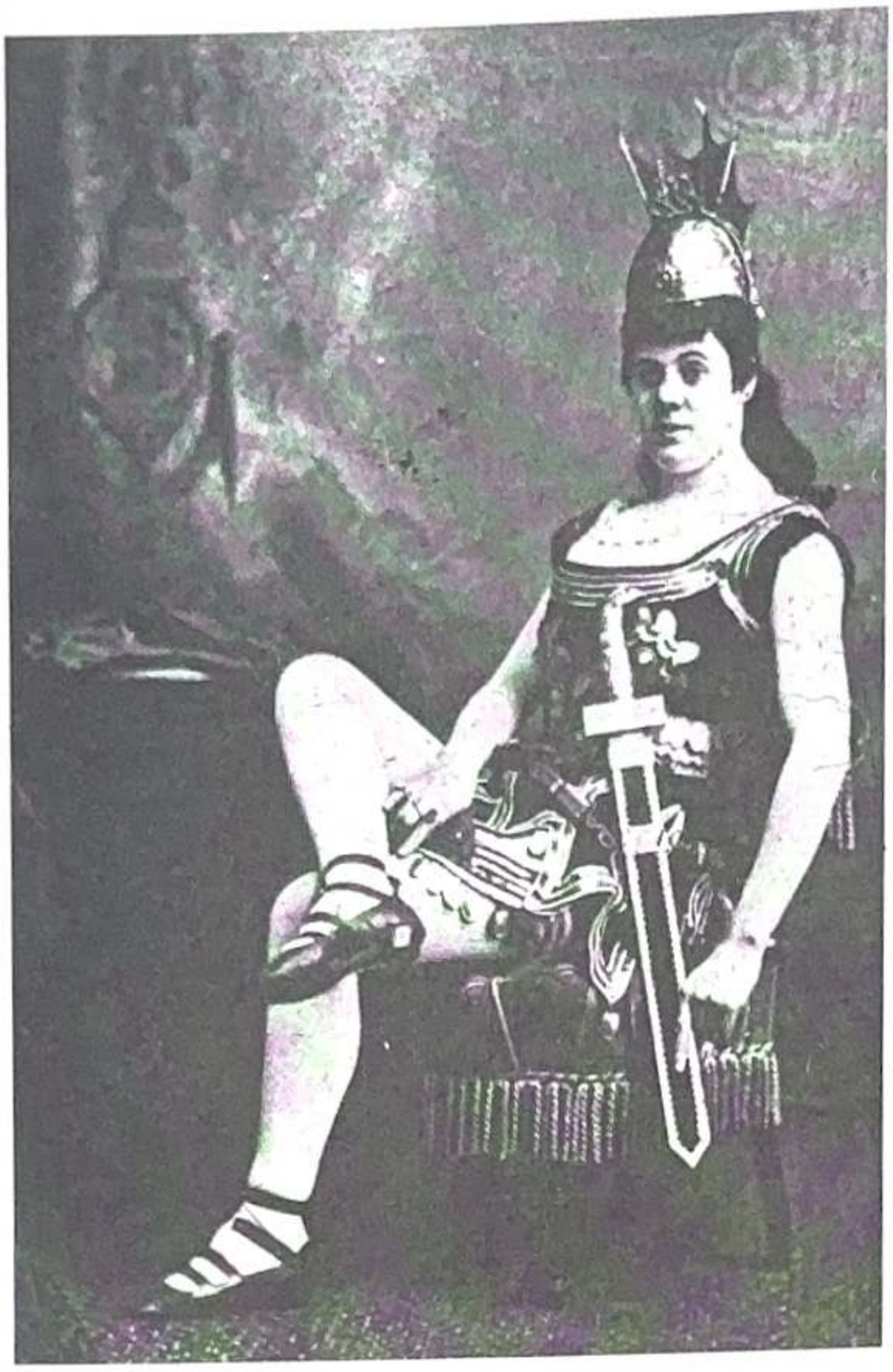
Costumes for the show created quite different critical reactions. Oddly enough, some of the best descriptions of the ladies in costume were given by Rev. Charles B. Smythe in a sermon at the Cooper Union, New York, on November 18, 1866. Devoted to exposing the immorality of the piece, he actually did more to advertise the show than damn it:

> *The first thing that strikes the eye is the immodest dress of the girls, the short skirts, and the under garments of thin, gauze-like material allowing the form of the figure to be discernible through it in some instances; the flesh-colored tights, imitating nature so well that the illusion is complete; with the exceeding short drawers, also of thin material, almost tight-fitting, extending little below the hip; arms and neck apparently bare, and bodices so fitted as to show off every inch and outline of the body above the waist.*

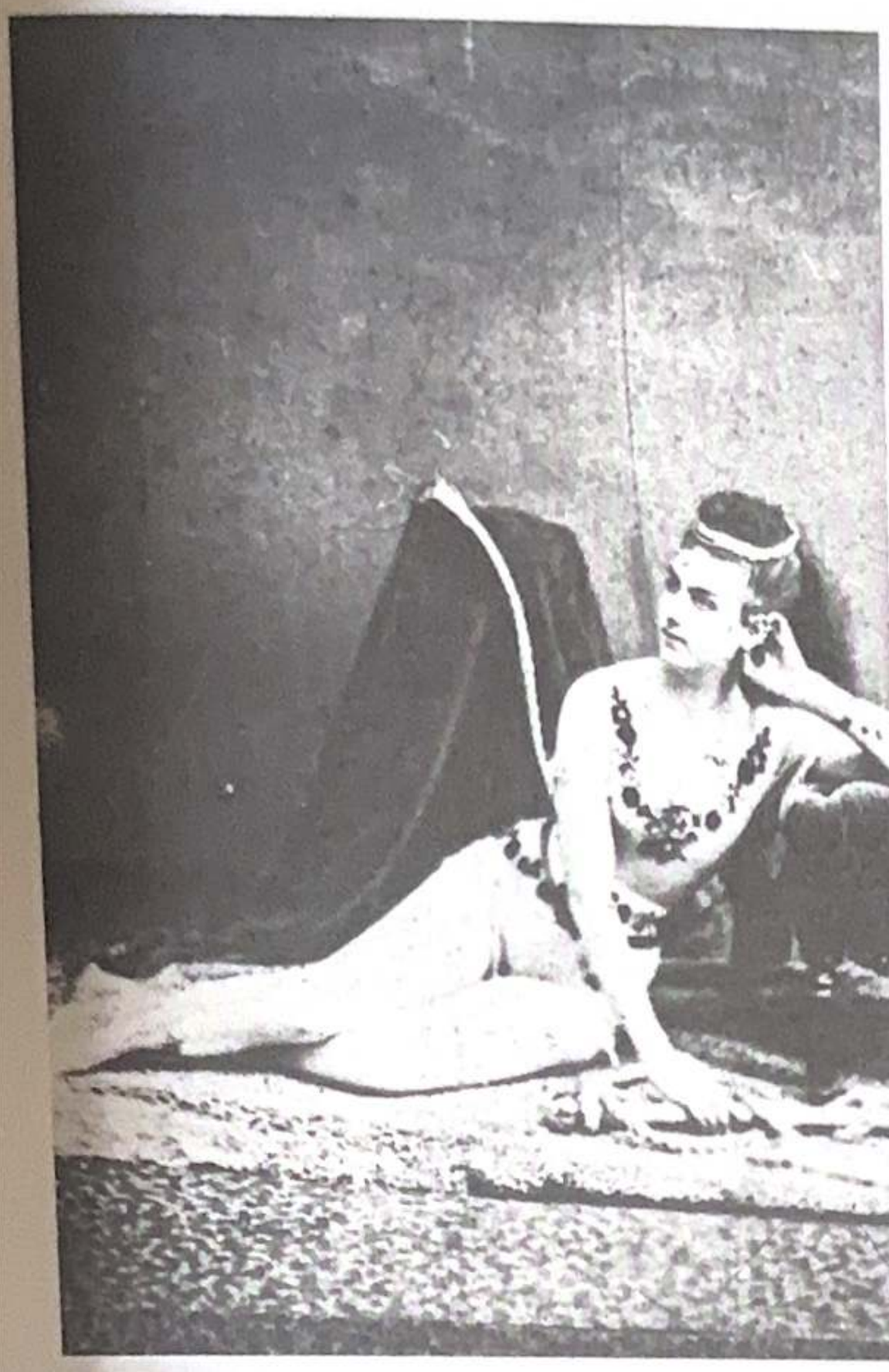
The numerous scenes required over three hundred various costumes, including about sixty representing strange fishes and monsters. Although they were considered for their design, the main attraction of the costumes was their brevity. As a writer for the *New York Clipper* (September 29, 1866) enthusiastically said: "It used to be said that (Ada Isaacs) Mencken's uniforms 'took the rag off'; but these demons at Niblo's have scarcely a rag left upon them to take off."

After the costumes, the sets received the majority of attention. The grand accumulation of spectacular scenery was largely responsible for the show's success. Although many critics treated *The Black Crook* as setting scenic precedents, it borrowed heavily from previous productions. Ververly is most often credited with the creation of the British Transformation Scene, one of which closed the last act. Such a scene, with gauze "rises" and tinseled "sinks" was used in James Robinson Planché's production of *The Island of Jewels* at the London Lyceum in 1848. Another transformation was used in Charles James' production of *Sonambula* in 1865. Planché's scene, designed by William Roxby Beverly, used painted gauzes lit from the front and backed by a dark curtain. The curtain was raised and the set behind was revealed. When the light from in front of the gauze was removed, the gauze seemed to disappear and could be flown out unnoticed.

In addition to the scenery above the stage, the stage floor itself was the subject of much interest. This adaptable stage was another European import, seen in London and



Unidentified Chorines, Amazons and Demons from the original production (1866) and subsequent revivals.



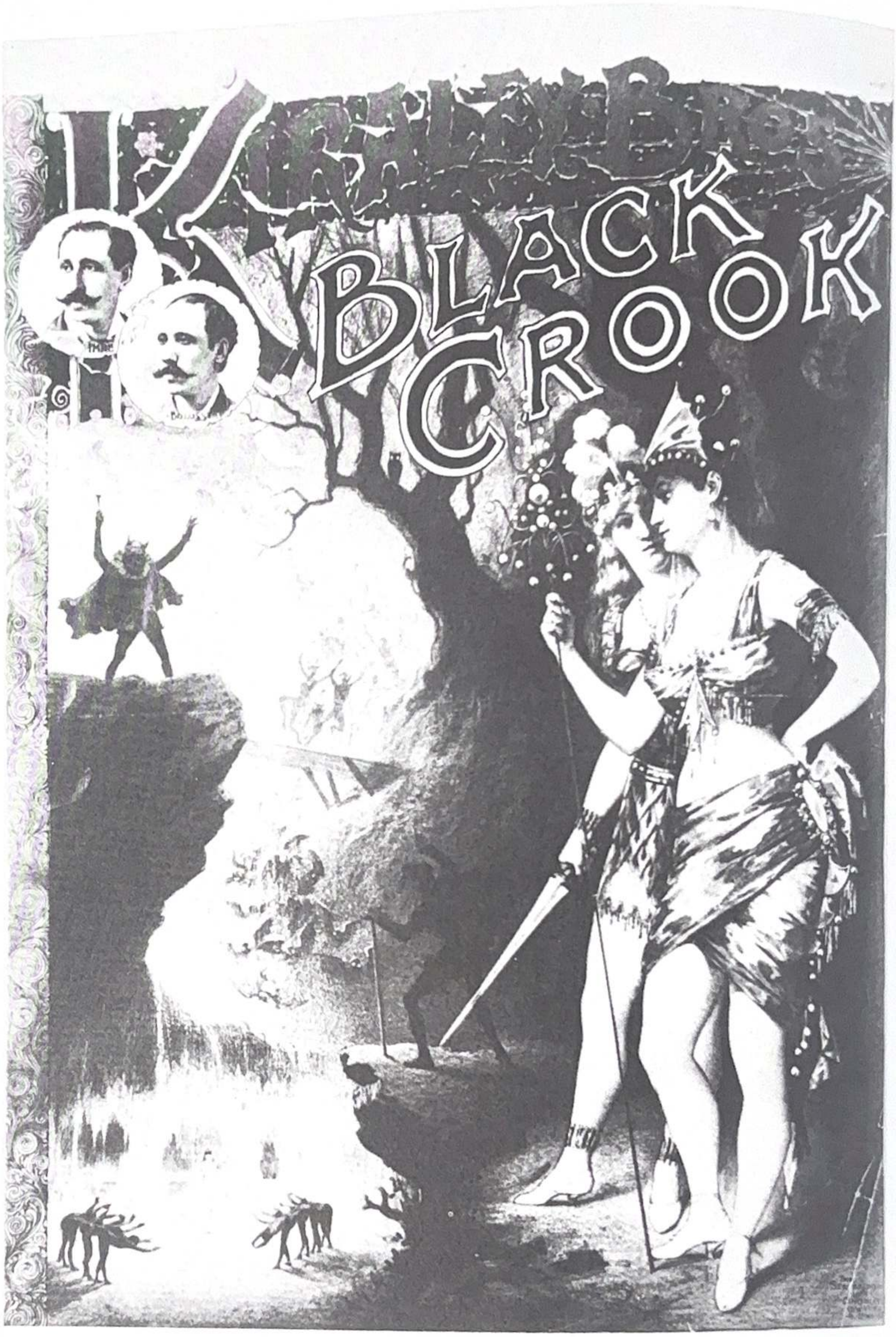
Paris earlier in the 1860s. The "trick stage" was installed at great expense at Niblo's Garden:

> *There is not a trap or opening to be seen from the front of the house, yet the entire stage is cut all up into traps. The cellar beneath the stage has been dug to a depth of 23 feet, in order to sink a whole scene at once. The space underneath looks like a small forest; it is crowded with columns and beams, each of which performs another office besides supporting the flooring, and has its important part to play in the mechanism of the stage. At an hour's notice, every inch of this flooring may be made to slide out of sight, and every one of these beams may be unlatched and lifted out of place.*
>
> **(New York Clipper, *September 1, 1866*)**

The cost of this spectacular endeavor was enormous for that time. Estimates of the expenses appeared in almost every article about *The Black Crook*.

> *Digging cellar and alteration in stage, $5,000; labor of fifty men, $6,400; machinery, properties, scenery, dresses, etc., purchased in London, $3,000; transportation, amounting to 110 tons, $500; properties, wardrobes, etc., purchased here, $1,000; scenery and salaries of artists, $3,000. Besides this, there is the advance money to artists brought from Europe, transportation and salaries since they landed here, amounting to over $7,000, making a total outlay of over $25,000 before the piece is performed.*
>
> **(The New York Times, *September 3, 1866*)**

Other sources, including advertisements from Niblo's itself, reported much higher



Poster for Kiralfy Brothers revival (1889) showing Zamiel on cliff, Rodolphe in center, Amazons on right, and demons flying.

totals, some far over double the $25,000 mentioned by *The Times*. The expenses were recovered, however. Although the most expensive seat at Niblo's was $1.50, the popularity of the show and the size of the house made the show profitable. Box office receipts averaged from $2,500 to $2,800 each performance. Estimates of the profits range from half a million to well over a million dollars.

Beyond the expense of building the show, production expenses must also have been high, with a large part going to the personnel:

> *There are 71 night men employed to move and arrange the scenes, work the traps, etc.; 8 day men whose business it is to clear the stage; 1 head property man and 5 assistants; 2 pyrotechnists; 9 gas men; 6 calcium light men; wardrobe master and 5 assistants; costumer; 2 armorers; 35 children;* corps de ballet *of 39 American and 23 English girls; 3* première *and 9 solo dancers; a ballet master and 6 scenic artists. In all, a total of 218 persons are engaged in the representation, besides the dramatic people, whom we have not enumerated.*

This large crew and cast posed special problems for the management. Especially in such a long run, with so many dancers, fatigue and illness took their toll. As the performers, particularly the ballerinas, grew weary, replacements were brought in for relief. Niblo's even went so far as to set up a company hospital adjacent to the theatre.

On opening night, *The Black Crook*'s program read:

Count Wolfenstein ..... *J. W. Blansdell*
Rodolphe ..... *George C. Boniface*
Von Puffengruntz ..... *J. G. Burnett*
Hertzog ..... *Charles H. Morton*
Greppo ..... *George Atkins*
Dragonfin ..... *Hernandez Foster*
Zamiel ..... *E. B. Holmes*
Skuldawelp ..... *Mr. Rendle*
Redglare ..... *Mr. Clarke*
Wulfgar ..... *E. Barry*
Bruno ..... *Mr. Ellis*
Casper ..... *Mr. Weaver*
Jan ..... *Frank Little*
Stalacta ..... *Annie Kemp Bowler*
Amina ..... *Rose Morton*
Dame Barbara ..... *Mary Wells*
Carline ..... *Millie Cavendish*
Rosetta ..... *Miss C. Whitlock*

Other minor characters included villagers, peasants, charesters, guards, attendants, fairies, sprites, naiads, monsters, amphibea, gnomes, skeletons, demons, and ghosts—many of these played by the dancers.

GREAT PARISIENNE BALLET TROUPE
under the direction of the famed Maitre de Ballet, SIGNOR DAVID COSTA (from the Grand Opera, Paris).

PREMIER DANSEURS ASSOLUTE
MLLE. MARIE BONFANTI, from the Grand Opera, Paris and Covent Garden Theatre, London.

1867 sheet music for "Transformation Polka" by Thomas Baker, featuring dancing star Marie Bonfanti.

Studio photo of Marie Bonfanti in her **Black Crook** *costume.*

MLLE. RITA SANGALLI, from the Grand Opera, Berlin, and Her Majesty's Theatre, London.

Their first appearance in America

FIRST PREMIER AND SOLOIST

MLLE. BETTY REGAL, from the Grand Opera, Paris.
Her first appearance in America.

SECOND PREMIERS AND SOLOISTS

Mlle. Louise Masseri, Mlle. Giuseppi, Mlle. Lusardi, Mlle. Marie Duclos, Mlle. Goivanna Mazzeri, Mlle. Amele Zuccoli, Mlle. Eugenie Zuccoli, Mlle. Helene Duclos, from Berlin, Milan, Paris, and London.

CORYPHEES

Mlle. E. Regal, Mlle. Amande, Mlle. Nathalie, Mlle. Doche, Mlle. Lacroix, Mlle. Portois, Mlle. Chereri, Mlle. Artois, Mlle. Elise, Mlle. Duval, Mlle. Gabrielle, Mlle. Irban, Mlle. Marie, Mlle. Helene, Mlle. Delval, Mlle. Bertha, Mlle. L. Portois, Mlle. Centbertrand, Mlle. H. Delval, Mlle. Paulina, from Paris, London, and Berlin.

Their first appearances in America

FIFTY AUXILIARY LADIES
selected from the principal theatres of London and America.

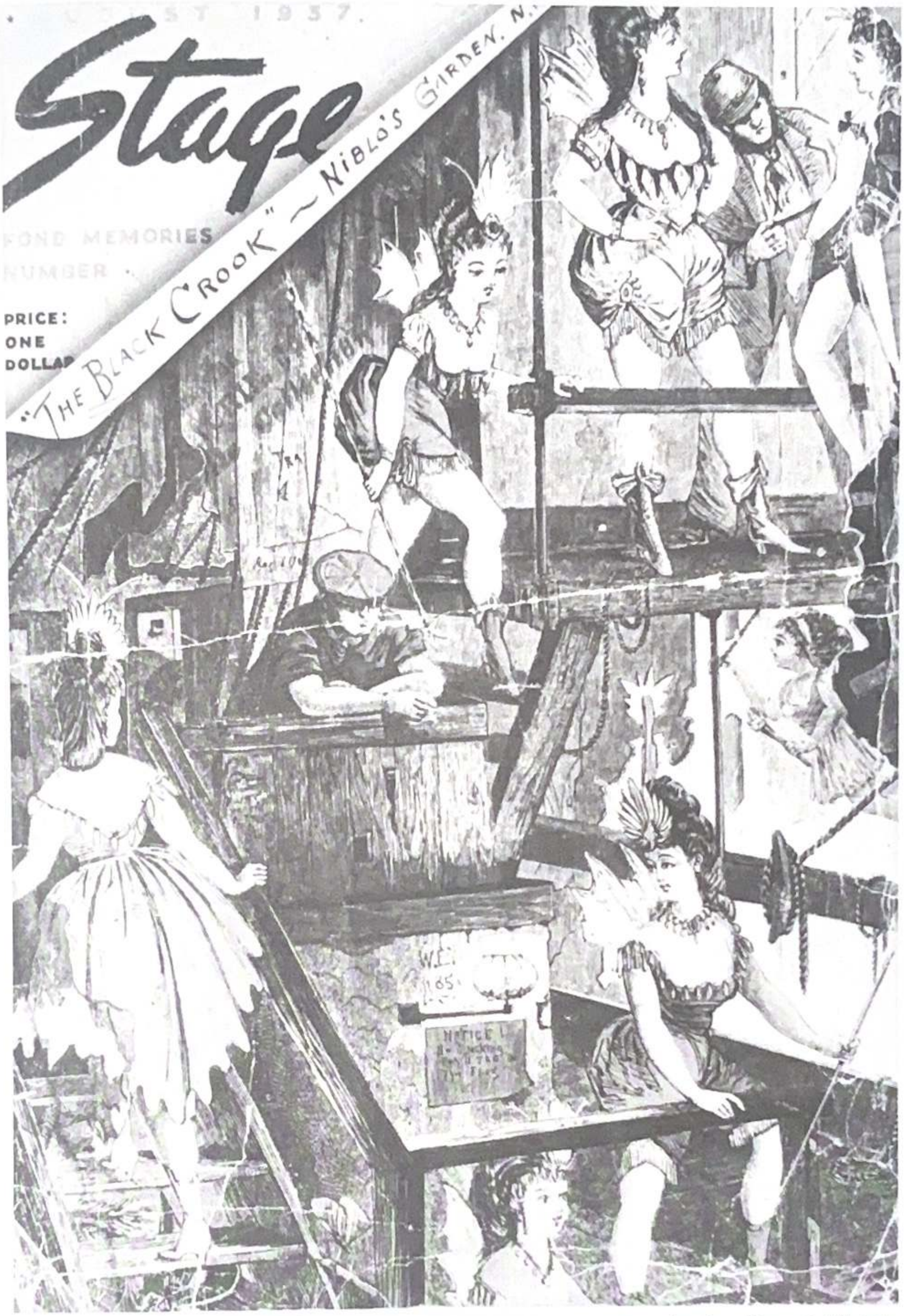
This dancer's bill is generally accepted as a slight, if not considerable, exaggeration. Most sources, however, do agree on a corps of thirty-nine American and twenty-three English ladies; thirty-five children; nine solo danseuses; and three premières: Marie Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli, and Betty Rigl (often spelled Regal).

These imported ballerinas were quite a novelty to New Yorkers, whose exposure to European ballet was limited. The European flavor was enhanced by the choreography of David Costa, also the principal male dancer of the company. For the most part, Costa's troupe received high and unqualified praise for their performances; however, the critic from *The New York Clipper* gave a more conservative review:

> *The great ballet troupe brought from Europe by Messrs. Palmer and Jarrett is a large and good one, but the principal dancers, Marie Bonfanti, Mlle. Rita Sangalli, and Betty Rigl, are no better dancers than we have already seen in this country. Bonfanti is petite, beautifully formed, as light as a feather, as graceful as a swan, and rather prepossessing, but she cannot compare with Galetti, Lamareux, Rolla, Cubas, Pougared or Soto, for difficult steps, pirouetting and toe dancing. Betty Rigl . . . is a vigorous danseuse . . . The premieres and soloists . . . are pretty in form and feature and graceful dancers. The corps de ballet is composed of many young and fascinating damsels. The ballet may be termed an attractive adjunct to the drama, by no means necessary to its proper development, but adding a new attraction by its connection with it.*
>
> ***(22 September 1866)***

As time passed, the ballet was recognized as the main attraction (along with the

Pauline Markham as Stalacta.



Cover of Stage *magazine (August, 1937) showing backstage in the flies at Niblo's Garden.*

spectacle), and it was the drama's place in the performance that was questioned by many critics. Also with the passing of time came a deeper analysis of each dancer's style.

In articles on the dance, critics tended toward an assessment of the dancer's qualities as a method of comparison. Special attention was paid to the effortlessness of the dance in addition to the technical difficulty. Being the leading ballerina, Marie Bonfanti garnered the greater share of acclaim.

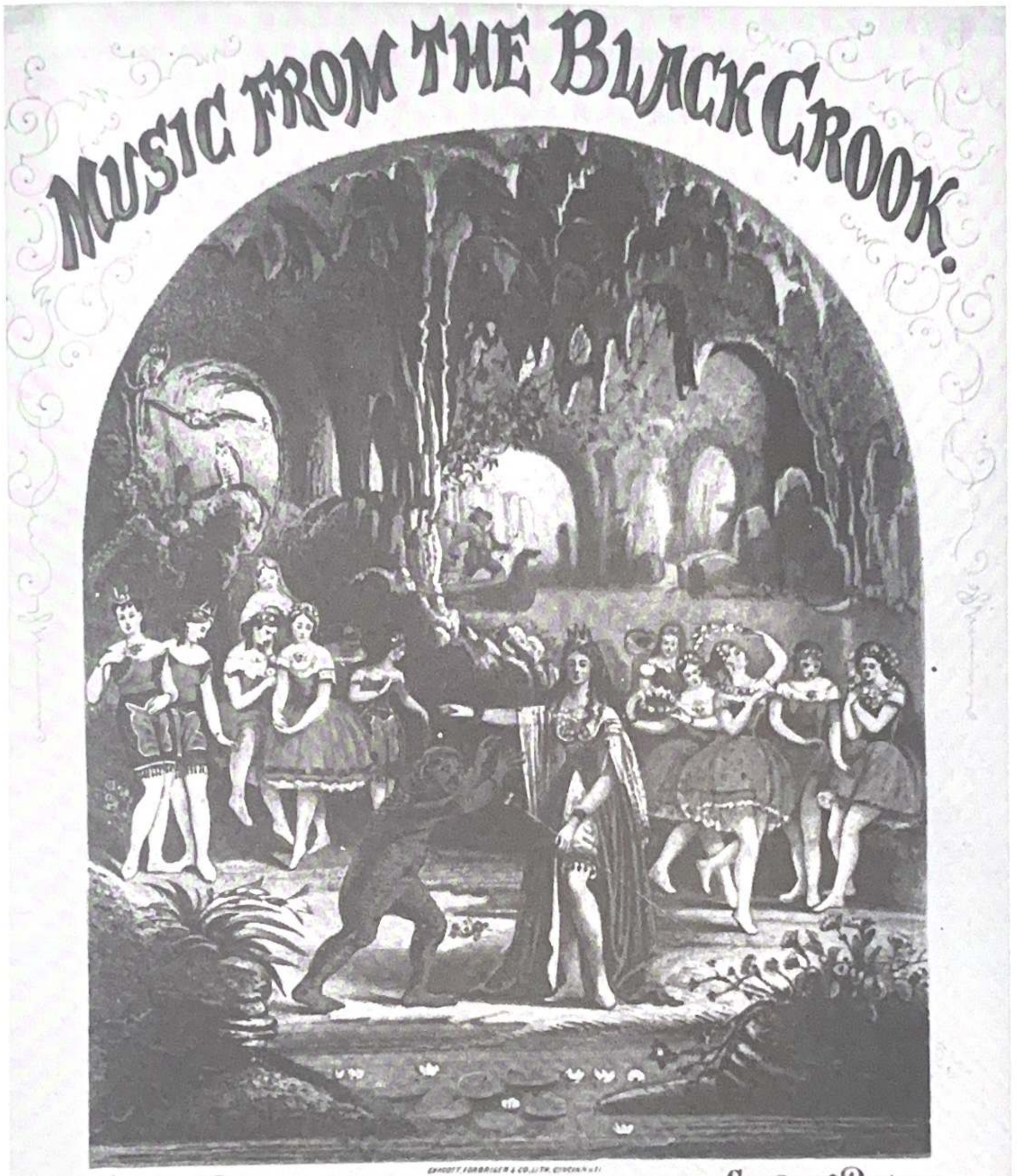
> *As a* danseuse *she will take rank with the best to be found in this country at the present time. She is slight of figure and softly bland of features. Her style of dancing is in accordance with the elegance of her person; it is full of grace, buoyant and elastic, and avoiding all the forced exertions of other artists, who seem to think the* ballet *is a school of gymnastics and not of grace. Her shape combines lightness and delicacy with that full development necessary to produce effect. Her movements, aside from the intellectual action which accompanies them, are the very embodiment of the music to which she dances, and which seems to form an atmosphere within whose radiant precincts she can wield her agile form at will . . . her delicate fingers have a definite and expressive meaning; while her step, obedient to the pulses of music, seems less upon the earth then in the air.*
>
> **(New York Clipper, *January 5, 1867*)**

Rita Sangalli also caught the critics' eyes. As with Bonfanti, she was lauded for her effortless dancing and abundance of expression; however, a further emphasis was given to her technical ability.

> *Possessed of considerable personal charms, sprightly and graceful in every action and attitude, she pleases all. While she gives evidence to the cultivated observer of careful study and severe discipline, the art is all so concealed and lost in the enthusiasm and* abandon *of the moment, that she never fails to be popular. Never, in the most difficult and even strained attitudes, does she exhibit the slightest indication of effort; and, throughout all, her expression of countenance is as bright, as animated and as intelligent as her motions are graceful and elegant. Her dancing is full of grace, buoyancy and elasticity. In* The Black Crook *she executes some of the most difficult steps ever attempted by any artist . . . her shape is perfection, combining lightness and delicacy with that full development necessary to produce effect.*
>
> **(New York Clipper, *February 16, 1867*)**

Fame and public recognition was not limited to the principals. Not unlike the articles on Bonfanti and Sangalli, coryphées were regularly picked and featured in newspapers. The ladies of the corps used the newspaper to their own advantage. A letter to the editor of *The New York Clipper*, shortly after the opening, related a problem of being underpaid. The British members of the corps were promised a salary of three pounds a week. Upon arrival in America, they received a weekly sum of fifteen American dollars. Not being familiar with the dollar or the legal exchange rate, they were perplexed by how little the money would buy. When they finally found the three pounds to be worth twenty-one dollars, they went to Wheatley for the missing money. He initially refused, but the ensuing public scandal caused by the letter forced him to remit.

Scandal, however, was nothing new to the managers at Niblo's. From its inception,



Sheet music cover depicting the Golden Realm of Stalacta from the original production: Dragonfin and Queen Stalacta (center), Demons (left), Village Girls (right), and Greppo in boat (rear center).

reports of nearly–naked dancers and immodest dancing filled the newspapers—and the seats. Neither Wheatley, Jarrett, nor Palmer did anything to discourage this free and effective advertising. While reviews of *The Black Crook* give some indication of how the dance looked and what was done in each number, it is again Rev. Smythe who, in trying to illustrate the evils of the piece, inadvertently gave the clearest description:

> *The attitudes were exceedingly indelicate—ladies dancing so as to make their undergarments spring up, exposing the figure beneath from the waist to the toe, except for such covering as we have described; stretching out a foot so as to place the limb in a horizontal line drawn from the hip, and turning the foot thus held out towards the audience; sometimes in addition to the elevation of the stage floor, standing on a pedestal about two feet, more or less in height. At other times, when a* danseuse *is assisted by a* danseur, *the attitudes assumed by both in conjunction suggest to the imagination scenes which one may read of in descriptions of ancient heathen orgies.*

As this suggests, male dancers were used to a lesser extent than female, but they did dance with and assist the ballerinas.

The Black Crook attracted a large number of people, with and without tickets, on its opening night:

> *The audience assembled on that occasion was so large that it filled the house in every part, overflowed into the lobbies and in the shape of frequent and large detachments, extended to the street and pervaded the neighborhood.*
>
> **(New York Tribune, *September 17, 1866*)**

Differing accounts exist of the audience's first reaction to the appearance of the dancers. Olive Logan, in her book *Before the Footlights,* remarked on the shock of the moment. "When *The Black Crook* first presented its nude women to the gaze of a crowded auditorium, a deathlike silence fell upon the house, and men actually grew pale at the boldness of the thing." In contrast, a spectator who disagreed with Logan challenged her memory:

> *Our recollection of that notable night is that when the performers in the foremost skirtless ballet—afterward celebrated as the demon dance—had executed their initiatory* pas, *there burst forth such a spontaneous, unanimous and overwhelming storm of applause as was like to bring the dome about our ears.*
>
> **(Dance Magazine, *December 1926*)**

Whatever the initial reaction, the first act met with great approval.

> *The first act is trashy, but affords ample scope for fine spectacular display, and introduces the English and French Ballet troupes, who were received with enthusiasm. Mlle. Bonfanti, the* premiere danseuse, *is as light as a feather, and exceedingly graceful. She, with Mlle. Sangalli and Mlle. Rigl, was encored twice during the* Pas de Fleurs. *The* Pas de Sabot *is also a charming arrangement, in which Mlle. Rosi Delval received the well-merited applause of the house. Miss Milly*

> *Cavendish (Carline) was encored in her song of "The Naughty Men." The act closed with a grand incantation scene laid in a wild glen, whose weird and unholy look was quite apropos to the devilish business there enacted.*
>
> **(New York Times, *September 17, 1866*)**

According to notes in the promptscript, the spectacular transition from moonlight to sunlight was accomplished first by lighting the stage with calcium light and green mediums. The foot and border lights were slowly brought up as the green light was removed, and the calcium light with red mediums was worked up. The sunlight was made into daylight by adding plain calcium light up full.

Two spectacular effects used in the incantation scene were a flaming serpent and a horse–monster. The serpent's flames came from cotton soaked with alcohol that was lit just before it flew onstage. The horse's mane was made of strings of firecrackers, also lit just before its entrance.

The major spectacle in the second act was the Golden Realm of Queen Stalacta. At the opening, the moon signaled—by changing from green to red—that the queen was in trouble. As the trouble passed, the moon resumed its green color. When Stalacta saw Rodolphe and Greppo in their boat, a profile boat with miniature characters was sent through an opening in the drop center stage.

A critic for *The New York Times* described the second act:

> *The features of this act were the dances held in the gorgeous grotto of Stalacta. Mlle. Sangalli and the full ballet appeared in the* Pas de Naiad, *after which came the ballet success of the night, the witching* Pas de Demons, *in which the demons, who wear no clothes to speak of, so gracefully and prettily disported as to draw forth thunders of applause . . . The curtain was rung up three times at the close of this act, in compliance with peremptory demands of the house.*
>
> ***(September 17, 1866)***

Several critics reported the innovative technique used in the painting of the grotto scenery. The designs were "raised and embossed on the canvas."

> *A vast grotto is herein presented, extending into measureless perspective. Stalactites descend from the arched roof. A tranquil and lovely lake reflects the golden glories that span it like a vast sky. In every direction one sees the bright sheen or the dull richness of massy gold. Beautiful fairies, too, are herein assembled—the sprites of the ballet, who make the scene luxuriant with their beauty.*
>
> **(New York Tribune, *September 17, 1866*)**

Although Niblo's was equipped to hold a tank with water, it is more probable that mirrors or reflective materials were used here. Throughout the scene, Dragonfin jumps in and out of the "water" and pulls Rodolphe and Greppo from it. At the close, fairies ride dolphins across the stage. The necessity of traps and grooves makes the use of real water improbable.

Dragonfin is pictured in a tight-fitting garment covered with green scales. A hood of the same material covers his head, but his own hands and feet are exposed. Stalacta wears a black-and-white dotted bodice with a long sheer white overcape. A long red split

skirt with yellow lining reveals a fringed girdle of matching material. She wears her hair down, and a large gold crown. Stalacta, as well as almost all women pictured, wears bracelets on both wrists. In some pictures, these bracelets seem to be camouflage for a long-sleeved leotard, yet the dancers are also pictured elsewhere with their arms entirely bare. The famous demon costumes consisted of a pair of mid-thigh close-fitting bloomers and a low-cut sleeveless bodice. The outfits were red trimmed in black-and-white polka dots and white cording. They also wore small headpieces that resemble horns. (The appearance of these demons in the grotto of Stalacta is not in keeping with the dramatic content. Being archenemies to Stalacta's realm, their intrusion can only be attributed to choreographic needs.)

A full score of the musical extravaganza is not extant. Many of the songs became popular tunes and were published separately as sheet music. Two such pieces are the "Golden Realm Waltz" and the "Golden Realm Polka." Both these songs must have been used in the grotto scene. As in many of the songs, a short introduction is followed by a fermata, giving the dancers time to take their places and pose before entering into the dance.

The "Pas de Demons" was certainly the most controversial part of the evening and it became the most popular. In another stroke of managerial genius, Wheatley printed "time tables" for *The Black Crook.* By consulting these pamphlets, which were handed out at the theatre, one could drop by to see just the parts one wanted. A crowd always gathered around 9:30 p.m. when the "Pas de Demons" was scheduled.

The opening of the third act went through many changes. The original script called for a grand ballet set in front of the castle. The prompt script notes a hornpipe by the coryphées, followed by a solo tabour, and ending with a solo schottische. Later, this was enlarged into a ballroom scene.

Studio shots of Chorines, Amazons, Sprites and Demons.

> *One new scene of singular brilliancy was introduced, that, namely, of the ballroom. It is composed of three vistas, the central one being an arch. The roof is wrought in imitation of fretted gold. On the right are four statue-pillars, and the same on the left. The arch is supported by six four-fold pillars, made of crystal spokes, and encircled with jeweled bands of gold. Statues supporting sconces surrounded each pillar. A central chandelier dispenses light from above.*
>
> **(New York Tribune, *May 28, 1867*)**

The new scenery was accompanied by new dances. In the pretext of a ballroom, dances were easily incorporated as well as interchanged. One new attraction was a male dancer, M. Von Hamme, who specialized in revolutions and was famous for being able to turn three times in the air. Another addition was the "Pas de Militaire."

> *The most entertaining novelty introduced in the spectacle last evening, however, was the baby ballet—a march of intricate military evolutions performed by over a hundred youngsters, varying in height from 35 to 45 inches. These military marches are growing to be great bores, and only the precocity of performers makes the present one interesting.*
>
> **(New York Times, *October 22, 1867*)**

Another possibility for choreography in the ballroom scene was a set of five quadrilles in different meters performed by the guests at the ball. The sheet music for the "Black Crook Lancers" lists:

	No. of measures	*Movement*
No. 1	*8*	*Introduction*
	4	*Lady and opposite gentleman forward*
	4	*Forward and turn*
	8	*Two couples cross over*
		Balance at corners
No. 2	*8*	*Introduction*
	4	*Couples forward and back*
	4	*Forward and leave lady*
	4	*Chassez across*
	4	*Turn partners to place*
		Form lines and all forward
No. 3	*11*	*Introduction*
	4	*Couple forward and back*
	4	*Forward and salute and hold*
	2	*Four ladies' chain*
No. 4	*8*	*Introduction*
	4	*Couple lead to the right*
	4	*Lead to the left*
	4	*Chassez to place right and left*
No. 5	*4*	*Introduction*
	8	*Grand chain*
	8	*1st (or 3rd) couple lead around and*

	face out: the other couples form behind
8	*Chassez across*
8	*March*
4	*All forward*
4	*Turn partners to place*
8	*2d (or 4th) couple lead around*
8	*Chassez across*
8	*March*
8	*All forward*
16	*Grand chain*

Near the end of the play, the villain Hertzog was taken through a trap in the floor accompanied by a great burst of flame. The first set of wings closed in, and a grand procession to the music of the "Fairy Queen March" entertained the audience while the transformation scene was being set. During one performance, Charles Dickens was backstage at Niblo's while the transformation was being prepared and mentioned it in a letter to Macready.

> *Having some amiable small talk with a neat little Spanish woman, who is the premier(e) danseuse, I asked her, in joke, to let me measure her skirt with my dress glove. Holding the glove by the tip of the forefinger, I found the skirt to be just three gloves long; and yet this length was much in excess of the skirts of the 200 other ladies whom the carpenters (stage hands) were at that moment getting into their places for a transformation scene, on revolving columns, on wires and "travellers," in iron cradles, up in the flies, down in the cellars, on every description of float that Wilmot, gone distracted, could imagine.*
>
> **(New York Globe, *February 10, 1935*)**

Why Dickens was backstage visiting during the performance is not explained in his letter.

When the preparations had been made, the house lights were taken down, and the set began to "transform" for a total of thirteen minutes.

> *Its luster grows as we gaze, and deepens and widens, till the effect is almost painful. One by one, curtains of mist ascend and drift away. Silver couches, on which the fairies loll in negligent grace, ascend and descend amid a silver whirl. From the clouds droop gilded chariots and the white forms of angels.*
>
> **(New York Tribune, *September 17, 1866*)**

While some sources picture the girls being flown on wires, others speak of large globes on which the ladies were lifted and lowered by way of slots in the scenery. In either case, it was a difficult mechanical feat.

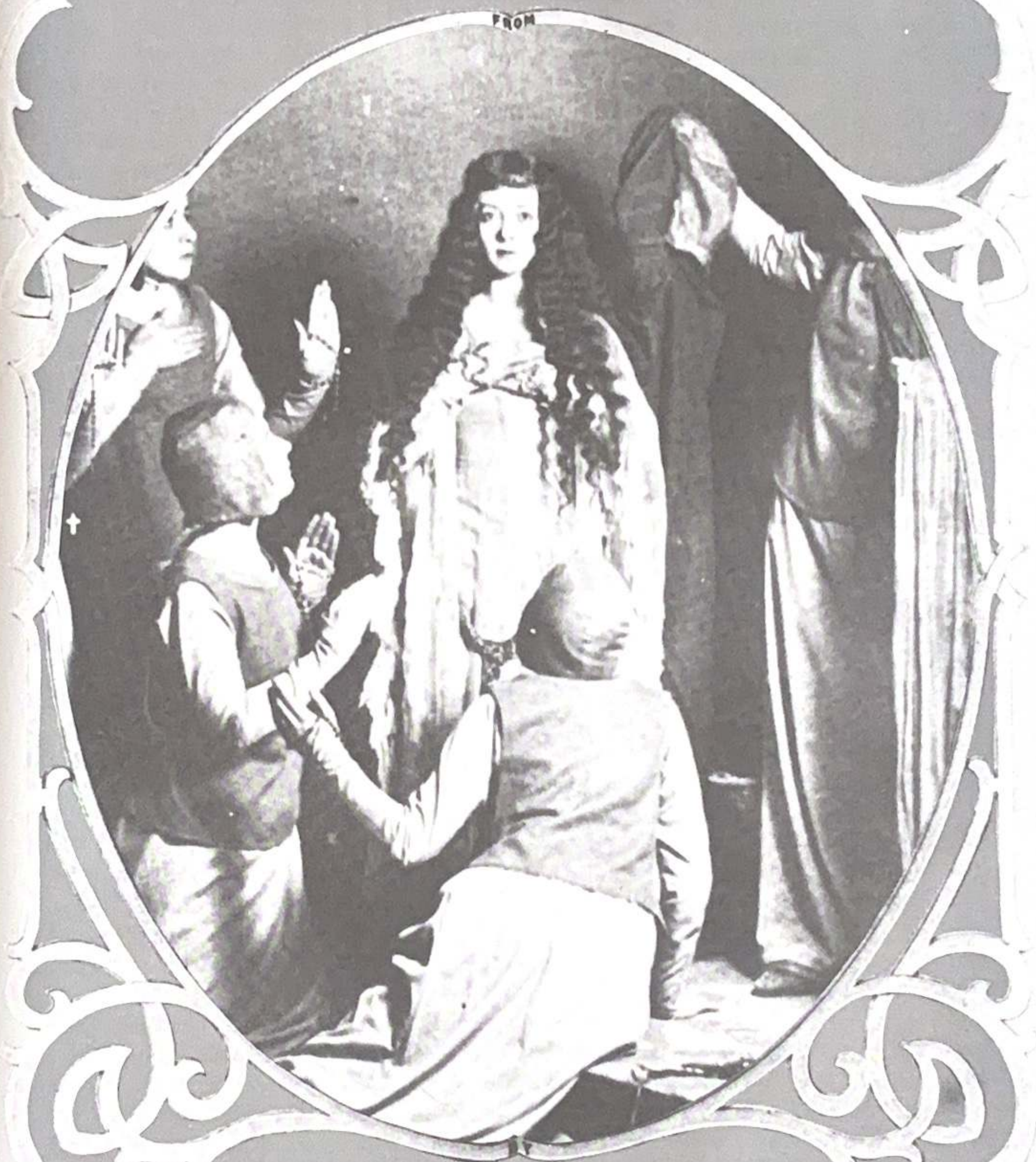
> *The curtain dropped on this piece the first night at nine minutes past one. Owing to some defect in the gas, the transformation scene would not work, and the curtain was dropped for ten minutes, after which everything worked smoothly. . . . On the second night the pandemonium and one other scene was cut out, and the forty minutes wait between the acts on the first night were considerably shortened, which brought the piece to a close at twelve o'clock.*
>
> **(New York Clipper, *September 22, 1866*)**

The transformation spectacle, surely the scenic climax of the evening, brought *The Black Crook* to a blazing finish as indicated by the final cues in the promptbook:

1. *Open scene*
2. *Raise drop to discover Stalacta*
3. *Work all the columns*
4. *Raise drop to discover Rodolphe and Amina*
5. *Drop set pieces to discover Greppo and Carline*
6. *Spangle shower*
7. *Open buds*
8. *Lower Aurura's chariot*
9. *Take up Jovetta*
10. *Light green fires in all entrances*
11. *Lower curtain slowly*
12. *Light red fire*
13. *Ring up curtain quick*
14. *Ring slow curtain*

Leigh George Odom *is a freelance theatre researcher and the New York coordinator for Sisyphus Productions, based in Los Angeles.*

Meyerhold's Staging of
Sister Beatrice



Frantisek Deák

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Meyerhold and Diaghilev were the inventors of Russian theatrical modernism. Even if the period during which both of these seminal artists were directly influenced by symbolism was relatively short, it was decisive in their move toward the avant-garde. It was in his symbolist period (1903–1907) that Meyerhold came to the realization that the new theatre he was seeking would not come about by reforming the existing theatre, as Stanislavsky believed, but by a radical break with it. The symbolist esthetic gave Meyerhold fundamental concepts as well as concrete ideas about the function and form of theatre from which he could proceed to invent the Russian form of the theatrical symbolism.

Meyerhold's first attempt in this direction was in The New Drama Association where, in 1903, he tentatively experimented with stagings of Przybyszewski's *Snow* and Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*. But the provinces where he was playing at the time were not ready for this repertory, nor did Meyerhold have a clear idea of exactly how the new, symbolist theatre should look.

The next step for Meyerhold was his work at the Theatre Studio on Povarskaya Street. This studio was founded by Stanislavsky for the express purpose of experimenting with the new symbolist drama. Out of Meyerhold's productions, the most important conceptually was his staging of Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tantagiles* (1905) where he applied for the first time the principles of symbolist painting and symbolist poetic diction to the mise–en–scène.

The culmination of Meyerhold's symbolist period came in Petersburg where, in Komissarzhevskaya's Dramatic Theatre on Ofitserskaya Street, in one season he staged three symbolist productions. The new theatre opened with a radical, symbolist interpretation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (November 10, 1906) followed by Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* (November 22, 1906) and another Maeterlinck play, *Pelleas and Melisande* (October 10, 1907). From these productions, the staging of *Sister Beatrice* has the priviledged position of being the most fully realized symbolist production, not only from the point of view of Meyerhold's theatrical solutions to Maeterlinck's play, but also because it realized some of Meyerhold's mystical and social longing, which was receptively received by audiences.

Sister Beatrice is a Miracle play. Its story is very simple. In the first act, Beatrice runs away from the convent with the knight Bellidor, who has promised to marry her. The statue of the Virgin Mary comes to life in the second act and takes Beatrice's place. As a result, her disappearance is not discovered. In the third act, Beatrice, who was abandoned by Bellidor, returns after 25 years, broken and repentant, to die near the convent.

On the sketch of the set by Sudeikin, a chapel is depicted with a statue of the Virgin Mary hidden behind the right portal. The chapel is old and decrepit. The sketch emphasizes the heavy material, the stoniness of the chapel floors and steps, and the coarse plaster. Through the arrow-shaped windows and portals, a bright countryside shines, painted in the primitive Pre-Raphaelite style.

The actual decor did not follow the sketch precisely. The play was set on an extremely narrow strip of stage, no more than seven feet deep. To the left (from the audience's point of view) was a big tapestry. Its color was a combination of green and grey. In it, threads of pale silver and gold shimmered. Behind it was a neutral, probably dark grey, backdrop. To the right of the tapestry were sharply rising stairs (nine or ten steps) on the top of which was the platform with the statue of the Virgin Mary. Behind the statue, the sky with clouds was visible, a part of the Pre-Raphaelite countryside. To the right of the stairs was another dark backdrop that deliniated the playing area from the right. The floor was covered with sturdy canvas on which grey and green geometric figures—squares and triangles depicting the flagstones—were painted. (There is no evidence from photographs that there was any wall left of the tapestry with arrow-shaped windows. But that does not mean that it was not there. Because the photographer was interested mainly

in the groupings of actors, the overall view of the set, which certainly extended to both sides, was not photographed.)

The main acting area was the space between the end of the tapestry and the first two rows of stairs, which probably was no more than five to six feet wide. All of the photographs depict the action in the small ambo-like space. But in the scene of the Miracle, there is a need for more space to accommodate a group of beggars, three pilgrims, and a group of Nuns simultaneously on stage. As the Virgin Mary passes from one group to another, there is a need for more space, both to the right and to the left as the photograph suggests.

The costume of the Nuns consisted of a long light blue dress covering the entire body. Over it they wore a fitted grey vest. The robe was simply cut. The sleeves were tight, covering the hand up to the palms and hiding the wrist, which made the hand more suitable for the iconic gesture. They wore simple blue bonnets covering their heads entirely so that none of their hair was visible. The Mother Superior had a pleated mantle of which the upper, shoulder part, was dark grey and the rest light blue. Beatrice also had a richly pleated mantle in the first scene, but it was all dark grey. The costume of the Virgin Mary generally followed Maeterlinck's instructions ("in silk and precious brocades . . . a broad girdle, wrought in gold, encircles the waist, and a golden fillet, on which glitter precious stones, confines, like a diadem, the tresses of woman's hair . . .") except that she had a light, almost see-through mantle over her clothes. Beatrice's dress in the last act was a badly worn-out version of the rich crimson dress that Bellidor had given her in the first act.

The mise-en-scene of the first act was inspired by the painting of Domenico Veneziano, "Martyrdom of St. Lucy." There is an inverse parallelism between Beatrice's and St. Lucy's life, that Meyerhold is probably evoking. St. Lucy, a young virgin, offered her virginity to God and refused to get married. Her suitor, to change her mind, accused her of being a Christian. When she again refused to marry, the judge condemned her to prostitution in a brothel, but God saved her by making her immobile. After tortures, she finally was killed by a sword thrust into her throat. In Domenico's painting, St. Lucy is kneeling and praying, while her executioner, standing behind her, is stabbing her with a sword through her neck. Both figures are in profile against the almost blank, neutral space of a courtyard. space of a courtyard.

The first scene of the play actually opens with Beatrice on her knees praying to the Virgin Mary and asking her for advice. She is still praying when Bellidor enters, so it is at this moment that the arrangement of the painting is evoked for the first time in the mise-en-scene. It is in the last scene of the act, after Bellidor ceremoniously gives Beatrice the rich worldly clothes and she kneels again in front of the Virgin Mary to pray—a prayer interrupted by Bellidor urging her to leave—that the idea of Bellidor as her executioner is fully realized.

The second act begins with the animation of the statue of the Virgin Mary. The actress, however, does not descend directly from the platform down the stairs (they were probably too steep for that), but goes backstage and then appears from the side. She takes Beatrice's clothes that were left on the ground and puts them over her own dress. She picks up the basket of clothes that Beatrice was supposed to distribute to the poor.

In the next scene, the poor and sick arrive. Here, Meyerhold strayed a little from the text. In comparison with Maeterlinck, who let the beggers behave both as a group and as individuals, Meyerhold had them behave mostly as a group. He also gives them additional lines in which they plead for bread. Reviews indicate that Meyerhold stressed the themes of poverty and hunger in this particular scene.

In the next scene, the Mother Superior and, subsequently, the five nuns that act as

The animation of the statue of the Virgin Mary.

The Virgin dressed as Beatrice, with basket of clothes for the poor.

Beatrice's clothes are removed, and the Miracle begins.

The nuns carry Beatrice after the "descent from the cross" scene.

a chorus enter and realize that the statue of the Virgin Mary is missing. They see that Sister Beatrice has the clothes of the Virgin Mary under her clothes. The moment Beatrice's clothes are removed, the scene of the Miracle begins. The nuns fall on their knees and join in a joyous cry: "A Miracle! A Miracle! A Miracle! O My Father! My Father! Hosanna! Hosanna!" etc. The photograph shows very clearly that all the nuns gesticulate in unison and that the main gesture is the open palm (facing forward), imitating religious painting and used throughout the production by the chorus of Nuns. The end of the scene of the Miracle is described by Yartsev in some detail.

> *At the precise moment when the chorus offstage and the pealing of the bells fall silent, the Sisters drop to their knees in a single line and turn their heads toward the chapel. From the steps descends the Madonna, dressed in Beatrice's habit and bearing the golden pitcher in her hands. Simultaneously, from the other side appear three young pilgrims with faces reminiscent of figures from Vrubel, clad in brown and bearing tall staffs; they fall to their knees, with hands outstretched above their heads. Slowly, to the strain of an organ, the Madonna passes across the stage, and as she approaches the Sisters they bow their heads. Stopping before the pilgrims, she raises the pitcher above their upstretched hands . . . In a cut-out opening suggesting the convent gates, a group of beggars stands close together, those in front kneeling*

The Nuns attend Beatrice, but cannot understand her plight.

Beatrice says goodbye to the Mother Superior.

The Mother Superior leads the nuns in prayer after Beatrice's death.

> *with their hands raised in supplication. When the Madonna turns toward them, raising her hands in blessing and revealing beneath the cloak of Beatrice the raiment of the Madonna, the beggars make a primitive gesture of naive wonder, raising their hands with the palms facing forward.*
>
> ***(Edward Braun,* Meyerhold on Theatre*)***

Act Three begins with the same scenic arrangement as the first act. The statue of the Virgin Mary is back on the platform and Beatrice's clothes and rosary are on the ground where she left them. Beatrice is exhausted, returning to die at the monastery. She finds the clothes, tries them on and faints from exhaustion on the steps, where the other nuns discover her. The sequence of the "descent from the cross" begins in which Meyerhold imitates the scene from various religious paintings. Sister Beatrice is placed on a white linen shroud and carried a very short distance, no more than two–three feet, when she is again put down. The Sisters kiss her hands, feet, and forehead. None of these actions are played out fully. They are, as was Bellidor's kiss to Beatrice, indicated only as signs with practically no physical contact. Beatrice protests all the attention and tries to explain to the sisters what happened to her, which they, of course, can't understand. The sequence of Beatrice's death begins next. She says goodby to the Mother Superior, and falls back and dies. The image of the praying sisters led by the Mother Superior is the final tableau of the production.

In "The New Theatre Foreshadowed in Literature," Meyerhold advances the idea that "The growth of the New Theatre is rooted in literature. Literature has always taken the initiative in the breaking down of dramatic forms" (*Meyerhold on Theatre*). The new literature—especially Maeterlinck, whom Meyerhold has in mind—certainly contributed to the New Theatre, but the new dramatic literature did not lead to New Theatre simply by itself. Stanislavsky's production of Maeterlinck's one acts were not symbolist but realist versions of symbolist plays, and the 1910 staging of *Sister Beatrice* in New York was a traditional, rather romantic production without the traces of the New Theatre Meyerhold was talking about. What was radical about symbolist theatre was that its mise-en-scene was not based on any contemporary or past theatrical practice, but that its visual aspect was based on the idiom of symbolist painting, and its aural aspect on the symbolist theories of poetic diction. It was the application of these concepts to Maeterlinck's plays that made the productions of them symbolist. Meyerhold understood this perfectly well—his symbolist period was marked by an attempt to find concrete solutions for the realization of these concepts on stage. On his copy of the play, Meyerhold wrote the concepts he wanted to realize in this particular production: "Rhythms of plasticity, rhythms of dialogue. Singsong speech and slow movements. Musical unity. Musical basis in dialogues and the actors' movements. Bas-reliefs, sculpture groups . . . Mystery . . . The advantage of the proximity to the ramp" (Rudnitsky, *Meyerhold the Director*).

Several symbolist productions in France and in Russia were based on the idiom of symbolist paintings, but the staging of *Sister Beatrice* seems to go farther than any other production in modeling all of its visual aspects—blocking, grouping, tableux, postures, gestures, eye movement—on concrete visual sources. Among Meyerhold's sources—beside the already mentioned Domenico Veneziano—were Memling, Botticelli, Vrubel (a contemporary Russian symbolist painter influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite style) and the 14th-century painting of an unknown Spanish primitive painter. According to Tairov, who was at the time a member of the company, Meyerhold brought the monographs of Memling, Botticelli and other painters to the first rehearsals, and it was from these that the actors took their gestures, positions of head and postures, as well as the groupings.

14th-century painting by an unknown Spanish artist was visual source.

It is not possible to identify what particular painting contributed to what in the available photographic documentation from the production, for the simple reason that the mise-en-scene is a synthesis, a reconstruction, of the idiom and not a copy of a particular painting, even if the rehearsals of a particular tableau could have begun directly from a scene in a painting.

The influence of the symbolist painting on the staging goes even further. In many symbolist paintings, the countryside and the human body are often drawn in a similar line and color scheme, which makes them blend. As a result, the body is depersonalized. A similar effect is achieved when the grey-green-blue color of the set corresponds to the grey-blue colors of the costumes. The simplicity of the costume and the fact that it covers the entire body, schematizing it, helps again to depersonalize the human figure on the stage. But through the extreme closeness of the actor to the sets—as well as to the audience—the overall effect is not painterly but that of a bas-relief. Meyerhold's solutions are sculptural.

The stage was lighted by footlights and by lights from above. It was a medium light, not too bright but not semi-obscurity either. It was unchanged throughout the production, even if the text asked for changes in light. For example, the first scene, which went from night into the early hours, was lighted like the rest of the production. Any possibility of the use of light for atmosphere was eliminated. Even some of the visual effects that Maeterlinck has written into the text, like the shimmering dress of the Virgin Mary, were muted. The only visual effect that Meyerhold used was to project the initials of the Virgin Mary (BVM, Beata Virgo Maria)—a detail not in the script—on the top of the backdrop at some point during the scene of the Miracle.

In the Theatre Studio, Meyerhold had already based delivery on the principles of poetic diction. He had actors reading Maeterlinck's poetry, sometimes even in the original French, in order to break out of the acting voice with new melodic (singsong) and rhythmic

readings. Meyerhold tried to eliminate all tremolo, tension, and lugubrious intonation from diction. He wanted words "to fall like drops into a deep well." The group of Nuns often spoke in whispers, carefully graduating intensity and measuring pauses. It was through precise execution of the diverse pauses that Meyerhold created the rhythm of the production. It was by the pauses that the movements and gestures were cued.

Komissarzhevskaya used two different voices. The voice for the Virgin Mary was like "pure sound of an unknown musical instrument," a depersonalized sound. The voice for Beatrice, even when keeping with the rhythm imposed by Meyerhold, had certain emotional undertones and personal quality. Komissarzhevskaya, the director of the theatre and one of the foremost lyrical actresses in Russia, after an unsuccessful portrayal of Hedda Gabler that did not fit her temperament, identified strongly with the new role, signing her letters at the time as Beatrice. When the actresses playing the Nuns were putting Beatrice on the white shroud for the scene of the descent from the cross, they saw that Komissarzhevskaya, even if outwardly keeping the rhythm and gestures, was inwardly trembling with "creative tremor." Also, they remarked that in the dying scene she projected the feelings of sorrow, anger, pity and reconciliation, playing the scene with tears in her eyes and on her cheeks.

Whether in France, Germany or Russia, the first symbolist productions in the early 1890's were done by poets and painters outside of the regular theatre. Meyerhold already represented a second step in the development of symbolist theatre, when the radical esthetic was brought into professional theatre. This caused some problems. Among them, the most persistent was the problem with acting. Meyerhold had to force his ideas on not-too-willing actors, who resisted giving up characterization, psychology, and personality in order to become the depersonalized sign that Meyerhold wanted. Komissarzhevskaya's acting in *Sister Beatrice* was a compromise between her former lyrical acting and the rhythmical, sculptural concept imposed by Meyerhold. But *Sister Beatrice* allowed such a compromise to a much greater degree than, for example, *Pelleas and Melisande*, and it is quite possible that Komissarzhevskaya's identification with the part, which was against the symbolist esthetic of a detached representation, was one of the reasons for the great success of the production with the audience.

Frantisek Deák *is a contributing editor of* The Drama Review. *He teaches at the University of California at San Diego.*

Nijinsky's
Jeux
FROM

Barbara Barker

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Jeux, Vaslav Nijinsky's second ballet, was first performed in Paris, May 15, 1913 by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. It featured a score by Claude Debussy, designs by Leon Bakst, a libretto by society painter and social historian Jacques-Emile Blanche, and was danced by Nijinsky, Tamara Karsavina and Ludmilla Schollar. *Jeux* was a short-lived work. Contemporary critics felt it was meretricious, and audiences were puzzled as to Nijinsky's intent. After only eight performances, *Jeux* was dropped from the repertory. In recent years, however, dance historians examining the fragmentary records find much that is innovative in the conception of the ballet, its thematic content, esthetic values, and choreographic development. *Jeux* was a significant departure from balletic tradition and an attempt to fuse the ideas of contemporary art and dance.

Of the four ballets choreographed by Nijinsky, *Jeux* has the least documentation. Sandwiched between *L'Apres-Midi d'un Faun* (1912), and *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), *Jeux* was considered of minor importance. Following Nijinsky's break with Diaghilev in 1913, his ballets were no longer performed and many of the records lost or destroyed. Remaining are a few photographs, a series of six pastels by Valentine Gross, Debussy's score with the sequence of events described, eyewitness accounts and reminiscences of the performers and collaborators. Bakst's set designs have been lost, and although his costume designs have been preserved, not all of them were used in the actual production.

The 1913 season was Nijinsky's fifth in Paris and the most productive of his career. For the first three seasons he had appeared as the principal dancer of the Ballets Russes in a repertory choreographed principally by Michael Fokine. In the 1911–1912 season, Nijinsky choreographed his first ballet, and when Fokine resigned from the company in 1912, Nijinsky assumed the role of ballet master and choreographer in addition to his other duties. His time was divided between rehearsing the repertory, choreographing *Jeux* and "*Sacre*," and performing nightly in at least one but more frequently two or three ballets.

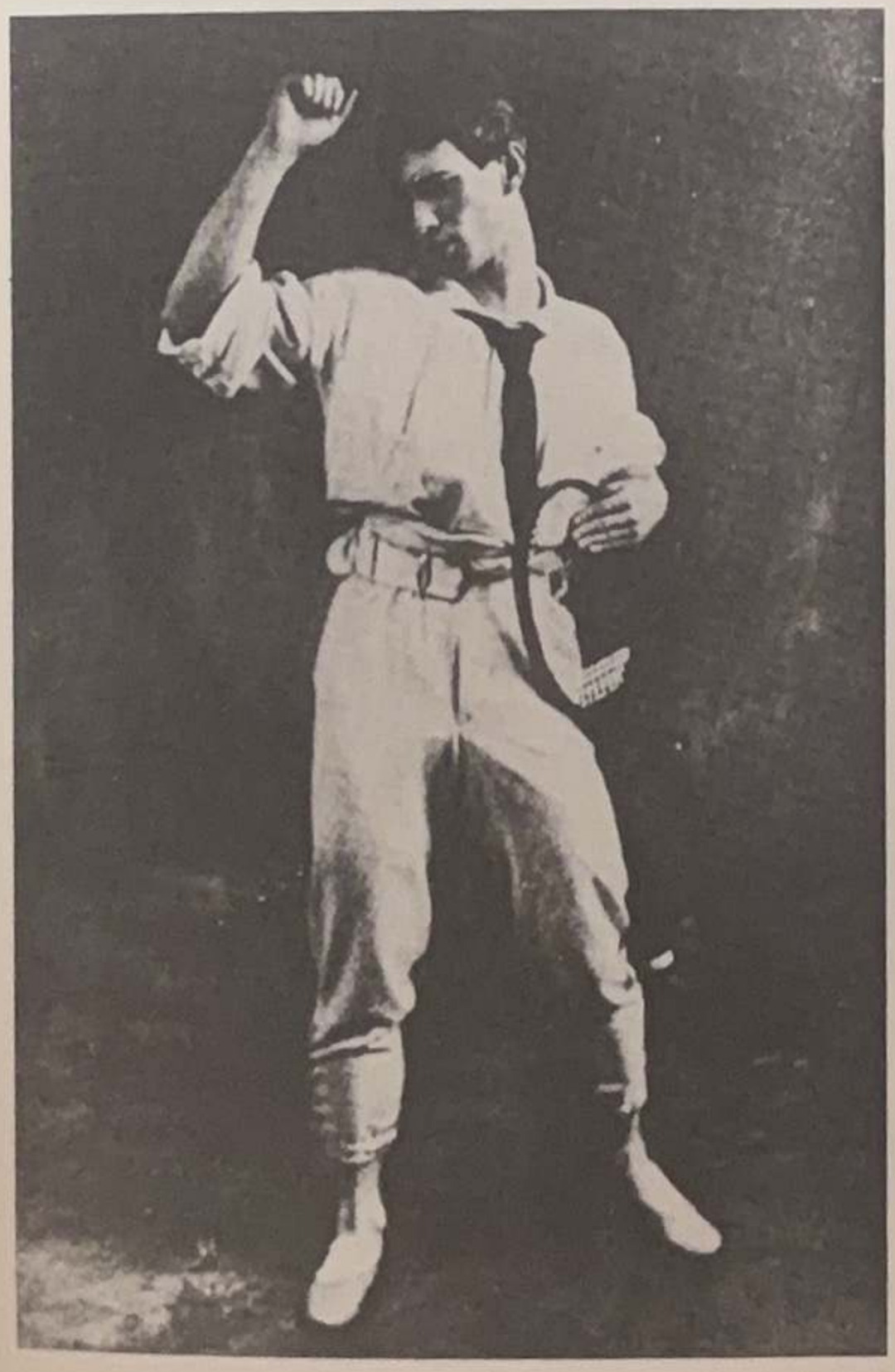
Guiding and shaping Nijinsky's talent was the Russian impresario Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev. From 1909 to 1917 Diaghilev affected, through the medium of ballet, every field of art in Western Europe. Among his contributions to the history of dance, two are especially important in relation to *Jeux*. He gave form to the one-act danced dramatic poem—of which *Jeux* is an example—and he provided a hotbed of collaboration for the most distinguished talents of his epoch. Diaghilev skillfully synthesized the color provided by the great painters, original music, and choreography that expanded the subject matter and the vocabulary of classical ballet. He sought a new genre of ballet, based on the Wagnerian "Gesamtkunstwerk" or masterwork principle—that is, a unified production in which no one element predominated.

Diaghilev and his collaborators were interested in the avant-garde movements in Paris, Italy and Russia. Artistic manifestos involving implications of a mechanized, industrialized future were in the air. At the time Nijinsky's new ballet was being formulated in 1912, Futurists—glorifying the machine, war and the dynamism of objects—and the Cubist painters combined forces to give an important exhibition in Paris.

Jeux was the second collaboration of Nijinsky, Bakst and Debussy. There are several versions of the origins of the ballet, three of which are most frequently cited. The first appeared in an article by Hector Cahausac in *Le Figaro* the day before the premiere. According to Cahausac, *Jeux* was conceived in a discussion between Debussy, Bakst, Reynaldo Hahn, Robert Brussel (music critic for *Le Figaro*), Jean Cocteau, Blanche, Nijinsky, and Diaghilev. In casting about for a suitable subject for Nijinsky's next ballet, the group debated the virtues of modern versus traditional ballet. Brussel suggested to Diaghilev that the charm of ballet lay in its old-fashionedness, and pointed out the difficulty of adapting the new movements in painting. The Cubists fragmented the world into elements, but the choreographer must deal with the limitations of the human body.

At this point, Nijinsky, according to Cahausac, took up the argument. His statement, sounding very much like a Futurist manifesto on the modernization of ballet, was recorded by Cahausac:

> *The kind of man whom I see on the stage is first and foremost a contemporary man. My dream is to create costumes, plastic movements that would be characteristic of our time. Undoubtedly, a man's body contains elements that denote the era that he himself represents. If we watch our contemporary walking down the street, reading a newspaper, or dancing the tango, we won't find anything in common between his gestures and those, let's say, of a stroller in Louis XV's time, or of a monk deciphering manuscripts in the thirteenth century.*
>
> *I've been giving a great deal of attention to polo, golf, tennis, etc., and I am convinced that these games are not simply healthy pastimes, but they also form a plastic beauty. Studying them has given me the hope that in the future our own time will be characterized by a style just as expressive as those antique styles that we admire so much at present.*
>
> *I wish to compose a score of movements in which everything would be defined by the bend of a finger, by the modulation of a muscle, and not by leaps and pirouettes; it will be a score that will reveal the boundless possibilities of the human body.*



Nijinsky in* Jeux*: Modern man in a contemporary environment.

It is doubtful that Nijinsky actually made this statement. He was, according to his biographers, shy and inarticulate, especially in so distinguished a group. More likely, the article was a publicity release, presenting the official Diaghilev point of view.

Richard Buckle, in his extensively documented biographies *Diaghilev* and *Nijinsky*, advocates a second version of the ballet's origins. He cites as his source Jacques-Emile Blanche, who received program credit for the scenario. According to Blanche, Nijinsky's original idea was a Futurist ballet, centered on a game of tennis in a garden. The young dancer wanted ". . . no corps de ballet, no ensembles, no variations, no pas de deux, only girls and boys in flannels, and rhythmic movements. A group at a certain stage was to depict a fountain, and the game of tennis was to be interrupted by the crashing of an aeroplane" (*Diaghilev*, p. 243). Diaghilev assigned Blanche to formulate a suitable outline, based on Nijinsky's ideas, for Debussy to follow in composing the score. The frame should present Nijinsky as modern man in a contemporary environment. Diaghilev is said to have remarked, "We will date *Jeux* 1930" (*Diaghilev*, p. 243).

A final version of the ballet's evolution was described by Nijinsky in his diary. *Jeux* was, he wrote, the life of which Diaghilev dreamed. "He wanted to have two boys as lovers. He often told me so, but I refused . . . In the ballet, the two girls represent the two boys, and the young man is Diaghilev. I changed the characters, as love between three men could not be represented on the stage." It must be remembered that Nijinsky's diary is an unreliable source, edited by his wife Romola and written after the dancer was diagnosed as schizophrenic.

Although the three versions of *Jeux*'s beginnings differ in many aspects, they agree on the theme, modern man. This was a departure from both the traditions of the Russian Imperial ballet and the reforms of Fokine.

The sports motif, which provided the frame for Nijinsky's ballet, was not new in 1913. Motifs from athletics have been used by choreographers for centuries. Pictures from Lambranzi's *New and Curious School of Theatrical Dancing*, published in 1716, show a danced tennis game. In 1897 Luigi Manzotti created a spectacular ballet *Sport* at La Scala in Milan, and the Kiralfy brothers presented similar spectacles in New York in the late nineteenth century. In *Jeux*, however, Nijinsky used the game of tennis as a metaphor for psychological patterns in modern manners. It was viewed by the critics and his biographers as a comment on modern love, illustrating that love was only a game among games.

Plotless, yet not abstract, *Jeux* was a ballet of mood, in which one moment was frozen and the relations of the three performers examined in minute detail. The curtain rises on an empty garden at dusk. A tennis ball bounces over the flowerbeds and disappears in the darkness. Nijinsky, dressed as a sportsman, racquet in hand, races after the ball, crossing the stage in two leaps. Following his exit, two girls enter from opposite sides of the stage and move together on a line parallel to the proscenium. Nijinsky returns and enters into their game but does not follow the rhythm they establish. The remainder of the ballet is a three-sided flirtation in which Nijinsky dallies with first one girl and then the other. They in turn vacillate between jealousy and reconciliation, at times carrying on their own flirtation. In the final moment of the ballet, as the three pose, a tennis ball bounces across the stage. Surprised, the dancers disappear into the darkened garden.

In interviews given a few days before the ballet premiered, Nijinsky described the esthetic principles of *Jeux* as "Aeginetan," based on ". . . ideals of angular as opposed to curved beauty, based on figures of primitive Greek sculptures of the human frame" (*Literary Digest*, 23 Aug. 1913). *Jeux* extended the stylized angularity that characterized "*Faune*" and moved from the first ballet's two-dimensional frieze into three-dimensional space.

In composing *Jeux*, Nijinsky began with a basic position embodying the Aeginetan ideal. He demonstrated the position at the first rehearsal, standing on demi-point, feet in a turned-in second position, body flat front to the proscenium, the head inclined toward one shoulder, arms at shoulder height, bent at the elbows and the wrists with half-clenched fists. Nijinsky's enclosed sculptural shape was the very opposite of the extended arabesques and port de bras of classical ballet. According to Vera Krasovskaya in *Nijinsky*, a recent biography, Nijinsky's position was:

> *. . . common both to the athlete of antiquity and the sportsman of the . . . twentieth century. It manifested two essentially different moods. The vertical of the arm raised in a defensive gesture . . . the slightly displaced lines of the entire figure denoting a centripetal rather than a centrifugal force, betrayed suspiciousness, nervous introspection, and not a proud serenity. The hero of* Jeux, *nurtured by modern civilization, contrasted his own complex world view with the spiritual harmony of the ancient Greek.*

Combining variations of the basic position, Nijinsky designed several groupings for the three dancers. The angular tension of these poses is similar to the geometric simplification of contemporary painting and sculpture. Critics attributed Nijinsky's abstractions to a variety of sources, ranging from Gauguin to the Cubists. According to Richard Buckle, "before choreographing *Jeux*, Nijinsky had made a careful study of Gauguin's work. He was attracted not by the exoticism of the South Seas, but by Gauguin's structure of formal solidity, linear patterns, abstracted figures and contained gesture. Most reminiscent of Gauguin is the grouping in which one girl slightly bending addresses the other, who sits, one hand in her lap the other on her breast, while Nijinsky watches them both."

From left, Ludmilla Schollar, Nijinsky, and Tamara Karsavina: Geometric simplification in the poses.

Many critics felt *Jeux* reflected the influence of Cubism more than that of Post-Impressionism. Parallels were drawn between Nijinsky's groupings and the Cubist characteristics of fragmenting a three-dimensional object and redefining it from several points of view, in a shallow plane with a limited pallette and rigidly geometric forms.

The dancing itself was thought to incorporate Cubist elements. Nijinsky's movement theme was balletic, pantomimic gesture, broken into short snatches. The fragments gave the impression of rapid photographic snapshots or of small consecutive movements, all of which could be graphically rendered in straight lines and angles. The dancers were described as clockwork figures, and *Jeux* was labeled "Ballet Cinematographique" by Paris critics. Each limb made a different movement and followed a different rhythm. The result of the angular, jerky movement was a tension, underlining the tautness of the groupings. Nijinsky broke the tension only occasionally, most notably when he leapt across the stage after the ball.

From the girls' first entrance, to the final hurried exit, their movements were consistently fragmented. As Schollar and Karsavina approached one another on the single plane, their steps suggested a ritualistic childhood game, like hopscotch. When Nijinsky joined them, they stood at arm's length, legs closed, heads inclined toward one shoulder, holding the loose ends of imaginary skipping ropes. Nijinsky darted between his two partners, cutting through the space with his elbows and chest.

Nijinsky interrupted the girls' game to flirt with one of them. The other tucked her feet under her and sat, leaned to one side, put her head on her shoulder, dropped one hand to her knee and the other on her breast, and jerked in a gesture of annoyance. While Nijinsky stood a short distance away watching, the standing dancer turned stiffly toward her seated companion and stretched out her fist in a gesture of reconciliation. The seated dancer rose and allowed her friend to embrace her. Nijinsky then moved between them,

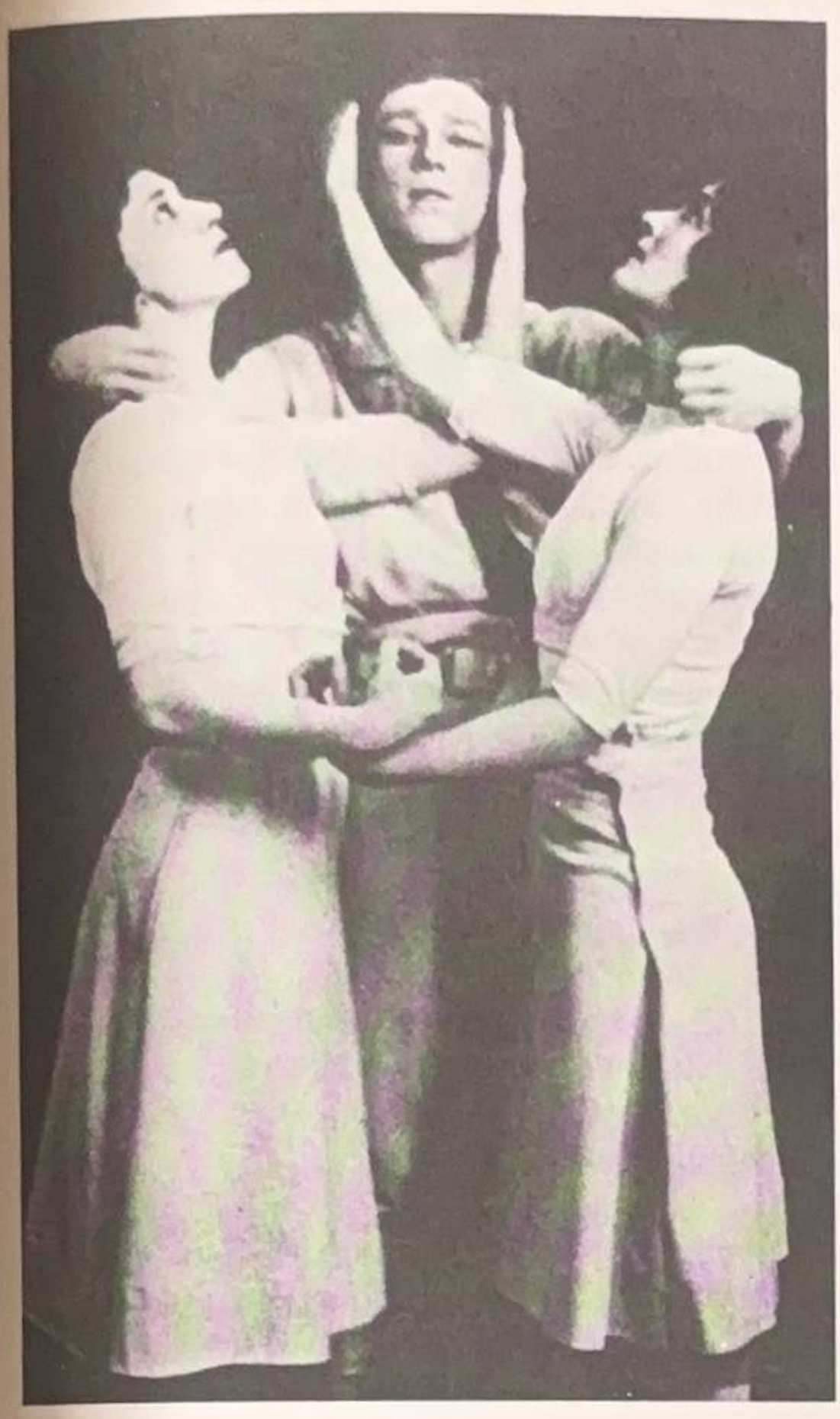
Jeux, 1913.

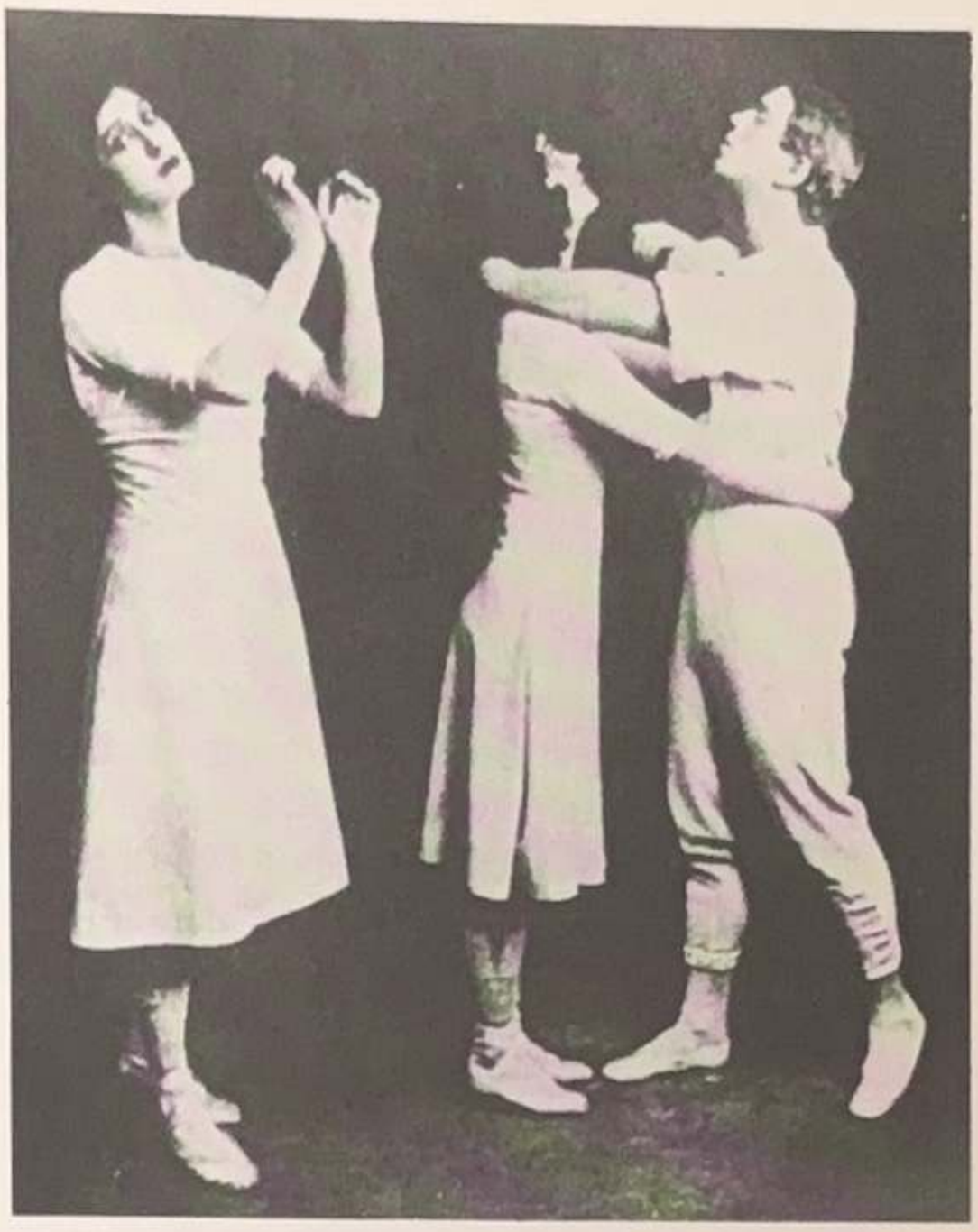
(*left*) Ludmilla Schollar and Tamara Karsavina.

(*below*) Schollar, Nijinsky, and Karsavina.

(*right*) Karsavina, Schollar, and Nijinsky.

Schollar, left, and Karsavina play ritualistic childhood games.





Nijinsky dallies with first one girl and then the other.

The ballerinas entwine their arms around Nijinsky's head.

put his arms on the girls' shoulders and brought them close. Each girl, in turn, entwined one arm around his head, and joined the other in front of his torso. For the final pose, Nijinsky sank to the ground, putting his arms around his knees, and the two girls positioned themselves on either side of him, also putting their arms around their knees, thowing back their heads and leaning with their backs to him.

Although no photographs of the staged production are available, there are posed studio photographs as well as written descriptions of the signature movement. More reminiscent of golf than tennis—Buckle points out that Nijinsky hardly knew the difference because he had never been allowed to participate in sports while a student in the Imperial School—Nijinsky's recurring gestural motif consisted of a sideways and upward swing of both arms across the body. It was not a recognizable tennis movement, and this annoyed audiences, who anticipated a danced game. They were also disturbed by the dancers' lack of facial expression. At the first rehearsal Nijinsky instructed the dancers not to smile or flirt, but to keep their faces motionless. Expression, he believed, should come from the plastic movements of the body.

Much of the controversy surrounding *Jeux* centered on Nijinsky's use of music. Both he and Diaghilev were concerned with the problem of establishing a new relationship between the ballet and music. Rather than being tied to the metric beat of the music, they felt the choreographer should be able to follow the phrasing of symphonic movement. Diaghilev was particularly interested in Jacques Dalcroze's methods of teaching musical

analysis. Twice, Diaghilev and Nijinsky visited the school at Hellerau. On their second visit, Diaghilev hired one of Dalcroze's pupils, Maria Rambert, to help teach the principles of Eurythmics to the Ballets Russes dancers and help Nijinsky interpret Stravinsky's complex *Le Sacre Du Printemps* and the equally difficult score for *Jeux*. According to Françoise Reiss in *Nijinsky: A Biography*, Nijinsky employed Dalcroze's principles in *Jeux*. On every note, one of the three dancers moved, even if it was only an eyelash or a finger. Other elements of Dalcroze's training may have infuenced the choreography for *Jeux*. Lincoln Kirstein points out that photographs of Nijinsky, Schollar and Karsavina resemble the action sketches drawn by Paul Thevanaz to illustrate Eurythmic texts.

How successfully Nijinsky applied Dalcroze's methods to Debussy's score is a matter of disagreement. On the one hand, Michael Fokine, in *Memoirs of a Russian Ballet Master*, accused Nijinsky of "rhythomania," or following the music too pedantically. Debussy felt, however, that Nijinsky's dance bore little relation to the score. He said, "The staging of *Jeux* gave Nijinsky's perverse genius a chance of indulging in some peculiar kind of mathematics. This fellow adds up triple crochets with his feet, checks them on his arms, then suddenly—half paralyzed, he stands crossly watching the music slip by." Debussy blamed Dalcroze, whom he considered an inferior musician as well as one of the greatest enemies of music.

Nothing could have been less Dalcrozian than watching the music slip by, and yet Nijinsky reportedly went against the music several times during the ballet. A possible explanation is that until two days before the performance Nijinsky worked with a piano score that gave little idea of Debussy's instrumentation.

The score itself, although barely appreciated in 1913, is now thought to be one of the composer's finest achievements. Described by the critics as ". . . elastic flowing, evanescent, finely fibered and discreetly woven," Debussy's music was thought to be almost too delicate for so broad a language as ballet. In addition, the composer disliked writing the score and disapproved of the ballet. He wrote to a friend that his music had to make acceptable a rather improper situation, but added ". . . in ballet, immorality escapes through the dancer's legs and ends in a pirouette."

Not only was the use of music a matter of controversy among the collaborators, but Bakst's costume designs were only partially realized. Diaghilev rejected the costume designed for Nijinsky at the first dress rehearsal. Bakst's sketch shows the uniform of an English footballer with a football at his feet. The costume consisted of a red wig, a white shirt with rolled up sleeves, red tie, and knee-length, red-bordered shorts held up by red braces, with red-topped white stockings. Diaghilev redesigned the costume, abolishing the wig, braces and socks and giving Nijinsky white trousers, cut like the black ones worn for class and rehearsal. The women wore the costumes Bakst had designed, short-sleeved dresses with a hemline just below the knee and identical wavy hairdos. In 1913 the skirts of women's tennis dresses were much longer. Bakst's designs, executed by Paquin, prophesied Post-War fashions.

With the designs for the scenery lost, only Valentine Gross's romanticized pastels and a black and white drawing by an unidentified artist that appeared in *La Revue Musicale* (June 1913) remain. Reviews describe a backdrop representing a two-story house seen through trees, masked by painted wings and borders of branches and bushes. Round flowerbeds were distributed about the stage. According to the critics, the overall effect of Bakst's design was to dwarf the dancers. Bronislava Nijinska felt the setting provided ". . . too much of a sense of space. The tensions inherent in the choreography demanded something more confined." Nijinsky's intentions, she felt, would have been clearer on a smaller stage.

On the opening night *Jeux* merely confused the audience. The lack of virtuoso steps,

the inconclusive brevity of the work, the strange poses were all unfamiliar. As the curtain descended at the end of the ballet, there was half-hearted applause and a few whistles. Debussy made his disapproval public by standing in his box at the end of the ballet, refusing to applaud and stalking out of the theatre.

Dancers Schollar and Karsavina were puzzled by the ballet. Karsavina in particular found the rehearsals frustrating and Nijinsky's conception unclear. In her autobiography, *Theatre Street*, she wrote:

> *Nijinsky had no gift of precise thought, still less that of expressing his ideas in adequate words . . . Certainly at the rehearsals for* Jeux *he was at a loss to explain what he wanted of me . . . As I had to keep my head screwed on one side, both hands curled as one maimed from birth, it would have helped me to know what it was for. In ignorance of my purpose, I occasionally lapsed into my normal shape, and Nijinsky would begin to nourish a suspicion of my unwillingness to cooperate.*

Nijinsky was surprised and disappointed by the audience's response. According to an interview with Emile Delfin, he had not expected the audience to laugh at his "experiments in stylized gesture." The young dancer was, however, so concerned about the opening of "*Sacre*" less than a week later that he did not have time for reflection.

The critics were, for the most part, negative. Raoul Durand's Parisian gossip column in the *New York Review*, June 7, 1913, stated that someone in Paris suggested the ballet ought to have been called, "Prélude à l'aprés midi d'un jouer de tennis." *Le Bulletin de la Societé Musicale Independente* printed tongue-in-cheek rules for Russian tennis:

> *The game is played at night on flood-lit flowerbeds. There are only three players and the net is dispensed with; the tennis-ball is replaced by a football, and the use of the racket is forbidden. Hidden in a pit at the edge of the court, an orchestra accompanies the game. The purpose of this sport is to develop suppleness of the neck, wrists and ankles, and it has the blessing of the Academy of Medicine.*

Jeux was labeled a "succès de ridicule," novel and absurd, an example of Diaghilev's desire to astonish, nothing more. Its principal faults were the lack of beauty in the traditional ballet esthetic of lightness and rounded graceful lines, and the lack of emotion in the expressive movements. Typical of the first point of view is Lalo's review from *Le Temps* (3 June 1913):

> *Following the precedent of his version of the* Afternoon of a Faun, *Nijinsky imposes on the three youngsters . . . stiff and mechanical poses, angular and wizened gestures, geometrical of line, rude, jerky, willfully begun, as arbitrarily checked or broken, derived obviously from primitive Grecian vase paintings.* [*Although this is justified in the* Faun] *in* Jeux *it is without excuse. What have these rigid posturings, these sharpened silhouettes, this mincing play of arms and hand to do with the flirtation that is the beginning and the end of Nijinsky's action? In spite of his partisans, he stylizes nothing; he merely extracts an arbitrary system of his own. Willfully he chooses ugliness and freakishness instead of the demanded desired beauty.*

As to the blank faces, British critic Francis Toye summed up the objections in his review in the *London Graphics* (19 July 1913): "How can you aim at mere expressiveness

on the one hand, if you wish to banish emotion on the other hand . . . For what is the expressive but emotion? Art without emotion seems very much like a body without life."

Jeux was in many ways ahead of its time. Historically, ballet is the most conservative of performing arts. The artistic movements of Cubism and Futurism, although gaining acceptance in other disciplines, were slower to be absorbed in ballet. Also, the fact that *Jeux* premiered within a few days of "*Sacre*" placed the ballet at a disadvantage. The delicacy of the Debussy ballet was overshadowed by the pagan violence of the Stravinsky work. In the last days of rehearsal, "*Sacre*" took precedence over *Jeux*, and rehearsals were cut in order to finish the longer ballet.

This is especially unfortunate since there was much that was new and significant in *Jeux*. It was the first ballet to use modern man as a theme. The use of sports as a metaphor for the playful attitude in manners and society toward personal relations also set a precedent. Nijinsky, Bakst, and Debussy created a new atmosphere, neither exotic as in *Scheherazade* nor imaginary as in *Swan Lake*, but emotional, intimate and immediate.

Nijinsky, bored with the pretty, light superficiality of ballet, experimented with stylized movement based on the Aeginetan ideal of beauty he had incorporated in the "*Faun*" but moving in three-dimensional space. He further experimented by breaking balletic pantomime into small movements. Critics and his contemporaries accused him of anti-classicism and described his work as harsh, meagre and ugly. Years later, Fokine, writing an essay on Graham, condemned her plastic expression, flat feet, turned-in toes, arms raised with the elbows sticking out, half-clenched fists and unnatural movements. Although Fokine does not specifically name Nijinsky as the instigator of the new technique, the implications are clear.

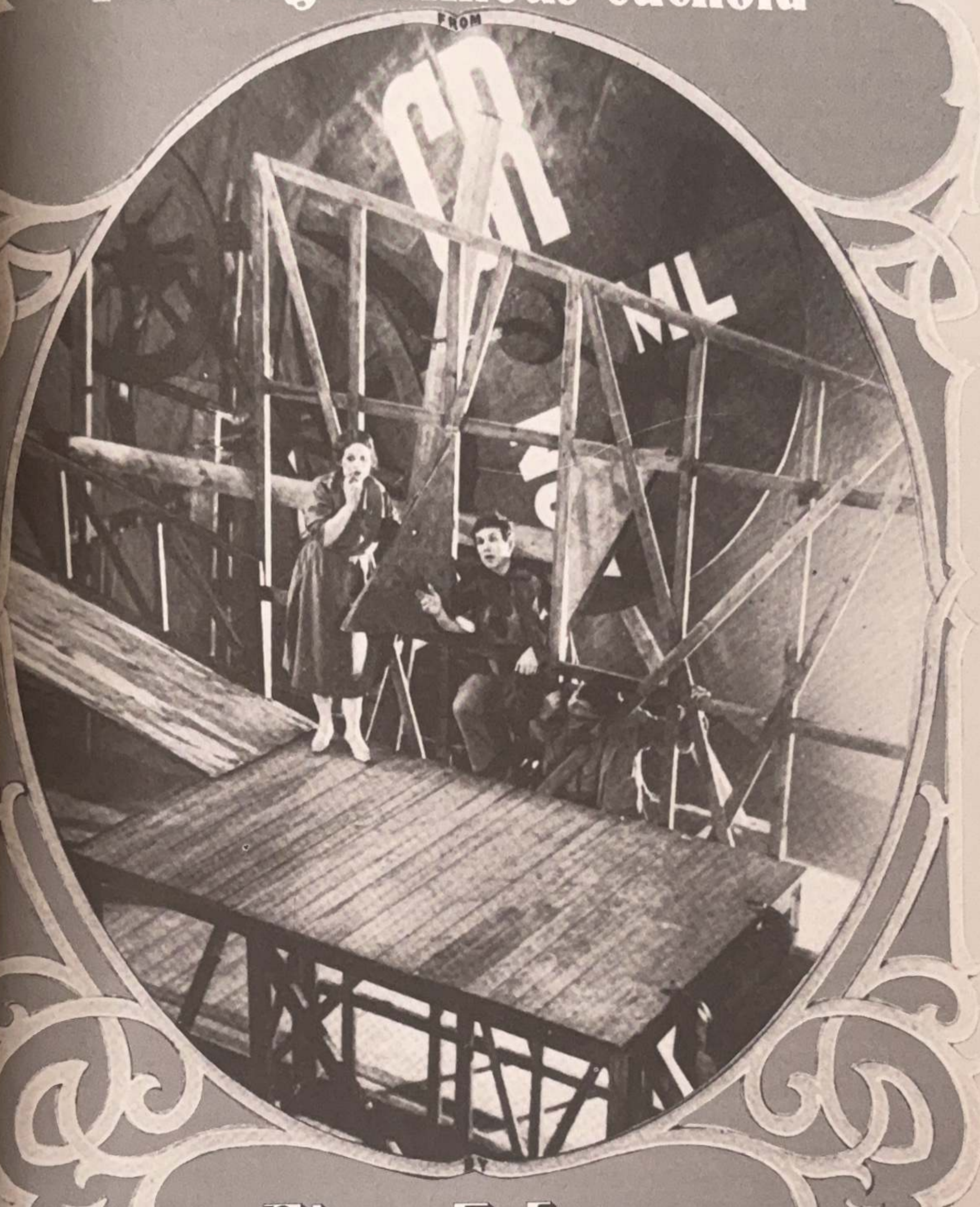
Nijinsky used the grotesque poses and fragmented movement not to destroy the past but to open new realms of possibility. Edwin Denby summed up Nijinsky's contributions in *Jeux* in his 1946 essay on the Nijinsky photographs:

> *. . . the awkward heaviness that* Jeux *exhibited and that was emphasized by [the dancers'] angular precision was not, I believe, an anti-classic innovation. It was an effort to make the dance more positive and to make clearer still the center of gravity of a movement, so that its extent, its force, its direction, its elevation can be appreciated, not incidentally merely, but integrally as drama. He not only extended the plastic range in dancing, but clarified it. And this is the way to give meaning to dancing; not second hand literary meaning, but direct meaning.*

Barbara Barker *teaches dance at the University of Texas at Austin.*

Meyerhold's

The Magnanimous Cuckold



Alma H. Law

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Meyerhold's production of Fernand Crommelynck's *Le Cocu Magnifique*, which opened at the Actor's Theatre in Moscow on April 25, 1922, marked a milestone in the history of the Russian theatre. It amply illustrated Vakhtangov's observation that, "every one of Meyerhold's productions created an entire period." In a single bold stroke, the Constructivist setting by Liubov Popova, with its combination of bare platforms, stairs, and ramps, revolutionized the art of scenic design. And for the first time, the production offered a stunning public demonstration of Meyerhold's new biomechanical system of actor training. As Aleksandr Fevralsky later wrote:

> *It was as if Meyerhold had . . . laid bare and presented with the greatest clarity the fundamental elements of scenic action. He created a production freed from the box–set, played out against the background of the theatre's fiery red brick walls, on a light, three-dimensional, stylized construction, and on the broad forestage in front of it. In spite of the economy of expressive means, or rather because of it, the emotional impact of the production was enormous . . . The acting was full of life's juices, and what's more, it was precisely organized by the splendid* mises en scène. *Movement became a support for the word, magnifying its meaning and its rhythmical tension.*

The closing of the RSFSR Theatre No. 1, in September 1921, suddenly left Meyerhold, after two years of intensive activity, without a place to work. At the time, it was a serious blow to his reputation. But the closing proved to be a blessing in disguise. Without question, Meyerhold was already aware by then that the era of "Revolutionary theatre" had passed. The Futurist movement in the theatre had reached a dead end. But what was to take its place?

Now, whether Meyerhold wanted to or not, he was forced to retreat and turn once more to work in a studio. As director of a newly-created State Higher Theatre Workshop (GVTM), Meyerhold gathered some one hundred young students and set to work training them as future actors and directors. The inclusion in the curriculum of two courses new to theatre schools—scene conducting and Biomechanics—plus the decision to develop in the GVTM Workshop the principles of scenic Constructivism gave some hint of the revolution Meyerhold was about to launch.

Meyerhold began work on the production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* in January 1922, almost immediately after Ivan Aksyonov, a poet and lecturer on drama at the Workshop, had translated it. Meyerhold's choice of this play, whose theme of jealous love seems so remote from the concerns of the Revolution, cannot easily be explained. Those who were working with him at the time recall Aksyonov's great enthusiasm for its boldness, and Meyerhold's own fascination with the play's paradoxical demonstration of the "logic of jealousy." Certainly the hours he and Aksyonov spent discussing how it might be staged played a decisive role.

Although written as a contemporary play, Crommelynck's "*Cuckold*" is very much rooted in the dramatic traditions of an earlier period. Divided into three acts, it tells the story of Bruno, a village poet, who is so obsessively in love with his wife, Stella, that he cannot believe in either her irrestibility to other men or in her faithfulness to him. Bruno's tragic downfall begins when he forces Stella to reveal her beauties to her cousin, Petrus, a friend of their youth. In a futile quest for her real lover, Bruno forces his wife to share her bed with every man in the village. Stella, true to her husband to the very end, finally runs off with the coarse Cowherd, from whom she extracts the promise that she will be allowed to remain a faithful wife.

This play about a modern day Othello could have been performed as either a grim tragedy or as an obscene bedroom farce. Meyerhold did neither. Instead he chose to take the basic situation, Bruno's obsessive jealousy, and carry it to the point of comic absurdity. Meyerhold even had Bruno (Igor Ilinsky) serve as his own Iago by making the scribe, Estrugo (Vasily Zaichikov), a mute character who mimes much of his dialog, thus forcing Bruno to speak for him.

Meyerhold cut Crommelynck's text both to shorten it (the production ran two hours, twenty–two minutes), and to eliminate some of the most suggestive lines. More significantly, he "neutralized" the lasciviousness of the text by throwing out virtually all of the stage directions. Meyerhold further distanced the play's context through the conscious stylization of the production. As the actors played their roles, they also undercut any direct identification with them. As Boris Alpers writes in his *Theatre of the Social Mask:*

> *Bruno . . . his face pale and motionless, stood before the audience and delivered his impassioned monologs in a single intonation, in a single manner of delivery, and with one and the same broad gestures. At the same time, the actor made fun of this Bruno by doing acrobatic tricks, belching, and comically rolling his eyes at critical moments . . .*

This dual role the actor played of both presenting and parodying his stage persona exemplified Meyerhold's new style of theatrical presentation. Yet it also had very powerful antecedents in his pre-Revolutionary interest in *commedia dell'arte*—just as the play's polarities of tragedy and farce appealed to Meyerhold's lifelong infatuation with the grotesque.

The Constructivist setting for *The Magnanimous Cuckold* was born in large part out of economic necessity. With no money at hand and little immediate prospect of a theatre in which to perform, Meyerhold needed some type of utilitarian set that could be erected anywhere, even out-of-doors, and that required neither trained technicians nor special machinery. As he later wrote:

> *With this production, we hoped to lay the foundation for a new form of theatrical presentation with no need for illusionistic settings or complicated props, making do with the simplest objects that came to hand and transforming a spectacle performed by specialists into an improvised performance that could be put on by workers in their leisure time.*

Meyerhold found the answer to what he was seeking in the work of the Constructivists—particularly the spatial apparatus designed by the Stenberg Brothers, Georgii and Vladimir, which he had seen at the memorable Constructivist exhibition in 1921—and in Liubov Popova's "preparatory investigations" for the 5 × 5 exhibition later that year. The anti-esthetic approach of the Constructivists, which replaced decoration with utility, made them a natural ally in Meyerhold's fight against the proponents of traditional theatrical decor. Meyerhold had worked with Popova and Vesnin in April 1921 on *Struggle and Victory,* an unrealized project for a mass spectacle. Now, he invited Popova to join the staff of his Theatre Workshop to teach "material formulation" (*veshchestvennoe oformlenie*).

The actual creation of the set for "*Cuckold*" went through a number of transformations. Meyerhold first approached the Stenberg brothers and Konstantin Medunetsky, but this collaboration broke down following some preliminary discussions. He then turned the planning of the set design over to his own Theatre Workshop, where according to Aksyonov, it was worked out in open discussion. There would be two mountings of unequal height

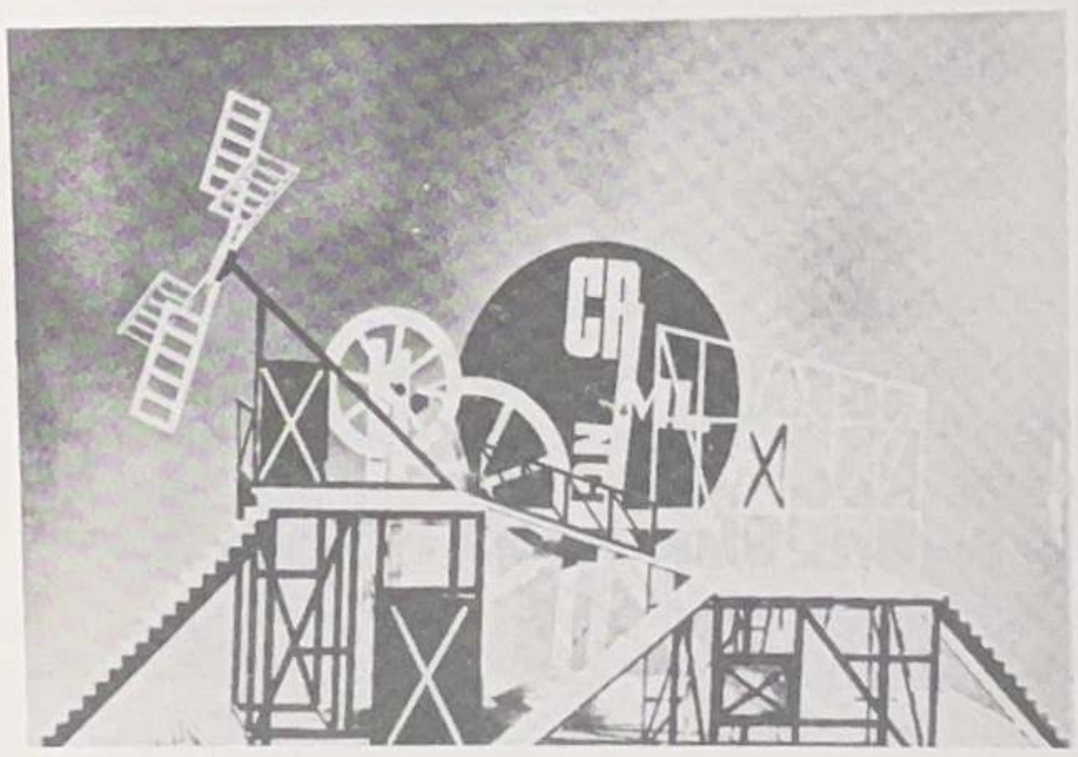
with a platform on top of each, and with stairs leading up to them. The left mounting would have two doors in it and the right two windows, as indicated in the dialog. There would also be a slide. At Aksyonov's suggestion, supports and diagonal struts were added. Meyerhold himself directed that the doors be revolving ones, such as he had used in his production of Blok's *The Unknown Woman* (1914), because they offered more possibilities for "play" by the actors.

The making of the maquette was assigned to Vladimir Liutse. At first Popova refused to take a direct hand in designing the construction because she was reluctant to incur the censure of her fellow Constructivists who had, after all, proclaimed the death of all art, including theatre. However, when she saw the result of Liutse's work, she was horrified. Feeling responsible for the output of the Workshop, she stepped in during the final week and reworked the design herself, changing the proportions and the placement of the diagonal struts. She also changed the direction of the stairs and the slide so that they were in profile, rather than facing the audience. And finally, she enlarged the wheels and added the framework behind the right mounting.

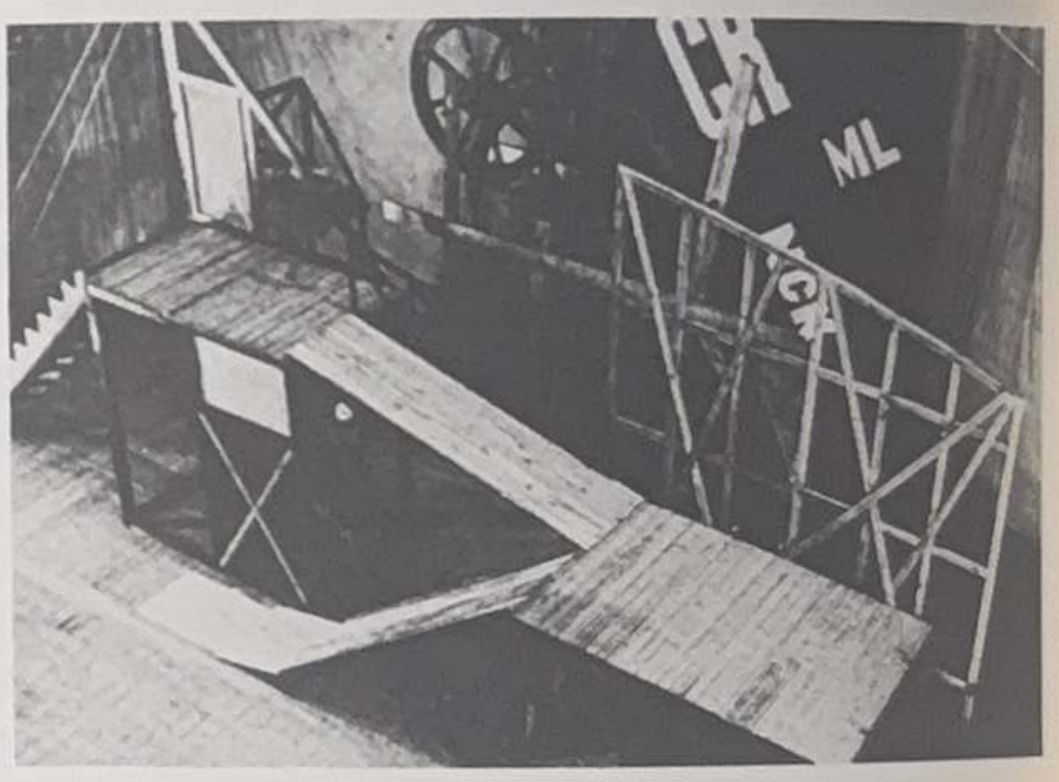
In its final form, (figs. 1 & 2) the construction, which was placed frontally, parallel to the line of the stage, consisted of the two basic mountings joined by a bridge to form a single entity. The bridge, which had a railing along its back, went from the forward part of the left platform to the rear part of the right platform. The slide ran from the right platform down to the floor where it ended in a trampoline placed on the floor. By means of the slide, the actors could descend, either sitting or standing, from the right platform (fig. 3). The passageway between the two mountings was used both as a playing area and for exits and entrances. The two stairways (right and left) were located on the end faces of the two platforms.

The lower part of the left mounting was called the gallery. The face of it was divided by a vertical support. To the left of the support was an open entry, to the right a revolving door (fig. 4). A triangular framework at the rear of the platform on the left mounting served as the point of attachment for the wings of the watermill. The door to Stella's room was located in the lower left hand corner of the triangle. Behind the door was a small service platform.

The lower part of the right mounting was called the cage. A support divided the face side of it into two unequal halves. The left, narrower one contained a watermill window. The window was traversed by a diagnoal support running from upper right to lower left

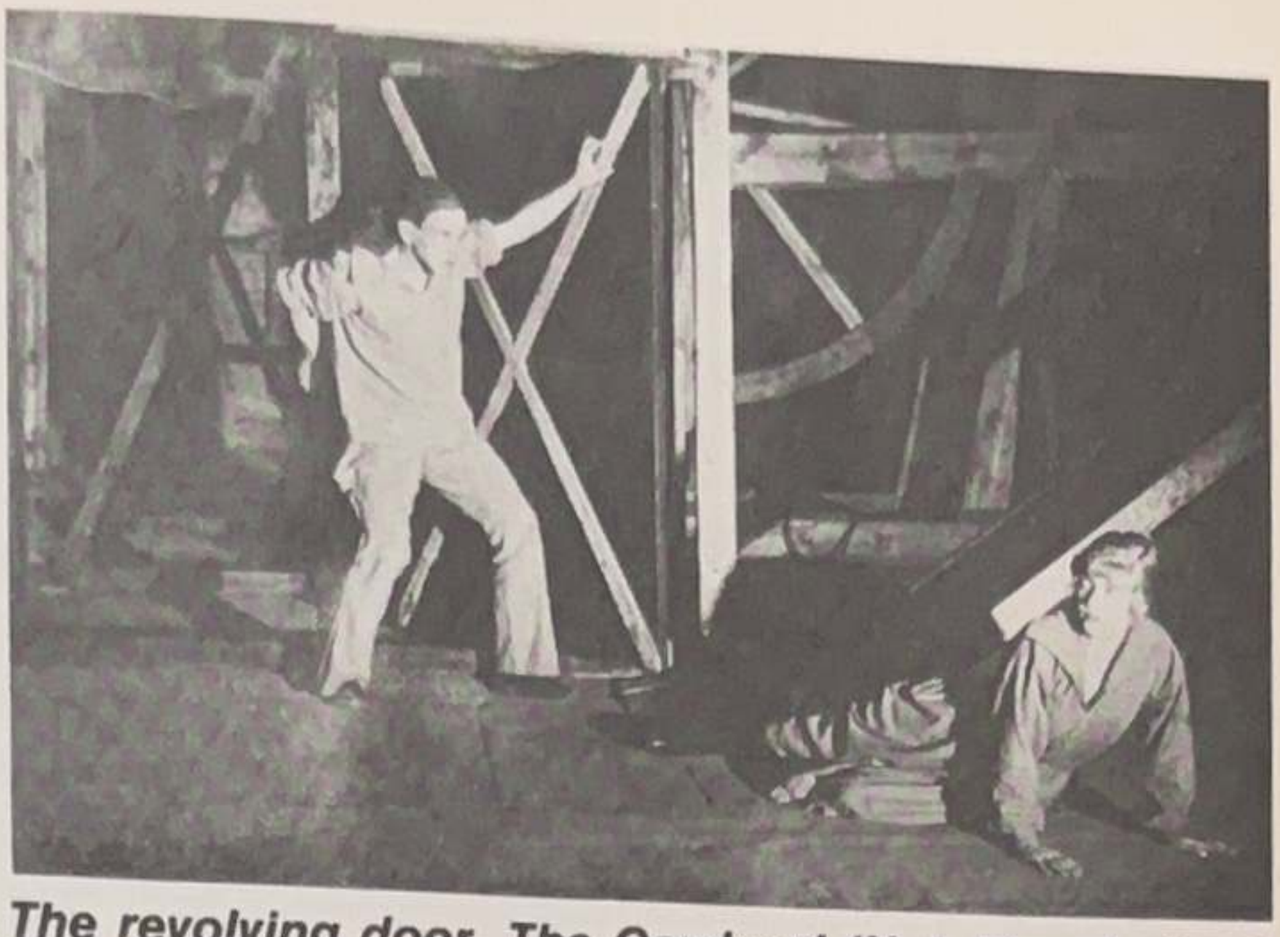


Liubov Popova's Constructivist set for The Magnanimous Cuckold.



Top view of set for The Magnanimous Cuckold.

Bruno (I. Ilinsky) slides down the slide. Stella (M. Babanova) follows him. Act I.



The revolving door. The Cowherd (N. I. Bogolyubov) leaps out from the door. Stella (M. Babanova) backs away. Act I.

Bruno (I. Ilinsky) and Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) at the lower window. Bruno sits on the crossbeam to the right of the window, hanging by his arms, his feet outstretched on the floor. Estrugo kneels at his feet. Bruno: "Estrugo, I am more discouraged than the birds say." Meyerhold called this scene "Christ and Mary." Act III.

The pantomime serenade, Act III. Stella (Zinaida Raikh), Bruno (I. Ilinsky). (1928)

on which the window pivoted, forming two triangles. The cage, window, and passageways on the right, wider side of the right mounting were all used for entrances, exits, and as an acting area (fig. 5).

The framework attached to the rear of the right mounting consisted of vertical, horizontal, and diagnoal supports. It rose above the platform and extended slightly beyond the sides of the mounting. Above the platform, slightly to the left and at about the height of a person, was a window with an open passage under it. The window opened in the same manner as the lower window, but from upper left to the lower right instead. A ladder

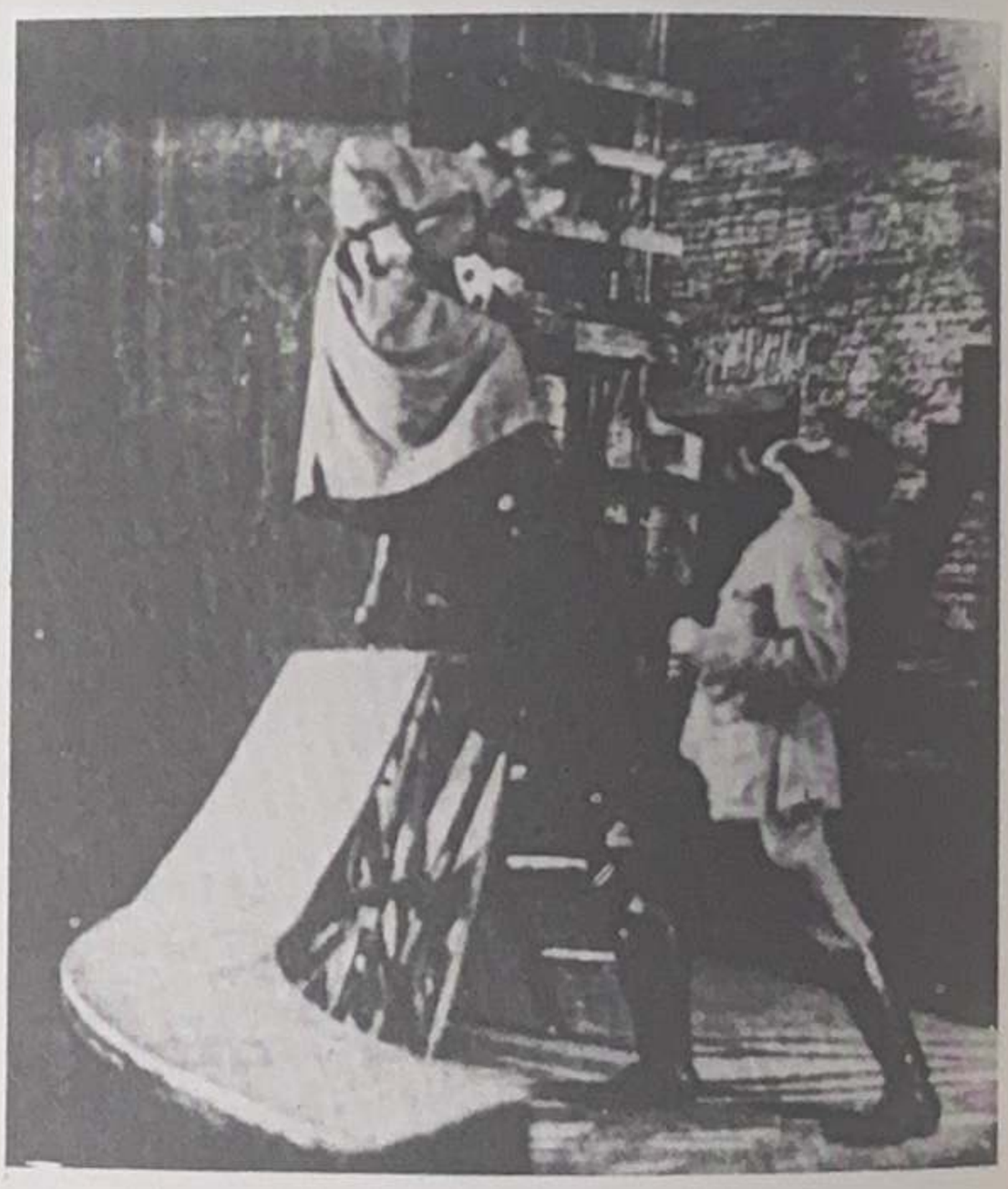
was located behind the framework leading up to the window. It was used for entrances and exits from the rear of the framework and was integral to certain scenes, as, for example, the pantomime serenade in Act III (fig. 6).

Behind the construction and at some distance from it, a service mounting was located for supporting the three wheels: the smallest, a red wheel above the left platform; an unpainted, medium-sized wheel behind it; and beyond them, the largest one, a black disc, that extended beyond the framework at the right. On the black disc, in white-painted Latin letters, were the consonants making up the last name of the playwright: CR–ML–NCK.

A curved bench was placed in front of the left mounting in such a way that there was a free passage between them. The right, forward end of the bench was of normal height. The left end sloped upward to form a short "millrace" with a small pedestal–platform at the top. The actors could mount the pedestal by means of a little ladder which was not visible to the audience at the left end of the bench (fig. 7).

A square stool the exact height of the right end of the bench served as Estrugo's writing desk. It was placed, along with the black cylinder containing Estrugo's pen and parchment, near the right portal. When Estrugo had to write, he carried the desk over and placed it at the right end of the bench. He would sit on the bench and place the desk in front of himself (fig. 8).

The entire supporting framework for the mountings, both revolving doors, and the window panels were painted black. The ladder behind the framework, the stairway to the pedestal, the bench and writing desk supports were all red. Boot black and rouge substituted for paint, which was in very short supply at the time. Lacquer for attaching false beards was used as a fixative. All the remaining parts of the construction were of new wood left unpainted.



Stella (M. Babanova) runs up to the pedestal of the bench. The Count (M. A. Tereshkovich) tries to grab her by the legs. She kicks out at him, saying "You werewolf!" Act I.

Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) sits on the end of the bench and bends over his writing desk. Notice the cylinder for his writing materials and the oversized pen. During performances, an ostrich plume would be attached to the stick extending from the end of the pen. It would bob up and down as Estrugo wrote. Seated to the left of Estrugo is The Mayor (A. A. Temerin) and to his right is Bruno (I. Ilinsky). Act I.

In her quest for "utilitarian suitability," Liubov Popova also designed a simple blue costume for the performers in the production. Intended as the prototype of a "work–uniform" (*prozodezhda*) for actors, it consisted of a loose fitting V-neck shirt with long sleeves, which was worn with flared jodhpur–like trousers by the men and a calf-length skirt by the women (figs. 9 & 10). To this basic costume were added various identifying details: red pompoms, reminiscent of a clown's costume, around Bruno's neck; the Mayor's emblem—a soft handkerchief made of white cotton with a red circle and black cross strips sewn to it; aprons of stiff oilcloth for the Nursemaid and the Village Women; a cape of soft black oilcloth for Stella. The Count also carried a stick and monocle. All the performers wore regular street shoes, except for Stella who wore calf-length high heeled boots, the Mayor—military boots—and Estrugo—ski boots with turned up toes suggestive of a jester.

The actors wore neither wigs nor heavy stage make-up. For his role as Estrugo, however, Zaichikov created his own mask by combing his hair in an exaggerated fashion and "putting on" an expression of dull-wittedness which he wore throughout the performance (see fig. 8).

Properties, also designed by Popova, were kept to a bare minimum. Many of them, such as Estrugo's writing equipment and the nursemaid's dustpan and shoe brush, were of deliberately exaggerated proportions (fig. 11). Some objects—for example, the lock and key Bruno and Estrugo used to lock Stella up at the beginning of Act II—were simply

Bruno (I. Ilinsky). Around the neck of the basic prozodezhda *were tied two red pompoms.*

Stella (M. Babanova). The basic prozodezhda *worn by the women. It was made from a coarse, bright blue fabric.*

Bruno (I. Ilinsky) carries Stella (M. Babanova) on his shoulders as he walks around the forestage gesturing and delivering his monolog:: "If you only knew how much I have suffered! . . ." The Nurse (Z. Dobriner) follows after, brushing his trousers with a brush. Notice the oversized brush and dust pan. Also, the "primavera" in Stella's hand. Act I.

"The love scene under the bridge." Bruno (I. Ilinsky) says to Stella (Zinaida Raikh): "Take off your mask, take it off, so that I can read the seductive deceit on your face." Act II. 1928.

mimed into existence as part of pantomime etudes. The primavera Bruno sends to Stella in Act I, instead of being a flower, was a red, wooden child's rattle of a kind very popular in the 1920's. The hand-held mask Stella wears (Act II) was made of rectangular and triangular pieces of cardboard painted red, white, black, and gray (fig. 12). The larger-than-life and consciously non-realistic nature of the properties served to reinforce the production's atmosphere of child-like innocence, which so startlingly undercut at every turn the erotic content of Crommelynck's play.

The set that resulted from the collaboration between Meyerhold and Popova was truly revolutionary. Nothing like it had been seen on the stage before. It was light-years away from the cozy interior of the old watermill in which Crommelynck located the action of his play. Yet all of the essential elements were retained: the doors, windows, stairs. Furthermore, the wheels and sails, as well as the slide suggesting a chute for sacks of grain, inevitably evoked strong associations with the watermill. In that respect, ironically enough, as Edward Braun has pointed out, ". . . it demonstrated the inherent contradiction in the term 'Theatrical Constructivism.' "

At the same time, the construction was so perfectly thought out that all of its components were constantly drawn into the actors' play. It is this kinetic quality that made the set so remarkable, and which is so difficult to appreciate. But as Elena Rakitina rightly observes:

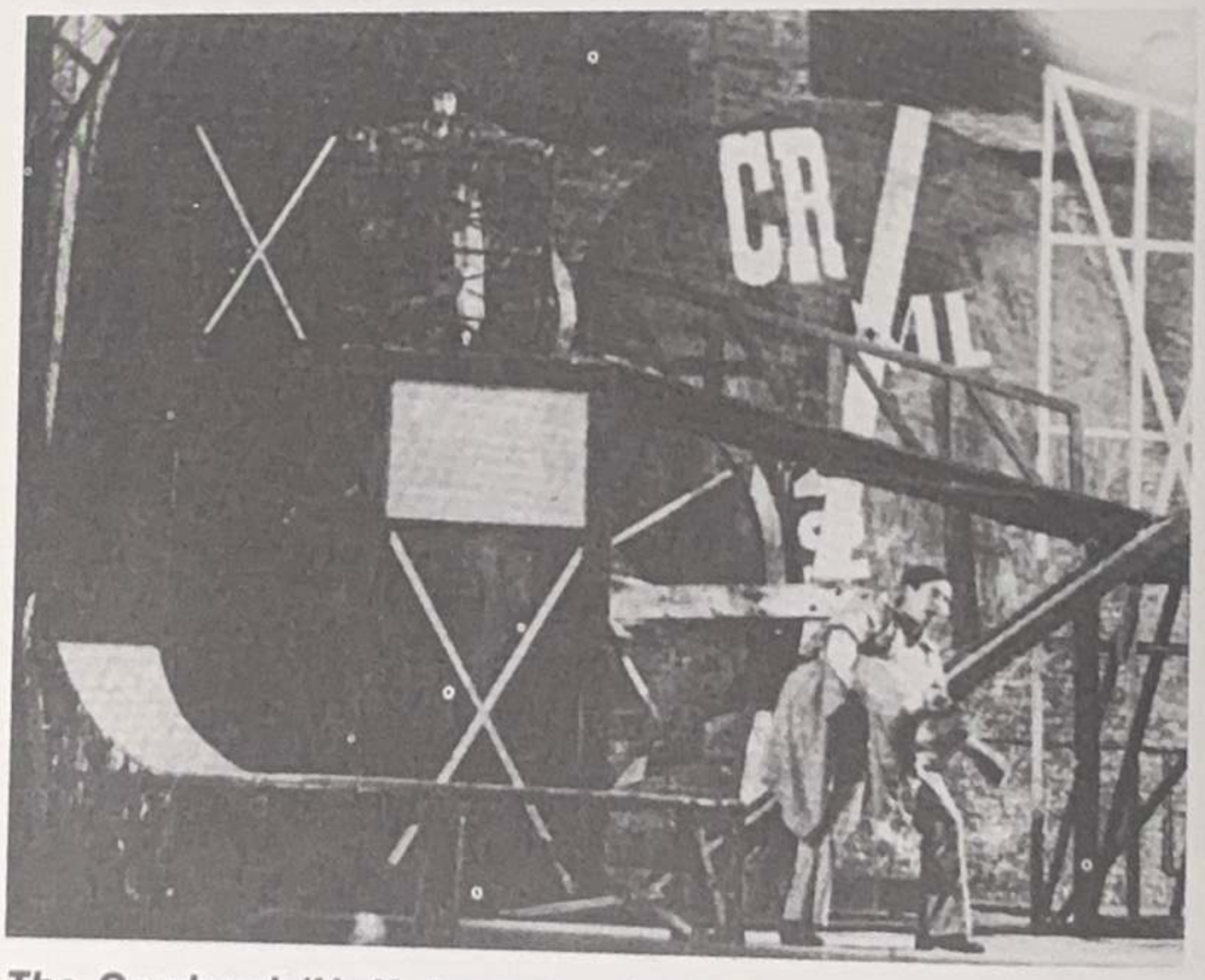
> *We will never understand* [*the set*] *correctly if we regard it statically. It is not a picture to be admired. Rather, it is a kind of machine that takes on a living existence in the course of the production.*

The revolving doors, for example, were constantly called into play, spinning, slamming, causing characters to appear and disappear in a flash. Petrus' arrival and the Mayor's departure in Act I, for instance, launches a whole cascade of "play with the door," turning the moment into a miniature vaudeville act. Taking his leave, the Mayor bows, hitting the

right half of the door with his rear and causing the left half of the door to strike Petrus who is standing in front of it. Petrus flies forward landing on the bench, hitting Estrugo who is sitting on it. Estrugo lands on the floor and Petrus remains sitting on the bench. Again, the Mayor unconsciously presses against the right half of the door, thus causing the left half to strike him on the nose. Grabbing his nose, he goes through the door. Bruno runs through the right half of the door after him. The Mayor appears in the left half. They rotate three times, each in turn bowing in front of the door as he appears.

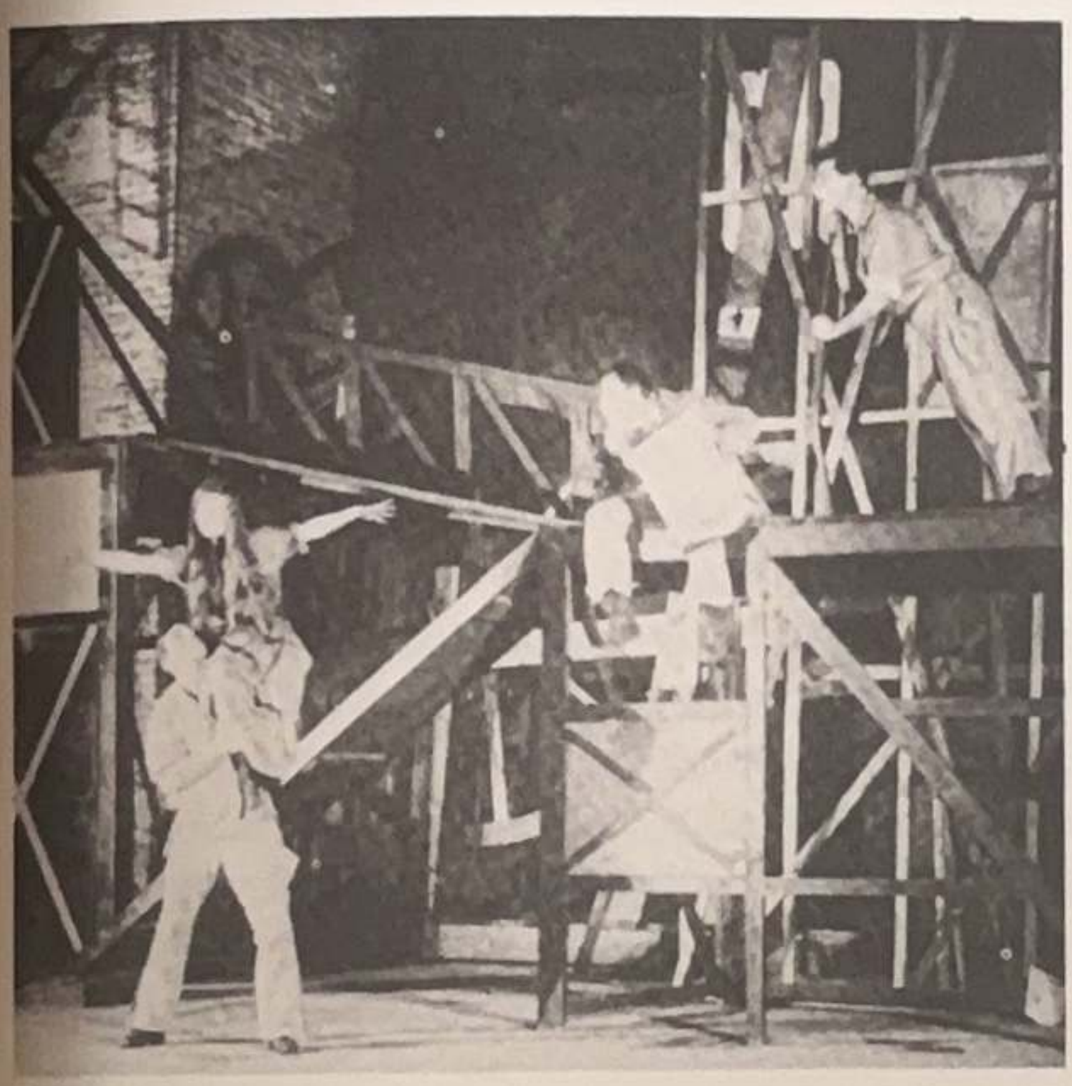
There was not a single neutral element in the construction. Even the wheels and watermill sails contributed to the production's unity by turning at crucial moments like the magnified gears of some huge machine. Each was designed to turn both clockwise and counterclockwise, independently or in any combination according to a carefully worked out score. As Popova noted later in a defense of her Constructivist design, "Their movements and speeds were intended to underscore and emphasize the kinetic meaning of each moment of action." For example, in Act I, when The Cowherd seizes Stella in order to carry her off (fig. 13), the red and unpainted wheels begin turning counterclockwise, stopping only when she is released. And when Bruno, expounding on Stella's beauty, detects a spark of desire in Petrus' eye, he gives his friend a resounding slap. As if triggered by the sound of the blow, the watermill starts to turn. It continues turning until Bruno, his jealousy again temporarily under control, invites Petrus to live with them.

As the tempo of the production accelerates, the wheels and sails turn more and more frequently. By Act III, they are almost constantly called into play, now as accompaniment to the "Chechotka" (a kind of tap dance) danced by the young men waiting in line to share Stella's bed, now as visual reinforcement when the village women, mistaking the masked Bruno for another one of their husbands, begin beating him (fig. 14). When the production opened in the spring of 1922, the music for the dancing and for the serenade scenes in Act III was played on the piano. However, according to Aleksandr Fevralsky, that fall Meyerhold introduced a jazz band to accompany the dancing of the Chechotka and to entertain the audience during intermission. Finally, when the Cowherd steps in and



The Cowherd (N. K. Losev) seizes Stella (M. Babanova) and starts to carry her off: "You are lighter in my arms than in my heart." Stella: "Let me go, you peasant!" Act I.

The village women, mistaking the masked Bruno (I. Ilinsky) for one of their husbands, begin beating him. Act III.



Stella (M. Babanova) leaps on The Cowherd's (N. K. Losev's) shoulder. Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov), seated, and Bruno (I. Ilinsky), standing, watch in amazement. Act III, finale.

announces to Stella, "Willingly or unwillingly, alive or dead, you'll be mine!" and Stella shouts, "No! No! You wild beast!" and slaps him, everything begins to turn: the black and unpainted wheels in a clockwise direction, the red wheel and the sails in the opposite. Only when Stella leaps on the Cowherd's shoulder and they exit (fig. 15) do the red and unpainted wheels and the sail stop turning, leaving the black wheel, like a cloud of lingering doubt in Bruno's mind, to go on revolving until the lights extinguish, marking the end of the performance.

Above all, it was as an instrument for actors' play (ie., "work" in Constructivist terms) that the construction was most successful. As Aksenov pointed out, "With this mounting it was possible to play as with a fan or a cape." By defining and structuring the spatial limits of the playing area, the construction aided the actors in much the same way that a properly designed machine enables a worker to perform more efficiently. As a showcase

for demonstrating the efficacy of the Biomechanical exercises Meyerhold was then developing in his Theatre Workshop, the construction proved ideal.

Stripped of the theoretical trappings that Meyerhold borrowed from Taylorism and reflexology, Biomechanics was simply a system of actor training intended to teach all of the basic skills necessary to move properly on the stage. It was born out of a need in the post-Revolutionary period to find ways to quickly and inexpensively prepare large numbers of performers for the Proletarian theatre troupes. By placing the emphasis on movement rather than feeling, Biomechanics was also Meyerhold's answer to the Moscow Art Theatre school of actor training, which demanded that the performer must first evoke an emotion or its equivalent before he could correctly convey its physical manifestations.

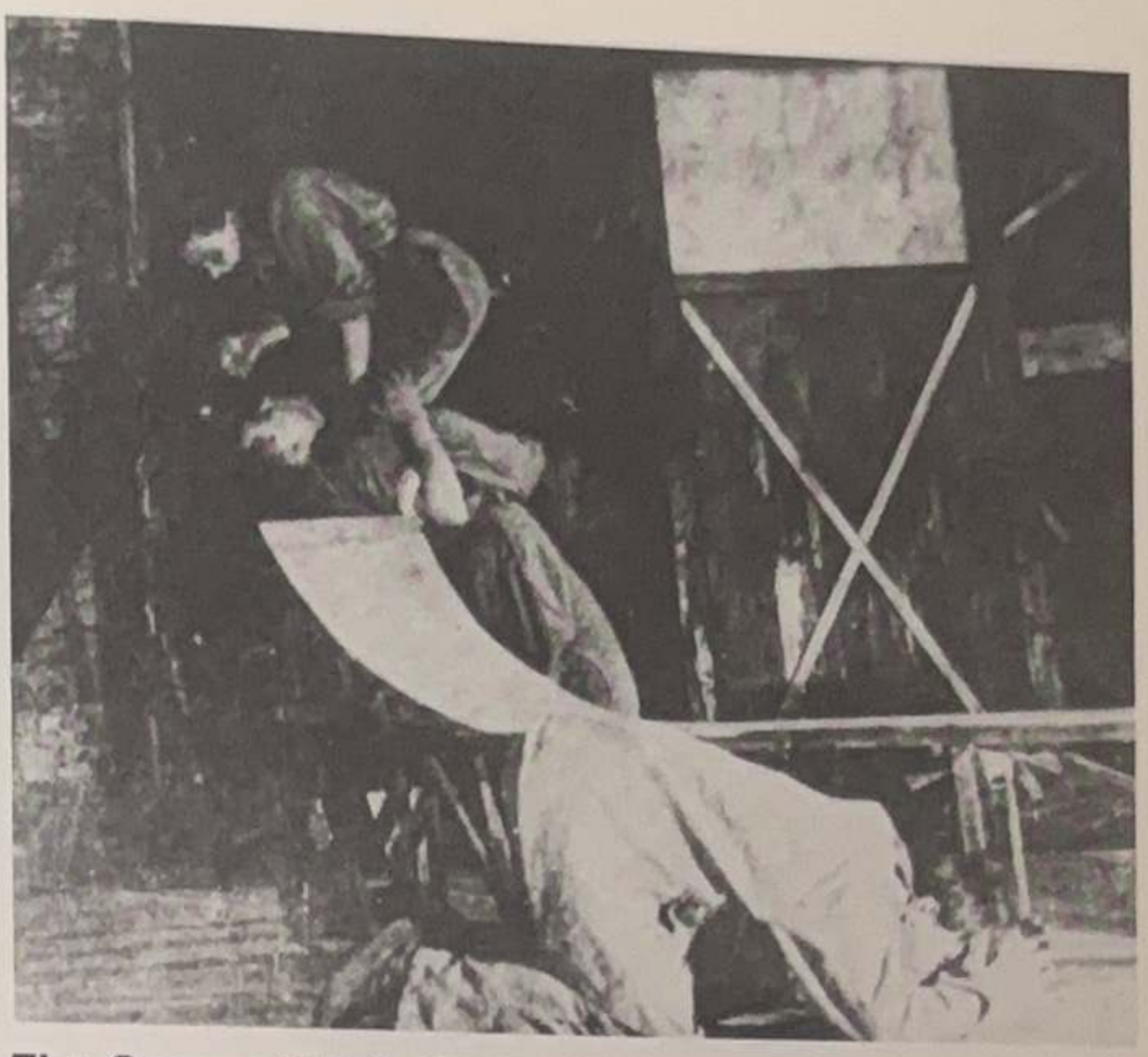
Meyerhold's preoccupation with some form of physical training for actors began well before the Revolution. As early as 1906, he was already attacking the naturalistic theatre in his writings for its failure to insist on some type of physical training for actors. For a course in stage movement at his Studio in St. Petersburg in 1914, he devised, together with Vladimir Solovyov, a series of sixteen etudes, each of which was to teach certain principles of scenic movement to the future actor. These etudes, drawn from a variety of theatrical traditions, including *commedia dell'arte,* the Oriental and Elizabethan theatres, laid the foundation for what later became Biomechanics. As one of Meyerhold's students recalled:

> *Meyerhold began with the technique of stage movement, gesture, and the control of objects on the stage. The exercises developed into etudes, and from etudes into pantomimes. Thus, from the exercise, "Shooting the arrow," the etude "Hunting" evolved and from it a pantomime which was used to train each "generation" of the Studio.*

Over the years, the number of Biomechanical exercises varied from seven to more than twenty, the average being around a dozen. In selecting and developing the exercises, Meyerhold drew not only on his earlier etudes, but also on a wide variety of other sources ranging from gymnastics and boxing to the circus and music hall. He never regarded Biomechanics as an end in itself, but only as a means to enable the actor to have complete control over his body. For a production as propulsively physicalized as "*Cuckold,*" this was essential. The acting demanded acrobatic virtuosity and split second timing as a whirlwind of blows, leaps, falls, and somersaults all but swallowed up Crommelynck's text.

Meyerhold incorporated one of his most famous Biomechanical etudes, "The Leap on the Chest" (which Meyerhold claimed he had learned from Giovanni di Grasso, the Sicilian actor) (fig. 16), directly into his production, using it as a climactic moment in the scene between Bruno and the Cooper (Le Jeune Homme d'Oostkerque) in Act II. The Cooper has come to Bruno for a love letter to send to a girl with whom he has fallen in love. Gradually, Bruno realizes the girl in question may be his own wife, Stella. He slowly circles the Cooper, then suddenly he gives him a slap. Simultaneously the unpainted wheel begins turning clockwise and the Cooper emits a steady, deep sound. Bruno, slightly frightened by the sound, steps back. After a few words to Estrugo, he delivers a second slap. Again, the Cooper emits the same steady, deep sound. In confusion, Bruno circles the Cooper, delivers another slap; again the same sound. Then in quick succession, there follow a fourth slap, the sound, and a fifth slap. This is followed by the Cooper's exit through the left half of the revolving door. As Bruno turns and looks at the door, the Cooper comes through the right half of the door. He looks at Bruno, slowly goes up to him, and in a flash leaps on his chest, raising his fist as if to strike Bruno on the jaw (fig. 17).

Biomechanical etude, "The Leap on the Chest."



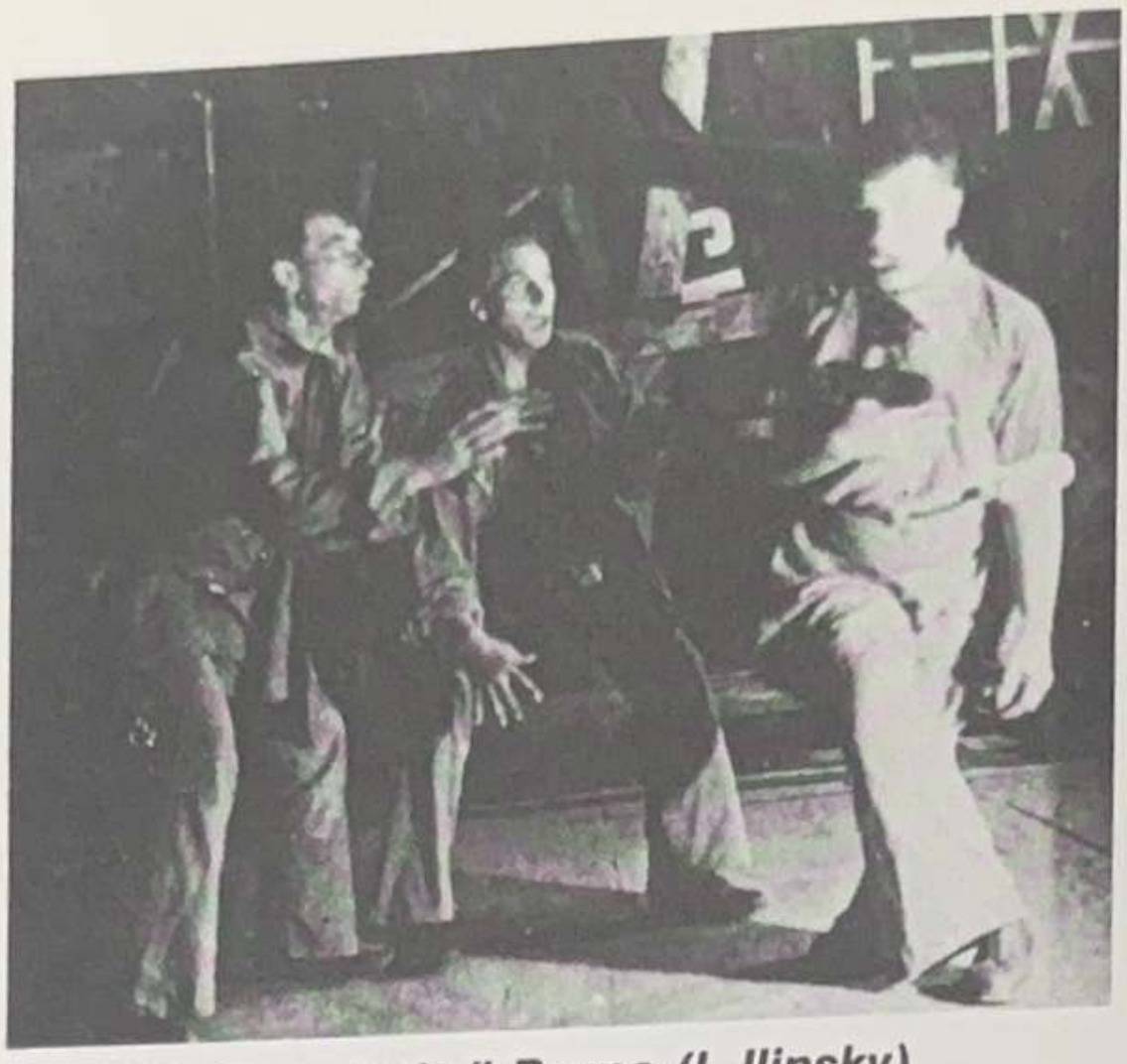
The Cooper (Ju. I. Goltsev) comes through the right half of the door. He looks at Bruno (I. Ilinsky), slowly goes up to him, and in a flash leaps on his chest, raising his fist as if to strike Bruno on the jaw. Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) crouches on the floor. Bruno: "Excuse me. It's an attack of lyricism." The Cooper slides to the floor. Act II.

This Biomechanical etude is followed by a "fainting etude" in which Bruno first staggers (fig. 18), then falls on his face, then on his back, with Estrugo catching him each time. Bruno next staggers to the bench and lies down; saying "Bury me!", he crosses himself and places his hands on his chest as though dead (fig. 19).

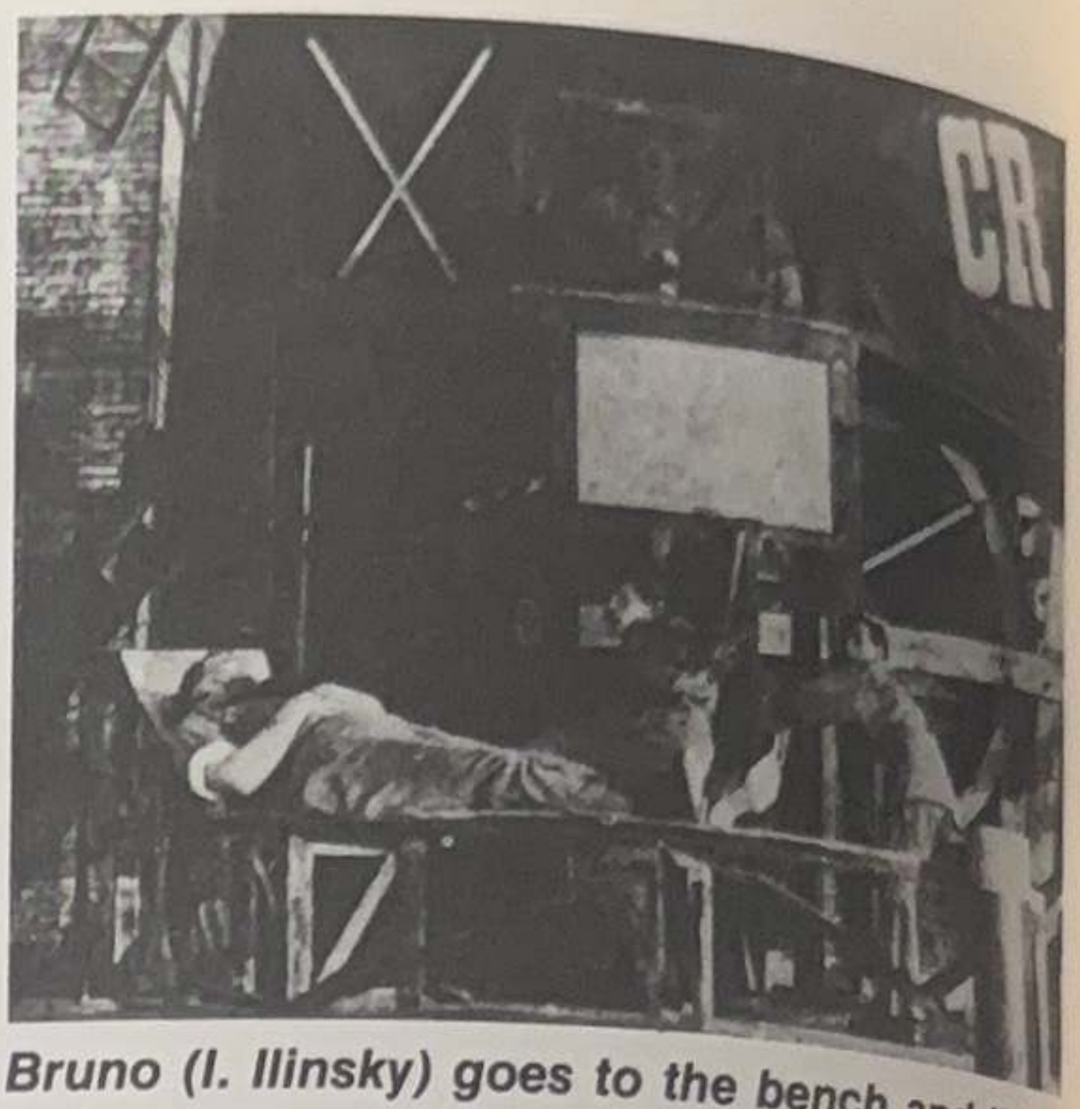
Much of the stage activity that Meyerhold wove into his production was clearly rooted in the traditions of *commedia dell'arte,* or in modern day slapstick comedy. Bruno, for example, in extolling Stella's virtues to Petrus in Act I, throws himself at his friend with open arms. They embrace. Bruno steps back and again throws himself at Petrus. Once more Bruno steps back. He starts to throw himself at Petrus a third time. Abruptly he stops, leaving Petrus with his arms outstretched in expectation. Finally, completely unable to express his feelings, Bruno suddenly throws himself at Petrus, hitting him in the stomach with his head. Knocked off balance, Petrus lands on the bench (fig. 20).

Estrugo, in particular, was the constant butt of comic action used to physicalize the expression of emotion. In Act I, as Estrugo sits on the end of the bench bending over his writing desk taking down the Mayor's proclamation (which Bruno is dictating), both Bruno and the Mayor alternately slap the scribe on the back each time they speak in order to express their mounting delight. Finally, both the Mayor and Bruno seize Estrugo, Bruno grabbing his shoulders and the Mayor his jacket. They rock him back and forth with his face pushed down on the writing table as Bruno tells of Stella's beauty: "Feet white as snow, knees pink and expressive . . ." (fig. 21).

Again in Act I, Bruno punctuates his monolog (directed at a silent Estrugo) in which he speculates on Stella's faithfulness with one physical action after another. The scene merits description in detail as it is so characteristic of the great wealth of comic action Meyerhold wove into his production: As Stella and the Nursemaid take Petrus to his room, Bruno, tormented by the laughter he can hear, sits astride the bench staring down at it,



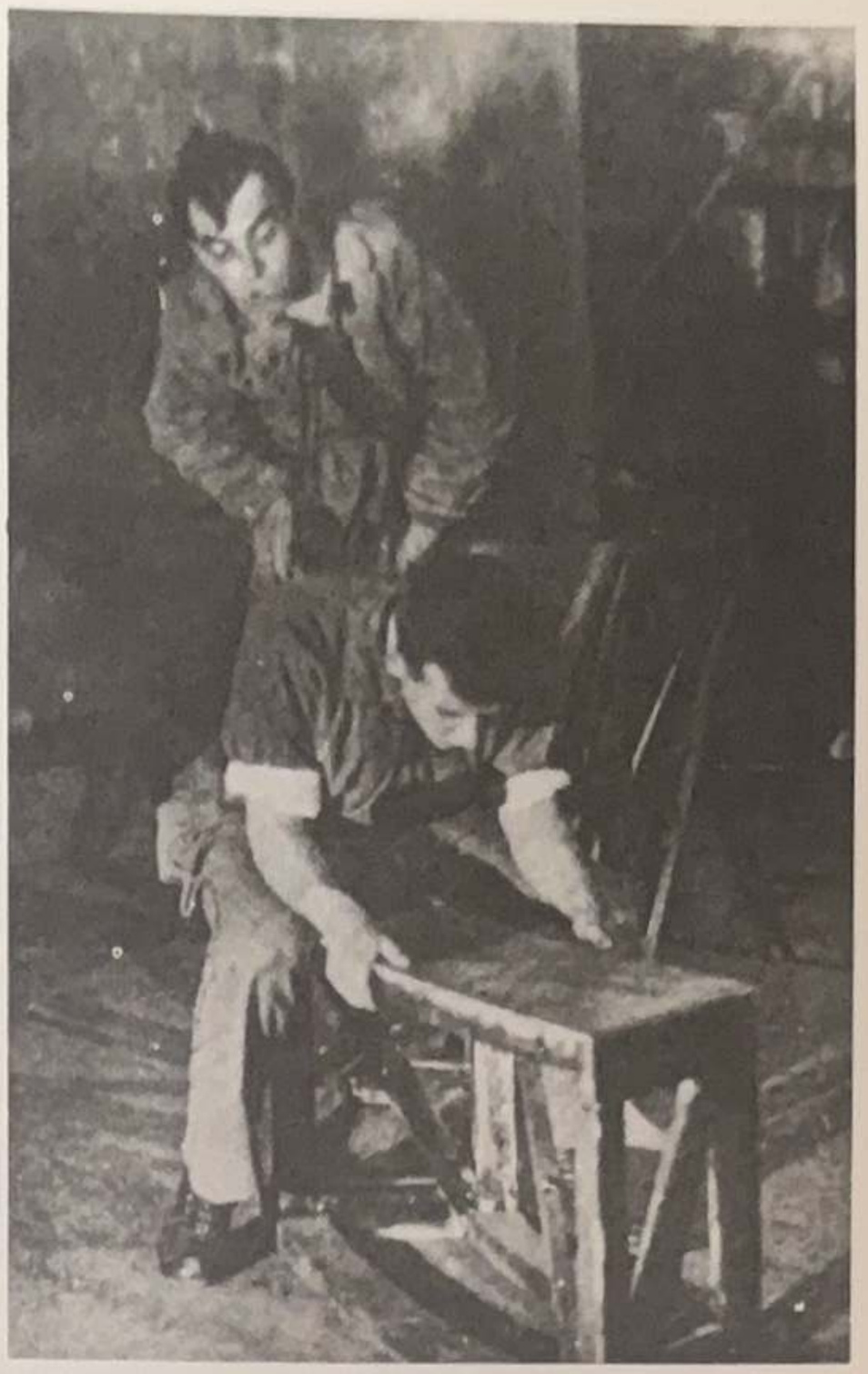
The "fainting etude." Bruno (I. Ilinsky) staggers, starts to fall on his face, then on his back, each time Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) catching him. Startled, the Cooper (Ju. I. Goltsev) center, rushes off. Act II.



Bruno (I. Ilinsky) goes to the bench and lies down saying: "Bury me!" He crosses himself and places his hands on his chest as though dead. Act II.

Bruno (I. Ilinsky) unable to express his feelings, suddenly throws himself at Petrus (N. V. Karabanov), hitting him in the stomach with his head. Knocked off balance, Petrus lands on the bench. Stella (M. Babanova) looks on, laughing. Act I.

The Mayor (A. A. Temerin) and Bruno (I. Ilinsky) rock Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) back and forth as the Cowherd (N. K. Losev) looks on. Bruno tells of Stella's beauty: "feet like snow, knees pink and expressive . . ." Act I.



Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) steps up on the bench and looks over Bruno's (I. Ilinsky) shoulder to see what he is staring at. Act I.

lost in thought. Estrugo enters, approaches Bruno and looks over his shoulder to see what he is staring at. Estrugo circles around the bench, steps up on it, and looks again (fig. 22). He next goes around in front of Bruno. He bends over and once more looks at the spot where Bruno is staring. Bruno finally notices him and, pointing his finger at the end of the bench, indicates that the scribe should sit down. Estrugo doesn't understand. He again bends over and looks at the spot where Bruno is pointing. He raises his head and looks at Bruno in bewilderment.

Bruno slaps the end of the bench with his palm, saying, "Estrugo, sit here." Estrugo carefully sits in mid-air just beyond the end of the bench facing Bruno. "No, here," Bruno repeats, indicating the end of the bench. Estrugo warily sits down on the very edge. As he does so, Bruno moves back on the bench saying, "Closer." Estrugo moves closer and Bruno again moves back saying, "Shhh, closer." Again Estrugo moves closer and a third time Bruno moves back saying, "Closer!" Estrugo again obeys. As he does so, Bruno shakes his fist at him shouting, "Hold it!" Frightened, Estrugo falls forward on his stomach, covering his head and miming a pounding motion with his fists. Bruno says, "Shh . . . silence . . ." A pause.

Estrugo slowly raises his head and looks at Bruno. Bruno yells, "Are you going to be quiet?" (Bear in mind that Estrugo has not said a word.) Grabbing Estrugo's head, he energetically pushes it back down on the bench again yelling, "Will you be quiet?" As Bruno continues—"Tell me, is Stella faithful to me or not?"—he traces a question mark on Estrugo's back with his finger. Bruno goes on, now punctuating each phrase by hitting Estrugo on the back with his right hand. He concludes, "Faithful? Prove it!"

Estrugo raises his head. "You can't prove it," Bruno says, grabbing Estrugo's head and pushing it down again. Estrugo mimes "banging" with his fist. "Will you swear to that? Swear." Estrugo raises his head and, trying to speak, makes some inarticulate noises. "You don't dare," Bruno says. Waving his finger at Estrugo's mouth, he goes on, "He

confesses . . . If you don't confess, in any case, admit that one can doubt her . . . That is already too much." Now shouting at Estrugo, "Don't dare to defend her. Shhh. Silence . . .!" Bruno pushes Estrugo's head down between his (Bruno's) knees. Estrugo waves his hands in protest. Bruno grabs Estrugo's hands by the wrists and pushes them against his spine. His arms restrained, Estrugo continues moving his hands until Bruno holds them down as well. Finally, only Estrugo's little finger is wiggling. Bruno stops it too.

Bruno leans with his left elbow on Estrugo's back as he continues his monolog. Estrugo, his left arm freed from Bruno's grasp, drops to the side. He reaches around and scratches his rear. Bruno watches Estrugo's hand closely. "He seems to you an honorable man, in control of himself," Bruno continues. "That's a good sign." Estrugo stops scratching. Suddenly Bruno jumps up from the bench and shouts, "Why do you always lie?"

Now the "play with the stomach spasms" begins. Bruno falls back on the bench, his head at the foot of the "millrace" saying, "I'm sick." Estrugo moves forward and puts his ear to Bruno's stomach. As Bruno continues his monolog, Estrugo moves away from Bruno and, resuming his former position, puts his head face down on the bench. Bruno sits up. Leaning over, he speaks right in Estrugo's ear, pushing hin toward the end of the bench at the conclusion of each phrase. After the third "push," Bruno says "Estrugo" and hits him on the shoulders so that he falls on his back on the floor.

Bruno jumps up, crosses in front of Estrugo and shouts to the audience, "I am a cuckold!" (fig. 23). Bruno calls Stella and then, circling the stage, returns to where Estrugo is lying motionless. He pauses in front of him, saying, "Your silence is admission enough. Yes, I understand." Bruno steps over Estrugo and goes toward the right forestage, continuing to call Stella. After Stella descends the stairway, Estrugo starts to get up. Bruno shouts, "Stop!" and Estrugo again freezes in his former position. Stella asks, "Have you invented a new game?" Estrugo waves his feet in the air.

Estrugo starts to crawl off stage. Bruno goes over and pushes him in the rear with his foot, sending Estrugo sprawling on on his stomach. Bruno grabs him by the collar and drags him to stage center, where he again pushes him in the rear. Estrugo again sprawls on the floor. He starts to rise but, startled by Bruno's shout of "Silence!" at Stella, falls flat on the floor again. Bruno turns, goes to the "millrace" and mounts the pedestal.

Estrugo stands up and, with gestures, attempts to say something. He goes to the

Bruno (I. Ilinsky) jumps up, crosses in front of Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) and shouts: "I am a cuckold!" Act I.

Act III opens with Bruno (I. Ilinsky) seated on the bench dictating to Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov). They are surrounded by a crowd of eleven young men.

revolving door. Bruno turns and shouts at Estrugo, "Get out!" Frightened, Estrugo leaps back from the door onto the slide. He slides down. He gets up, bumping his head on the corner of the left gallery. He creeps under the slide, hitting his head on its underside. He goes to the lower window and climbs up to the right platform. From there he crosses the bridge, moving sideways against the railing, and disappears through the upper door.

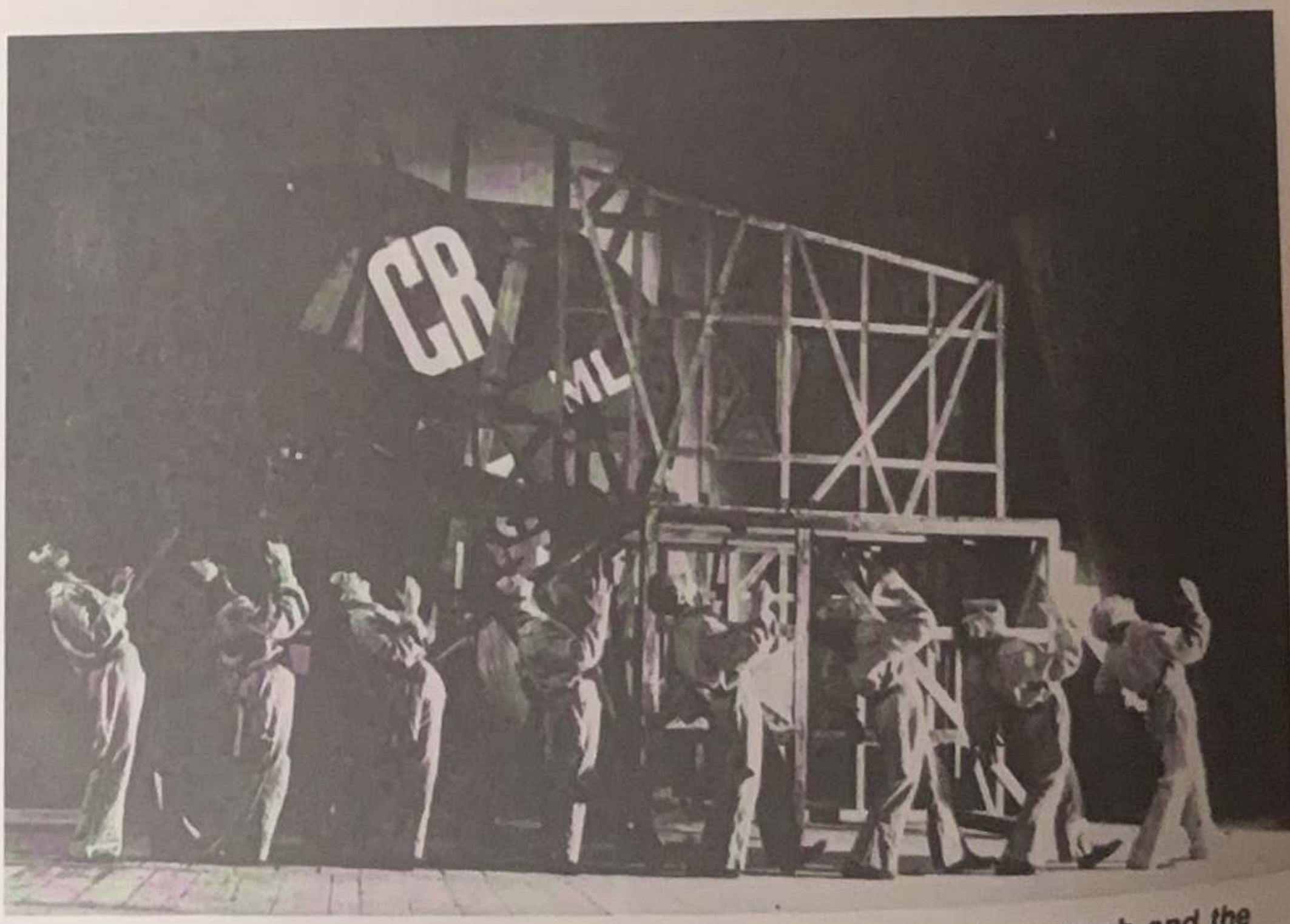
The scenes with the "young men" and "village women" in Act III offered Meyerhold especially rich possibilities for displaying the acrobatic virtuosity of his young performers, most of whom were no more than twenty-two years old. Act III opens with Bruno seated on the bench, dictating to Estrugo. He is surrounded by a crowd of young men, eleven in all (fig. 24). Stella runs in followed by more young men. The others jump up and join in the chase as Stella three times runs off stage and back again, calling for Bruno's help.

As she runs, Stella slaps two of the men (a signal for the unpainted and black wheels to start turning). Another leaps onto the stage. She slaps him. A third stands in her way and receives a slap, followed by a fourth who comes up from behind. Stella runs under the left gallery, then out on the stage. A fifth young man comes through the left side of the revolving door, and she slaps him. He falls back through the door and a sixth comes through the right side of the door—a slap, and he retreats through the door. Stella runs around the bench, slapping Estrugo on the way. He rolls over the bench. Stella throws herself at Bruno's neck. (The wheels stop.) Putting his left arm around her, Bruno fends off the young men with his right foot saying, "Now, now, careful . . . (fig. 25).

There is a short pause then the chase begins anew. Stella runs across the stage and up the stairs to the right platform. Shouting, the young men follow. They line up at the foot of the stairs. At a signal from Bruno they fall silent. The music begins. The young men start dancing the "Checkotka" (figs. 26, 27). (The red and unpainted wheels begin turning.)

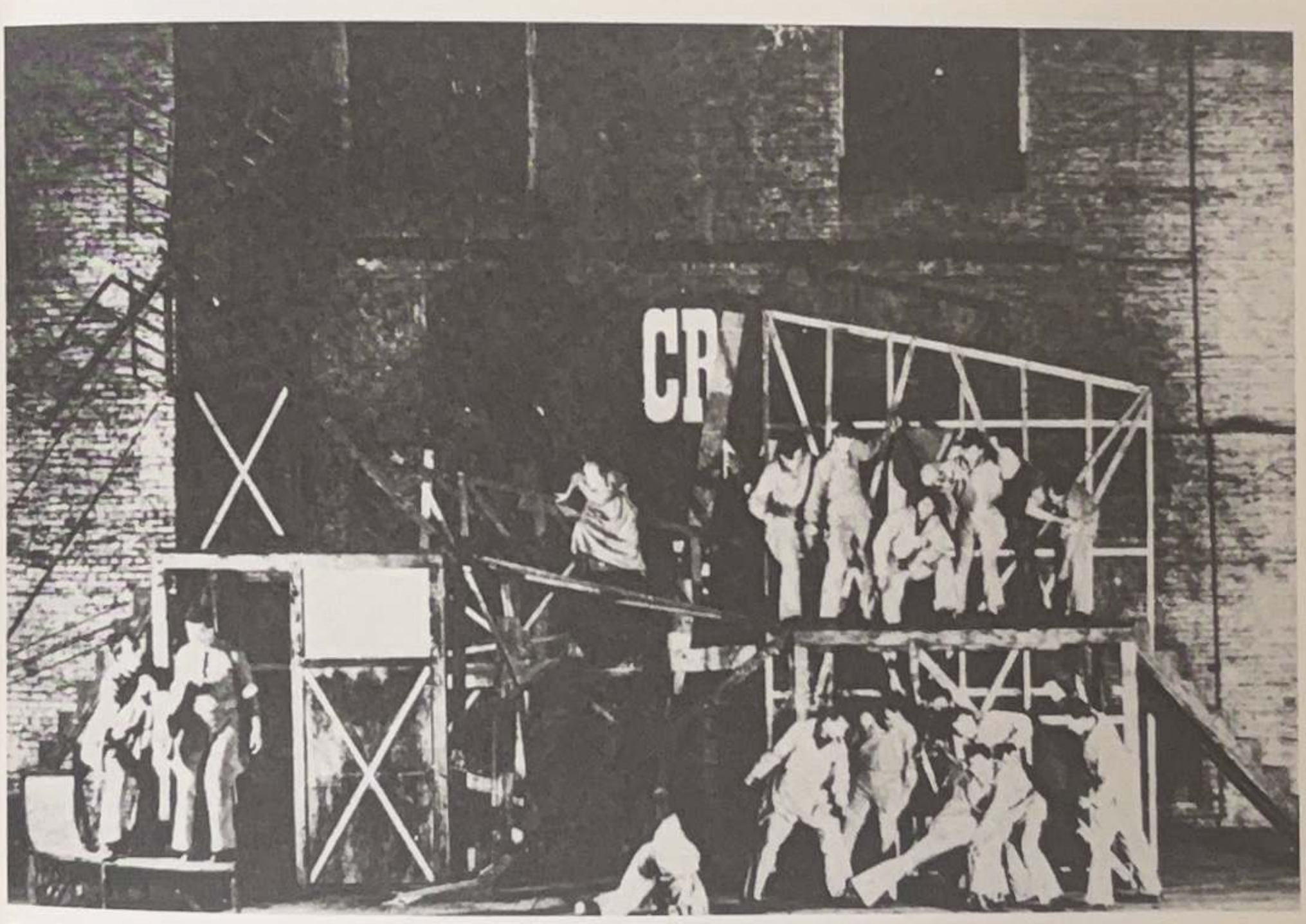
The Cowherd runs on stage behind the construction and emerges through the lower door. The young men shout. The music stops. (The wheels stop turning.) Half of the young men run up the stairs to the right platform. Stella moves to the bridge. The young men below seize the Cowherd and send him flying (fig. 28). The Cowherd jumps up. The young men run back as he shouts at Bruno, "I spit on you!" (The unpainted wheel begins turning.) The Cowherd spits, hitting Estrugo instead.

Putting his left arm around Stella (Zinaida Raikh), Bruno (I. Ilinsky) fends off the young men with his right foot saying: "Now, now, careful! . . ." Act III. (1928)



The young men start dancing the "Chechotka." Note: This photograph and the following one are rehearsal shots from the 1928 revival. Act III.

The young men dance the "Chechotka." Act III.



Stella (M. Babanova) moves to the bridge. The young men below seize The Cowherd (N. K. Losev) and send him flying. Act III.

The Cowherd (N. K. Losev) is saved when Bruno (I. Ilinsky) and Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) hide him under a cape at the end of the bench. Act III.

Shouting: "Line up! Line up!" the young men again range themselves on the stairway and upper platform. The music starts, they dance the "Chechotka." (1928) Act III.

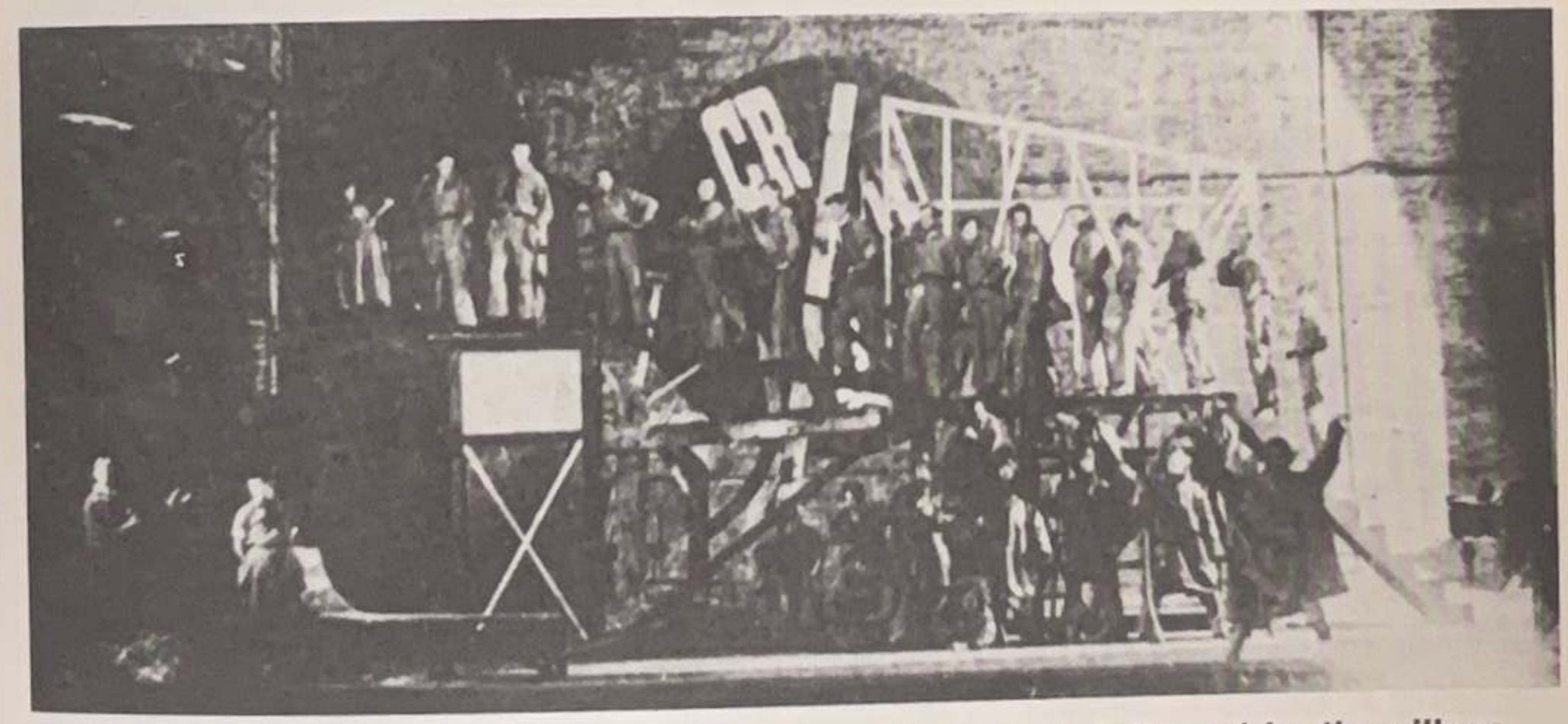
The Cowherd next attacks the young men. One of them trips him. The Cowherd falls in front of the window. As the young men on the platform shout, "Hit him! Come on, hit him!" the ones below surround the Cowherd. A blow! A second blow! On the third blow, he escapes and runs across the stage and around the bench. Leapfrogging, the young men chase after the Cowherd. Seizing him, they throw him to the ground. He runs up the slide. (The sails begin turning counterclockwise.) The young men on the upper platform grab him. They lift him in the air and send him back down the slide, following after to continue the chase. Finally, the Cowherd is saved when Bruno and Estrugo hide him under a cape at the end of the bench (fig. 29).

Performing somersaults, handsprings, leaps, and other acrobatic tricks, the young men search everywhere for the Cowherd. "Find him! Find him!" they shout. (The red wheel begins turning.) Suddenly the Cowherd escapes under the gallery. Sticking his head out, he shouts, "I'll be waiting for you one after another on the road!" Stella calls from above, "Whoever leaves loses his turn!" (The sails reverse direction.) Stella moves from the bridge to the left platform. Shouting "Line up! Line up!", the young men again range themselves on the stairway and upper platform. The music starts, and they dnace the "Checkotka" (fig. 30).

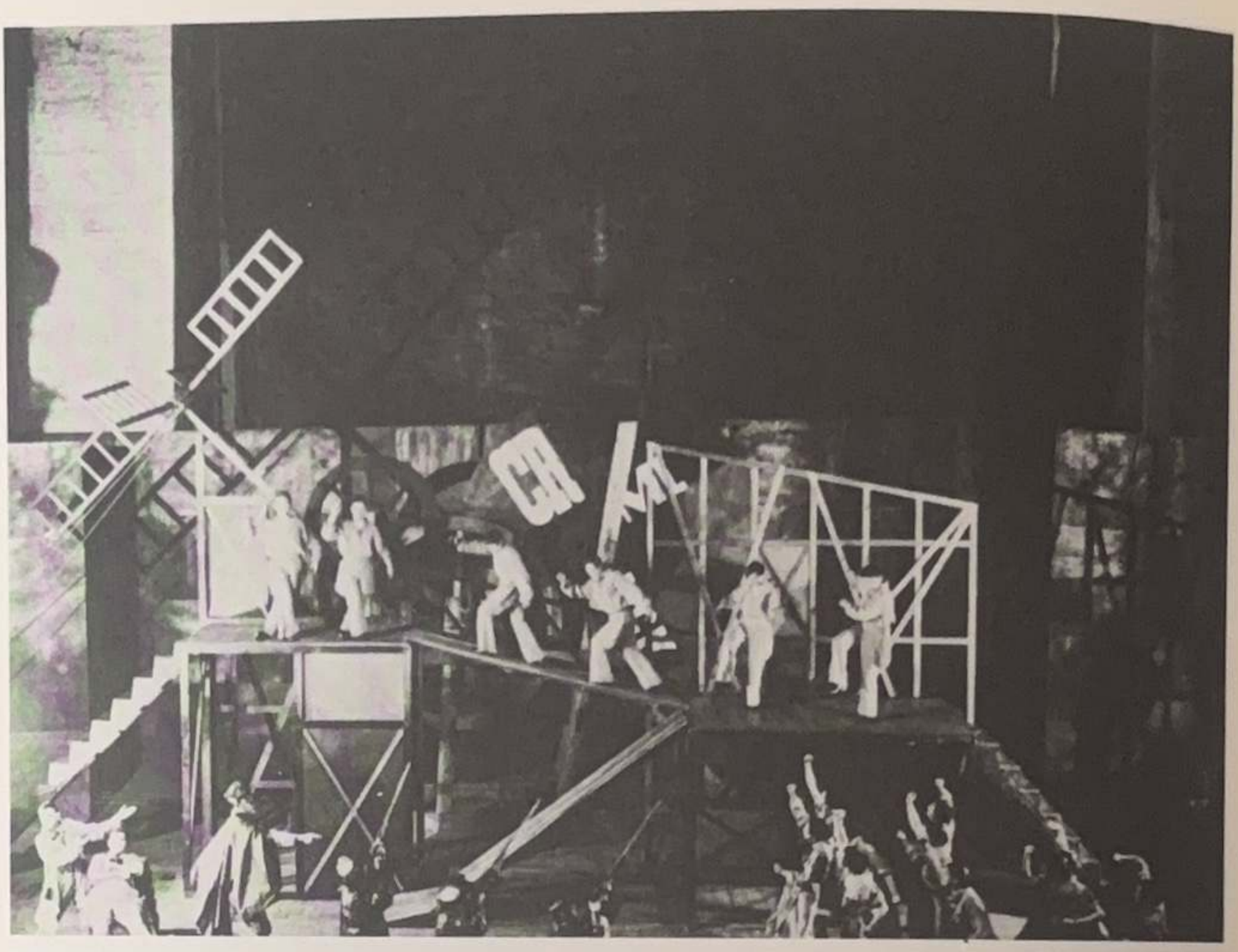
The Mayor and his village guards rush in followed by the village women. (The wheels and sails stop turning.) The young men stop dancing (figs. 31 & 32). The Cowherd runs out from under the gallery. Shouting at Bruno, "Take that, Bruno, I won't share her," he spits. The Mayor turns just in time to be the target. The village women burst out laughing. The Cowherd escapes (fig. 33).

The tempo accelerates as one "vaudeville act" follows another. One minute the Mayor and his village guards are giving chase to the young men. The next minute, shouts and blows are heard from behind the upper door, and out flies Florence's husband, followed by Corneile and Florence, who continue to beat him as he tries to escape (fig. 34).

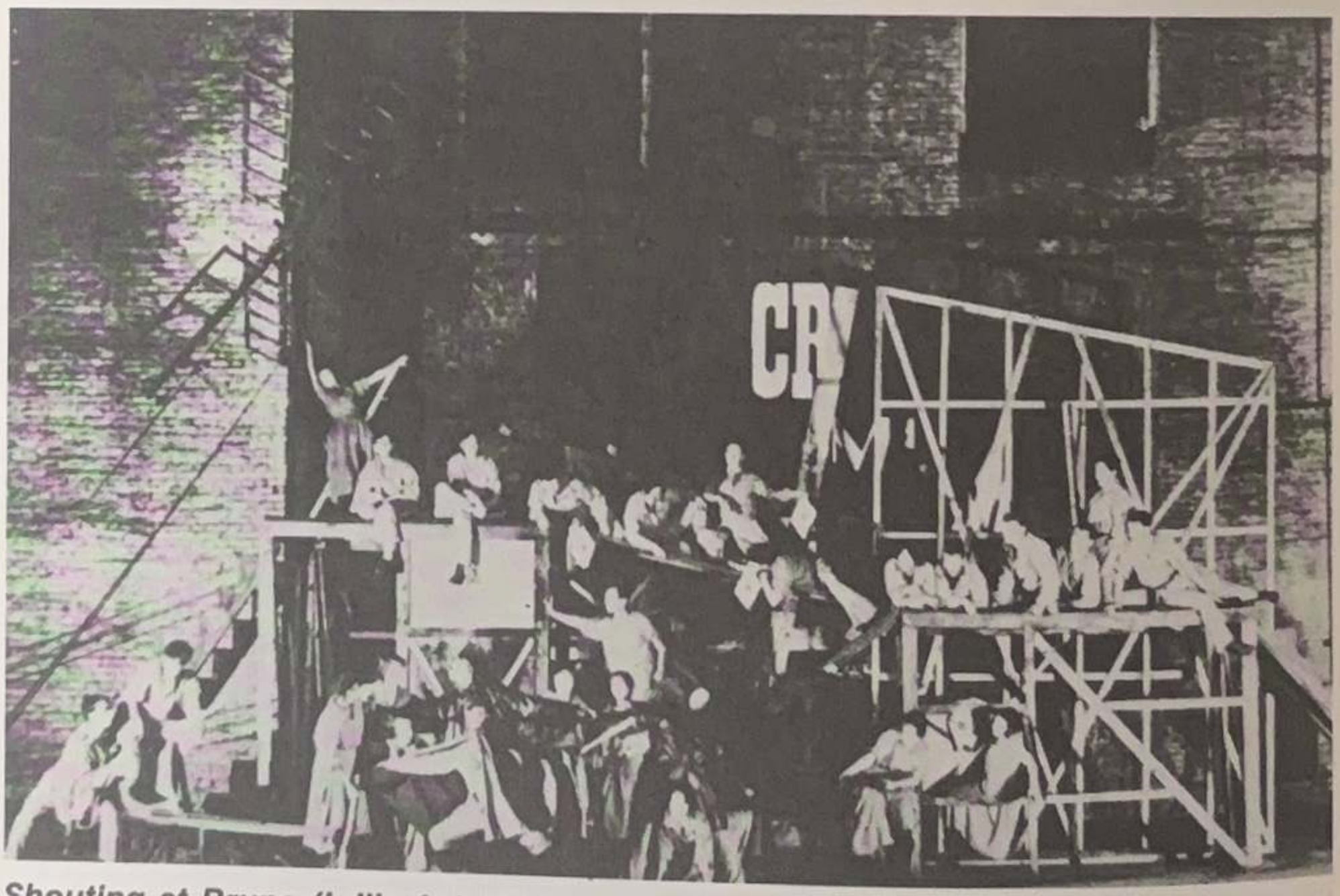
The lights extinguish. A Debussy "Arabesque" is heard, signaling the beginning of the "pantomime serenade" scene. A single spotlight follows Bruno, wrapped in a cape, and Estrugo as they enter carrying a red ladder (from the construction). Carefully they lean the ladder against the back side of the cage. Bruno mounts. The spotlight illuminates the window as Bruno appears in it. In a high, falsetto voice he begins his serenade to



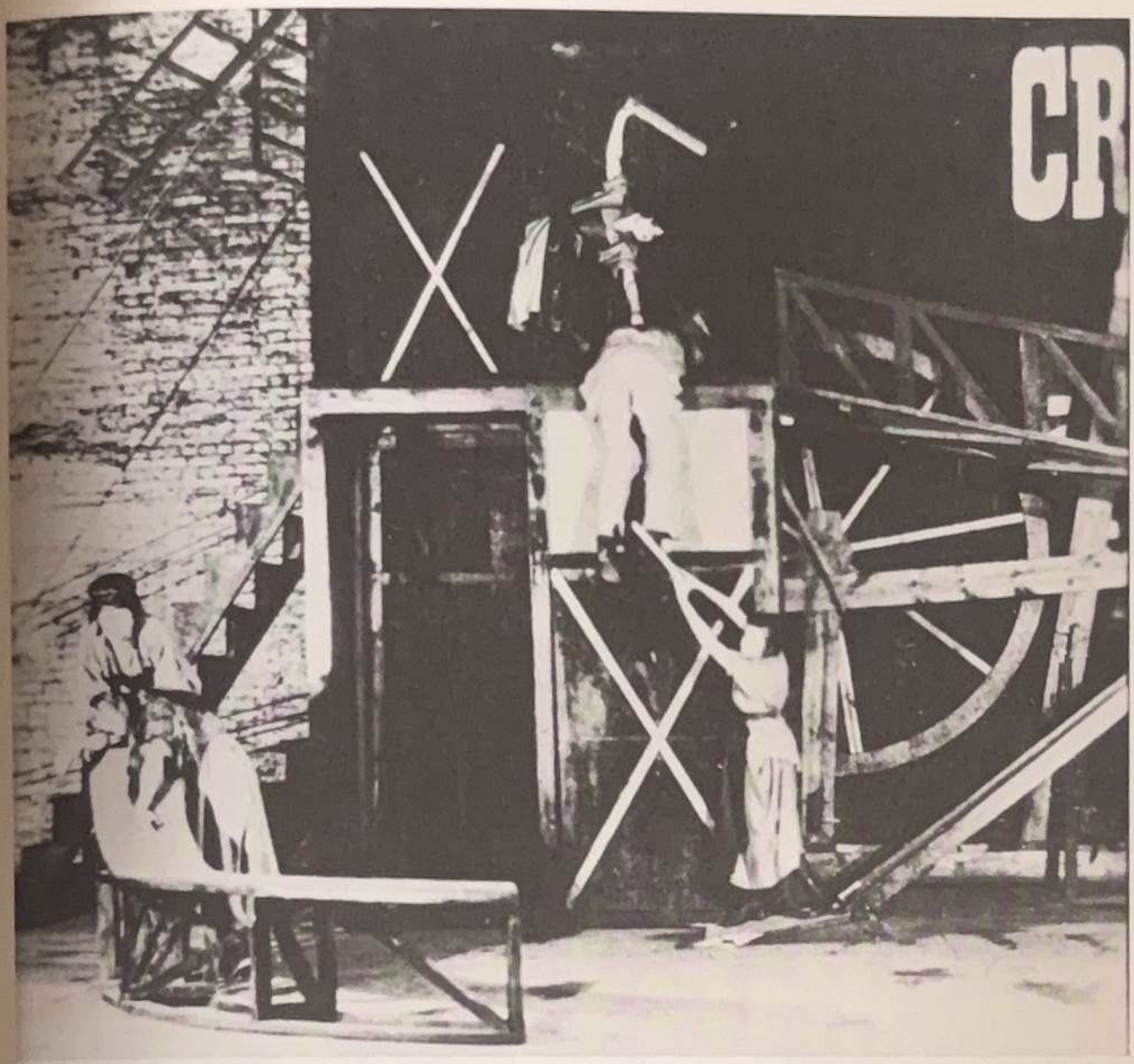
The Mayor (A. A. Temerin) and his village guards rush in followed by the village women. Act III. (1928 photo)



The Mayor (A. A. Temerin) orders the village guards to take aim at the young men. Act III.



Shouting at Bruno (I. Ilinsky): "Take that, Bruno, I won't share her." The Cowherd (N. K. Losev) spits. The Mayor (A. A. Temerin) turns just in time to be the target. The village women burst out laughing. The Cowherd escapes. Act III.



Cornelia (O. Sochenkova) and Florence (M. Sukhanova) beat the latter's husband (L. Obolensky) as he tries to escape. The Nurse (Z. Dobriner) comforts Stella (M. Babanova) at left. Act III.

Stella: "Evening soft as fur appoaches . . ." Stella emerges from the upper door, crosses the ramp, and approaches the window (see fig. 6). Playing the role of a Spanish Hidalgo, Bruno climbs through the passage under the window. He wraps Stella in his cloak, drags her across the bridge and disappears with her through the upper door.

The lights go up. The village women enter, led by Corneile and Florence saying, "One of ours is up there." They prepare to attack. Flying out the upper door, Bruno runs across the bridge to Estrugo who is sitting on the right stairway. He runs back and slides, standing up, down the slide. He mounts the pedestal and falls face down on the bench. The women sneak up. They start to beat Bruno with their sticks (see fig. 14). Howling, he jumps up.

Stella emerges from the upper door. She calls to Bruno, asking his foregiveness. "To the river! To the river!" Bruno shouts, delivering his words like a military commander. The women run to the left stairway. Three of them mount, seize Stella and drag her across the bridge to the right stairway. They descend and exit, the other women running after them.

The Nursemaid runs in. Bruno seizes her by the waist and spins her around, then begins shaking her. Releasing her, Bruno raises his fist as if to strike her. She keeps

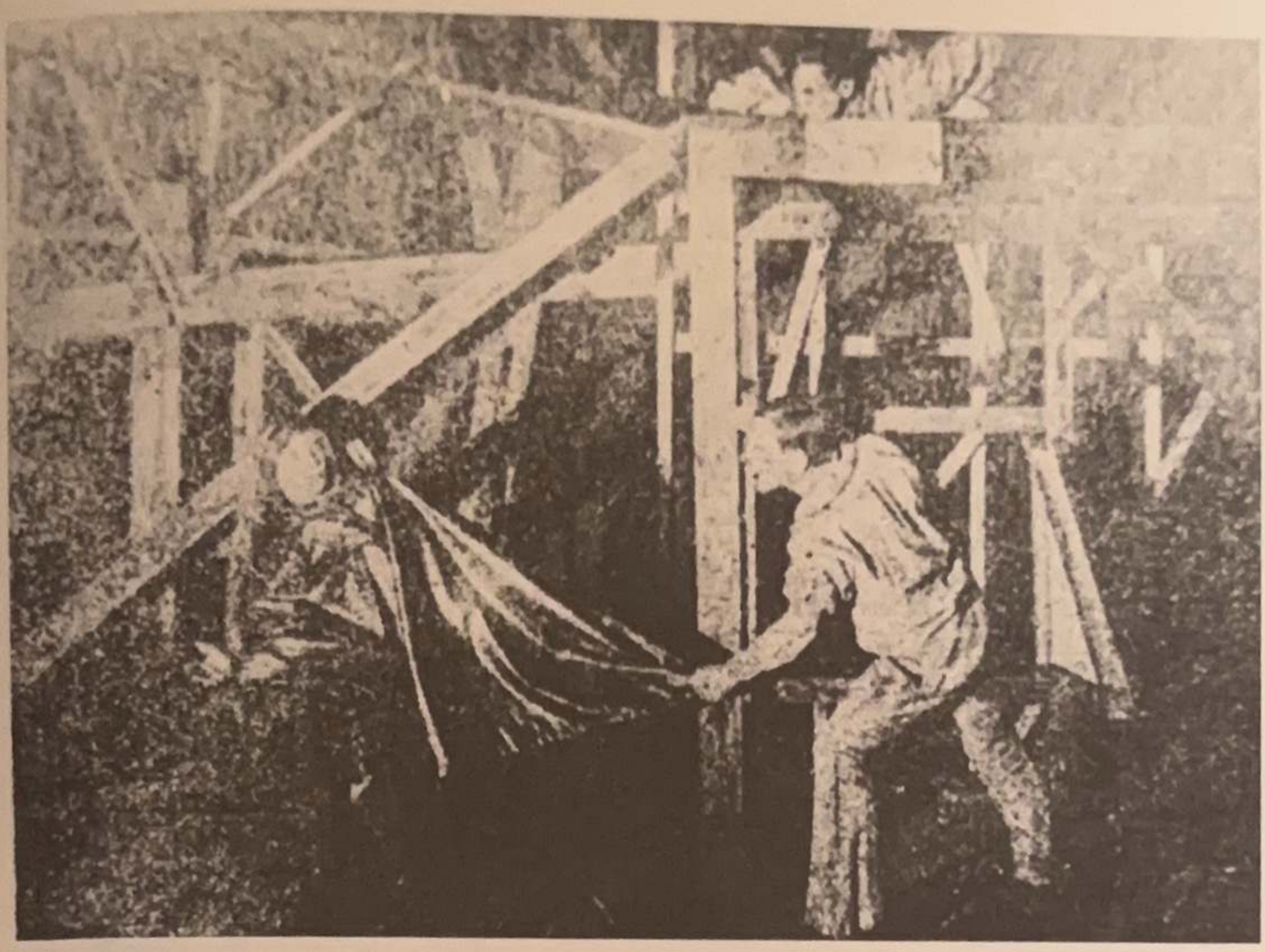
Bruno (I. Ilinsky) crawls across Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) and leans over the edge. He warns Stella (M. Babanova): ". . . the one you want to save won't escape me." The Nurse looks out from the "cage." Act III.

rocking back and forth like a toy figure. Bruno shoves her in the rear with his foot sending her flying toward the "millrace." She runs off after Stella.

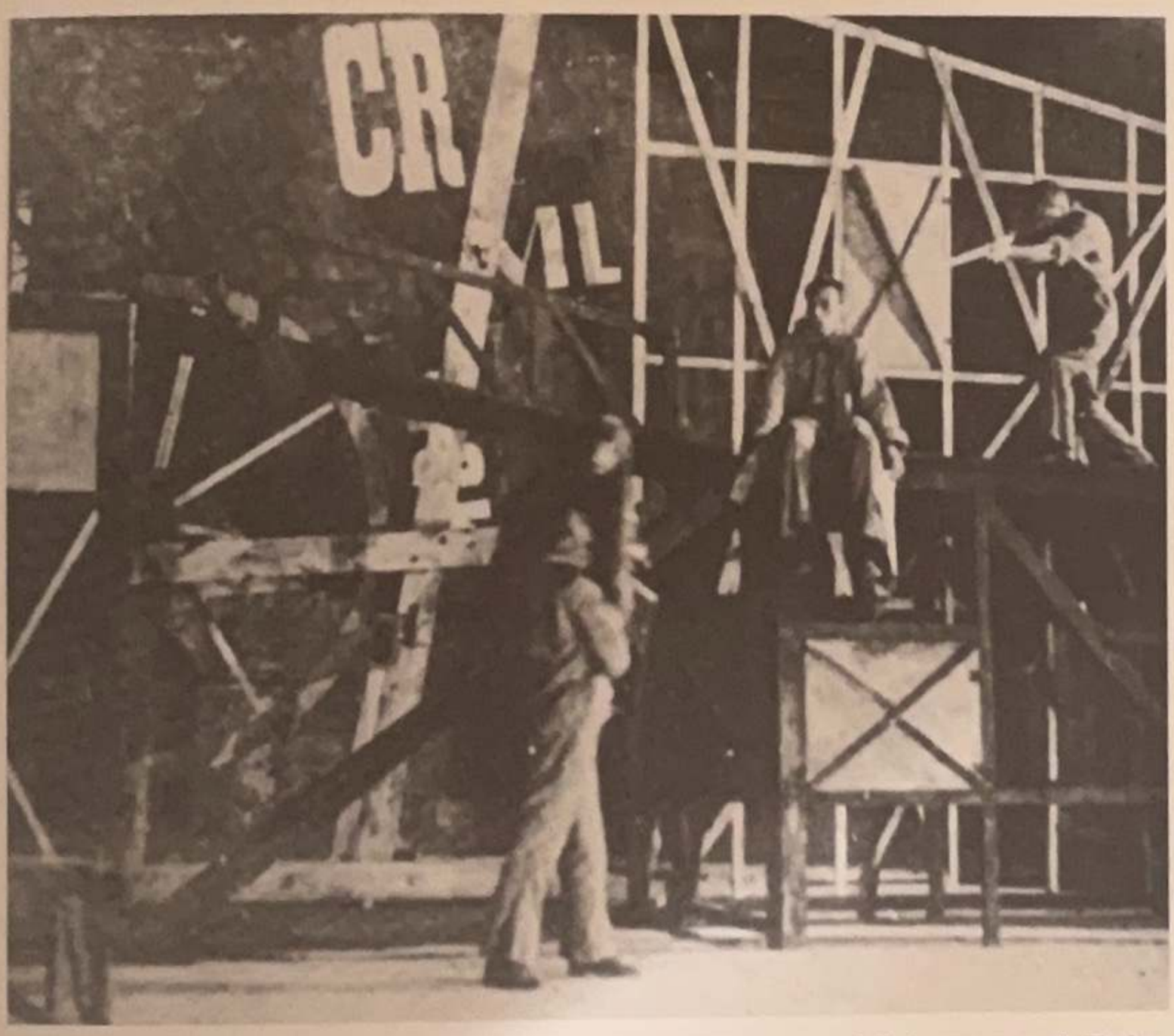
Estrugo mounts the right stairway and, waving a handkerchief, orders music. The Debussy "Arabesque" is heard. Bruno climbs the stairway, saying bitterly, "Soak her . . . Play the music!" He and Estrugo sit down on the platform, dangling their feet over the edge. Stella and the Nursemaid return. Stella, wrapped in a cape, her hair hanging loose, stops by the right stairway. Bruno and Estrugo lie down on the platform. Bruno crawls across Estrugo and leans over the edge. Hitting the support with his palm, he warns Stella, "The one you want to save won't escape me" (fig. 35). Taking his rifle, Bruno exits through the passage under the upper window and down the ladder. Estrugo remains behind. He writes as Stella tells the Nursemaid that she still loves Bruno.

The Cowherd runs on stage from the right, goes under the right platform, throws open the lower window and, leaning out, tells Stella to come with him. She refuses. He climbs through the window demanding his cape (fig. 36). Stella runs to the bench. Bruno reappears and watches from behind the construction. He mounts the ladder and climbs out the upper window. He and Estrugo watch as the Cowherd warns, "Willingly or unwillingly, alive or dead, you'll be mine!" Answering, "No! No! You wild beast!" Stella gives the Cowherd a slap (setting all the wheels and sails in motion).

Bruno shouts, "Beat him! . . . He's the one! . . ." He raises his gun and aims at the Cowherd. Stella suddenly cries, "Yes, yes! I love you! Take me away. I'll stay with you." In a flash she leaps on the Cowherd's shoulder (fig. 37). "Wait!" she pleads. "Promise me, swear to me, that you'll allow me to remain faithful to you." The Cowherd carries her off (see fig. 15). Bruno and Estrugo climb down from the upper right platform. Bruno hands



The Cowherd (N. K. Losev) climbs through the window demanding his cloak. Stella (M. Babanova) runs to the bench. Estrugo (V. F. Zaichikov) watches from the platform. Act III.



Stella (M. Babanova) suddenly cries: "Yes, yes! I love you! Take me away! I'll stay with you!" In a flash she leaps on the Cowherd's (N. K. Losev) shoulder. Act III.

the rifle to Estrugo. Putting his hands in his pockets, Bruno crosses the stage to the right and exits. Estrugo follows after him. The lights extinguish. The performance is over.

Meyerhold never relied on brilliant performers for his productions. Instead, he created the roles in such a way that they would fit anyone stepping into them. Every movement was worked out and coordinated with the precision of a musical score. This explains the remarkable success and durability of a production like *The Magnanimous Cuckold* as countless young actors passed through his theatrical company.

Yet it would be remiss not to point out that certain actors were born Meyerhold performers, and none more so than the trio who played the leads in "*The Cuckold*": Ilinsky, Babanova, and Zaichikov. They formed an ensemble so perfect in their harmonious interaction that one critic named them "Il-ba-zai." So exquisitely did they perform together, it was as though Meyerhold had created the production specifically for them:

> *Ilinsky's impetuous swiftness and his litheness found their extension in Babanova's exceptional sense of rhythm and musicality. And Zaichikov created for them a matchless accompaniment through the absolutely exact reinforcement of each gesture. Like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, he accompanied and amplified in pantomime everything that took possession of his partners in the stormy shifts of passion.*

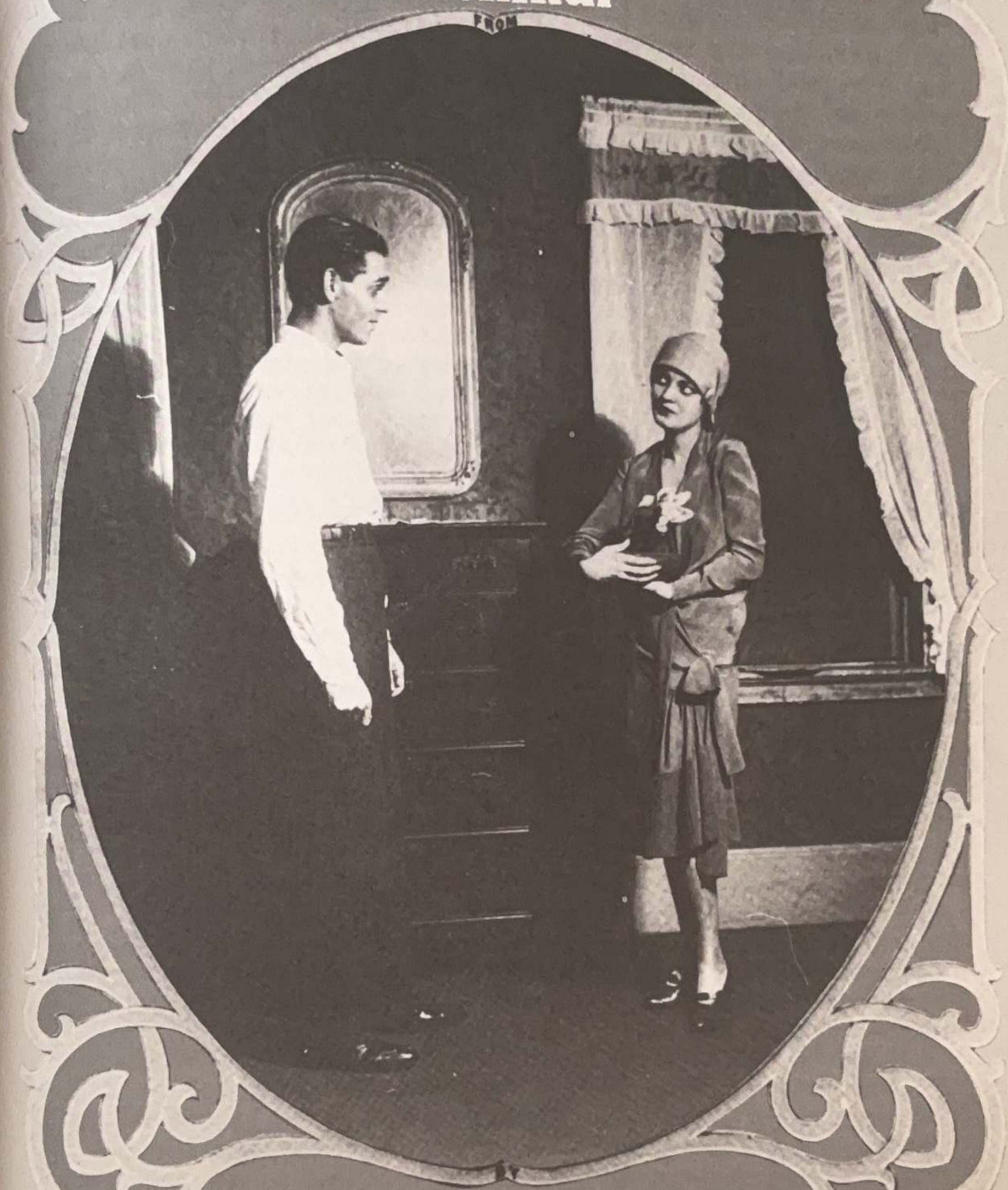
Although *The Magnanimous Cuckold* was an immediate success, not everyone was unqualifiedly enthusiastic about the production. Lunacharsky, for example walked out after the second act. He was shocked and upset by a play he regarded as making "a mockery of men, women, love and jealousy . . . and by a theatre that vilely underscored it." But perhaps the greatest testimony to the production comes from those who still remember it today, both performers and members of the audience. Although almost sixty years have elapsed, the mere mention of Meyerhold's *Cuckold* elicits a smile, and a burst of laughter, invariably followed by some vivid recollection of a favorite scene. Such is the power of great theatre.

Note: *The photographs here published are from the 1922 production unless otherwise noted. Only those photographs from the 1928 revival have been used which preserve the original* mise en scene. *Descriptions of the* mises en scène *and the stage action are based on a reconstruction made by N. V. Grigorovich from a copy of the play with descriptive annotation noted by her late husband, S. V. Kozikov, a student-director in Meyerhold's Workshop. I have supplemented this with information gained from conversations with former members of Meyerhold's Workshop including X. A. Lokshina, E. P. Garin, I. V. Ilinsky, A. V. Fevralsky. I am grateful to all of them for so generously sharing their recollections with me.*

Alma Law *writes and lectures on Soviet drama and theatre, and is a frequent contributor to* The Drama Review.

Arthur Hopkins' Production of Sophie Treadwell's

Machinal



Jennifer Parent

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Machinal, written by Sophie Treadwell, was first produced and directed by Arthur Hopkins at the Plymouth Theatre, New York City, on September 7, 1928 and ran for ninety-one performances. A "failure" commercially, it was generally acclaimed by the critics as one of the finest productions of the season and was considered one of Arthur Hopkins's ten best stagings in his forty-year career as a stage director/producer, as well as being Sophie Treadwell's best play. Condensations of the script appeared in *Theatre Magazine* in 1928 and in *The Best Plays of 1928–1929* edited by Burns Mantle; the complete script was included in John Gassner's collection *25 Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre (1916–1929).*

The most remarkable aspect of the piece was its use of expressionist techniques to tell an otherwise common story. As Treadwell wrote in her production notes:

> *THE PLOT is the story of a woman who murders her husband—an ordinary young woman, any woman.*
>
> *THE PLAN is to tell this story by showing the different phases of life that the woman comes in contact with, and in none of which she finds any place, any peace. The woman is essentially soft, tender, and the life around her is essentially hard, mechanized. Business, home, marriage, having a child, seeking pleasure—all are difficult for her—mechanical, nerve nagging. Only in an illicit love does she find anything with life in it for her, and when she loses this, the desperate effort to win free to it again is her undoing.*
>
> *THE STORY is told in ten scenes. In the dialogue of these scenes there is the attempt to catch the rhythm of our common city speech, its brassy sound, its trick of repetition, etc.*
>
> *Then there is, also, the use of many different sounds chosen primarily for their inherent emotional effect (steel riveting, a priest chanting, a Negro singing, jazz band, etc.), but contributing also to the creation of a background, an atmosphere.*
>
> *THE HOPE is to create a stage production that will have "style," and at the same time, by the story's own innate drama, by the directness of its telling, by the variety and quick changingness of its scenes, and the excitement of its sounds, to create an interesting play.*

Expressionism, while considered exotic, was not new to Broadway: O'Neill, Rice, Kaufman and Connelly had all previously experimented with this style. Nor was it new to call attention to mechanization's crushing effect on individual sensitivity and expression. But this was a particularly well-received use of expressionistic means that, according to *New York Herald Tribune* reviewer Percy Hammond, successfully "blended the terms of art and box-office."

Though some reviewers implied that the production was wonderful *despite* the exaggeration, harshness, distortion of lights and sounds and images, most agreed that it was the most highly stylized scenes (such as the first and seventh episodes) that worked the best. Reviewers who did not like the production complained about the script or discussed it in reference to its disputed source, a recent sensational murder and trial. Much praise was lavished on the quality of the acting, especially the honest intensity, power and beautiful vocal quality of Zita Johann as the Young Woman. Though the unsentimental approach of the production to the inexorable grind of this domestic tragedy made viewing uncomfortable for some, ultimately the effect was exhilarating. The very final silence in the red-gold glow of the lights on the empty stage was peace for the audience as well as for the Young Woman.

Called "the Sphinx of 45th Street" for his quiet, withdrawn and somewhat spiritual manner, Arthur Hopkins was reputed in his day to be possibly the best director on the American stage, presenting some of the most notable productions and most brilliant actors of his time. On his death, the *New York News* said that "a list of Hopkins failures is more interesting and important theatrically than the list of many another man's successes."

He began as a newspaper reporter in Cleveland, turned press agent for a vaudeville agency, did bookings and became involved himself in productions. After doing his first play, he studied theatre practice in Europe for a time. Always interested in new methods, as well as in new plays, he was said to be a pioneer in the use of a revolving stage (in Elmer Rice's *On Trial,* 1914) to show flashbacks, as in films, and was said to be the first producer to allow an actor to talk with his back toward the audience. He was "a leader in the naturalistic school of playing . . . his actors were quietly conversational, they performed as though they were in a real room with four walls, with no thought that an audience was out front" (*New York Times,* 23 March 1950; *New York World Telegraph,* June 17, 1931; Chapman).

Though credited with developing the natural style, he himself decried realism in the theatre, that is to say, the attention to reproducing realistic detail on the stage. He argued that realism invites conscious comparison and so distracts from the play itself. Nothing should interfere with the communication of the play to the audience. All participants—author, director, designers, actors—must become completely unselfish servants of the play, the text being the center of the production. He believed in extreme simplification and worked to eliminate any unnecessary gestures, movements, props, effects. His abhorrence for anything he termed "theatric" ("cheap and tawdry, the trick of the street fakir") referred not to the use of non-realist modes but rather to tricks used to create a realistic illusion, and also to affected "stagey" acting. Every movement on stage had to be significant. In his book *How's Your Second Act,* he held up the Chinese theatre as a model of imaginative and economical theatricality.

He developed a theory that he defined as Unconscious Projection: "The theatre is wholly concerned with the unconscious mind of the audience. The conscious mind should play no part." Since "the theatre is always seeking unanimous reaction" it needs to bypass the individual conscious reactions in order to reach the collective unconscious. "In the theatre I do not want the emotion that rises out of thought, but the thought that rises out of emotion. The emotional reaction must be secured first." To accomplish this, the conscious mind must be disengaged. His method is to give the audience no reason to think about the process of the production, "by presenting every phase so unobtrusively, so free from confusing gesture, movement and emphasis, that all passing action seems inevitable, so that we are never challenged or consciously asked why." His anti-reflexive tactics contrast strikingly with current staging practices.

Though Hopkins had very definite ideas about theatre production, he was the quintessential "invisible director." Ideally, he thought, a performance was prepared without anyone realizing how it was done. Russell Rhodes, in the *Insurance Advocate* in 1950, wrote:

> *Hopkins was credited with being one of the greatest directors in the American theatre, though, exactly why, nobody could really explain. He never seemed to be directing . . . he wandered up and down the aisles or stood or sat at the back of the house while the actors were reciting their lines. Rarely would he come down front and then only to say a few words in his quiet restrained voice . . . just a suggestion, here or there. He seemed to be directing by remote control. And yet, some of*

> *the best pieces in American dramatic history bore his imprint. His cast spoke as if they were real casual people . . . no shouting or posturing.*

The question is, of course, what is the imprint of a director who would-not-be *auteur*? He said, "I must renounce all desire to be the boss, or the great master, or the all-knowing one." So much is remarked about how he lets the play play itself, the actors act themselves, while he stays quietly in the background, that it all sounds faintly suspicious.

It was, in fact, this very disappearance act that was Hopkins' best stage illusion. "There are any number of actors who have been with me who firmly believe that they received practically no direction, and that is exactly as it should be," he wrote. He talks of the play being "guided by wireless" but there is no question at all about who is in charge:

> *The two essentials in this kind of direction are for the director to know exactly what he wants and to make sure that he can get what he wants from the people he has selected. These two conditions put an end to all confusion at the outset.*

George Jean Nathan in his preface to *Second Act* said, "He is an innovator only in the sense that he is not an innovator." Hopkins was, however, remarkably gifted in finding actors to work with who would give him just what he wanted. And having cast well, all a director needs to do, he'd say, is to bring out the actor's good qualities with sympathy and understanding. He was extremely sure of himself, did all his own play-reading and casting, and when committed to a project, had unwavering faith in it, no matter what its reception was.

His feeling for the theatre bordered on religious fervor and his writings are suffused with a mystical idealism. "We are waiting for the word, the word that releases the long-pent-up force within us. Will the word be said in the theatre? It seems a very likely place to me," he said. He believed in the theatre as an agency for the development of a higher culture and for raising the consciousness of "mankind." He felt very keenly a moral sense of responsibility to society in his position as a Broadway producer. "If there is any way we can make life a little better, a little gentler, a little kinder," he said, "We will try to find the way."

These feelings were shared with his long-time collaborator and closest friend, Robert Edmond Jones, the designer for *Machinal*. Most often Jones's settings on Broadway were done for Hopkins, who is sometimes credited with having "discovered" Jones. Hopkins wrote about Jones:

> *He only hopes for one thing for his settings—that no one will notice them, that they will melt into the play. Naturally for this very reason they were conspicuous at first . . . But gradually his work is being noticed less and less, and Jones knows that means he is succeeding . . . And when the day comes that no one ever mentions his settings, he will breathe deeply and say, "I have done it."*

Machinal, by Hopkins's criteria, might be considered one of Jones's most successful works, being one of his most inconspicuous. It is certainly not one of his "famous" sets, one that scenic historians refer to. The set itself is described directly by only one of two dozen reviewers, but Jones is unanimously praised for his success in creating an *atmosphere* "with quiet appropriate delicacy and beauty," which of course is exactly the

point. "Suggestive backgrounds—splendidly lighted—no superfluous detail" is a typical reviewer's remark.

Photographs of the production rarely give a full stage view. But it seems that much of the stage was dimly lit and not important anyway, except for the area actually in use from scene to scene.

The basic unit was a large neutral greenish frame set within a curtained proscenium. Flanking either side and folded slightly forward were two smaller narrow flats each with a practical door unit. Filling the frame were interchangeable background flats with varied arrangements of windows and doors. These were changed after each episode along with furniture and props, which were used sparingly to indicate a generalized place, "an office," "a flat," "a speakeasy," and so on—really no more than a part of a room. Though sound was consistently used to indicate offstage life, occasionally visual means were used as well, as in Episode Three, when couples danced romantically together off to the side in juxtaposition to the central action, that of the husband clumsily making love to his new wife, or as in Episode Four, when the effect of the heavy construction sounds was reinforced by the steel girders that were seen through the hospital room window. Action took place away from rather than close to the edge of the stage and movement within the shallow playing area was condensed and almost planar. This led to a flattening of what was literally a stage(d) picture, with a large frame as the dominant scenic unit.

Of great importance in establishing the world of the play were the lights and the sounds. Treadwell's production notes state:

> *LIGHTING concentrated and intense—light and shadow—bright light and darkness. This darkness, already in the scene, grows and blacks out the light for dark stage when the scene changes are made.*

The periphery of the playing area was murky; specials were used to highlight the faces of principals at certain crucial points. The final episode was staged completely in darkness, then finished with the brightest, prettiest light seen all evening. Jones seems to have been responsible for the general lighting, with George Schaff credited for special unspecified lighting effects.

Offstage and onstage sounds, music and voices were constantly employed as counterpoint to or comment on the stage action. The sound of this play was at least as important as its look. In addition to incidental music by Frank Hartling (such as for jazz band, player piano, hurdy-gurdy), machines were prominent "actors." Not only were machine sounds used—office machines, bells, buzzers, steel riveting, telegraph instruments, airplane engines—but frequently human voices adopted machine-like qualities as well. Sounds and music also connected the separate episodes to cover scene changes and facilitate transitions, thus sustaining the mood of the piece. A reviewer noted, "Throughout the intermezzi, the audience, held in the tautest of silence during the progress of the play, stirred little, talked less."

Jones was presumably responsible for the costumes, as no separate credit for them was given. They are as unobtrusive as the sets and often were simply functional (uniforms for nurse, judge, etc.). Jones might have had *Machinal* in mind when he later wrote, in *The Dramatic Imagination*:

> *We know the costumes of any period in history are typical of that period. For example, let us think of the costumes of today in relation to the life of today . . . we instantly get an impression . . . of the characteristic quality of our own epoch, swift, direct, inclusive, brilliant, staccato. Now*

> *what could be more expressive of this quality than the snappy chic nervous little tailored suits we see by the dozens in our fashion magazines and in our shop windows? Look at the tight little sweaters and coats and skirts and the closely wrapped turbans, all so simple and practical . . . all like quick bold sketches, to be rubbed out tomorrow.*

This describes very well the look of the costumes worn in *Machinal.*

It is very difficult to determine from the reviews and photographs if the style of acting was expressionist to the degree that the staging was. The characters are simply types, representative forces lacking any complexity, and are identified only by labels: The Boss, The Mother, The Nurse, The Priest, etc. They are often described as performing in an "automatic" manner, through repetition, vocal quality, and an unthinking, almost mindless approach to tasks. However, reviewers say nothing about the acting being grotesque or even unusual, only that it was well-performed, moving, convincing, and so on, taking for granted the style of acting. And in the photographs (which may or may not be of actual staged action) the actors look, for the most part, to be very relaxed, less "stagey" even, than photos of many contemporary productions. This, along with Hopkins's reputation for eliciting a naturalness in performers that was ahead of its time, indicates that some expressionist techniques were being used by the actors, in moderation, and were so well integrated into the production that the style of acting did not call attention to itself. Zita Johann's Young Woman was the exception to all this. Not only was hers the only emotional character, but the whole play is from her point of view and describes her emotional state. Her character was out of sync with the others physically and vocally. She looked and moved differently, with more tension, used larger face and body gestures, and made arias of her soliloquies. But she received nothing but praise from even the most antagonistic reviewers for her beautiful, sensitive, believable performance.

Episode One: in an office

The stage is dark but the sounds of machines are heard—typewriters, adding machines, copy machines, telephone bells, buzzers. They continue throughout the scene until after the blackout. The lights come up on a plain-looking office with two desks, left and right. At the desk at the front right is the Stenographer at her typewriter with a letter, "Dear Sir—in re—your letter—recent date—will state . . ." Behind her is the Adding Clerk at his machine reading off numbers, "2490, 28, 76, 123, 36842, 1, ¼, 37, 804, 23½, 982." The young Filing Clerk is at his filing cabinet at the rear center, "Accounts—A. Bonds—B. Contracts—C. Data—D. Earnings—E." At the left rear on the other side of the door is the telephone operator at her switchboard, "Hello—hello—George H. Jones Company good morning—hello hello—George H. Jones Company good morning—hello." The characters are clearly identified with their machines, and their voices combine with the machine noises to sound like machines.

Continuing to work, they start to gossip, still in short staccato phrases. The front left desk is empty; "she" is late for work again, and the boss is looking for her; "It's important." The workers all laugh knowingly. The tardy Young Woman tries to enter inconspicuously to no avail and is sent in to see the boss. The workers buzz, mingling their joking with their work sounds. The Young Woman re-enters, sits daydreaming at her desk. After a moment, Jones follows her out, puts his hand on her shoulder, "That letter done?" She flinches. He exits, and she starts to think aloud to the subdued accompaniment of the office sounds and voices in short stream-of-consciousness phrases:

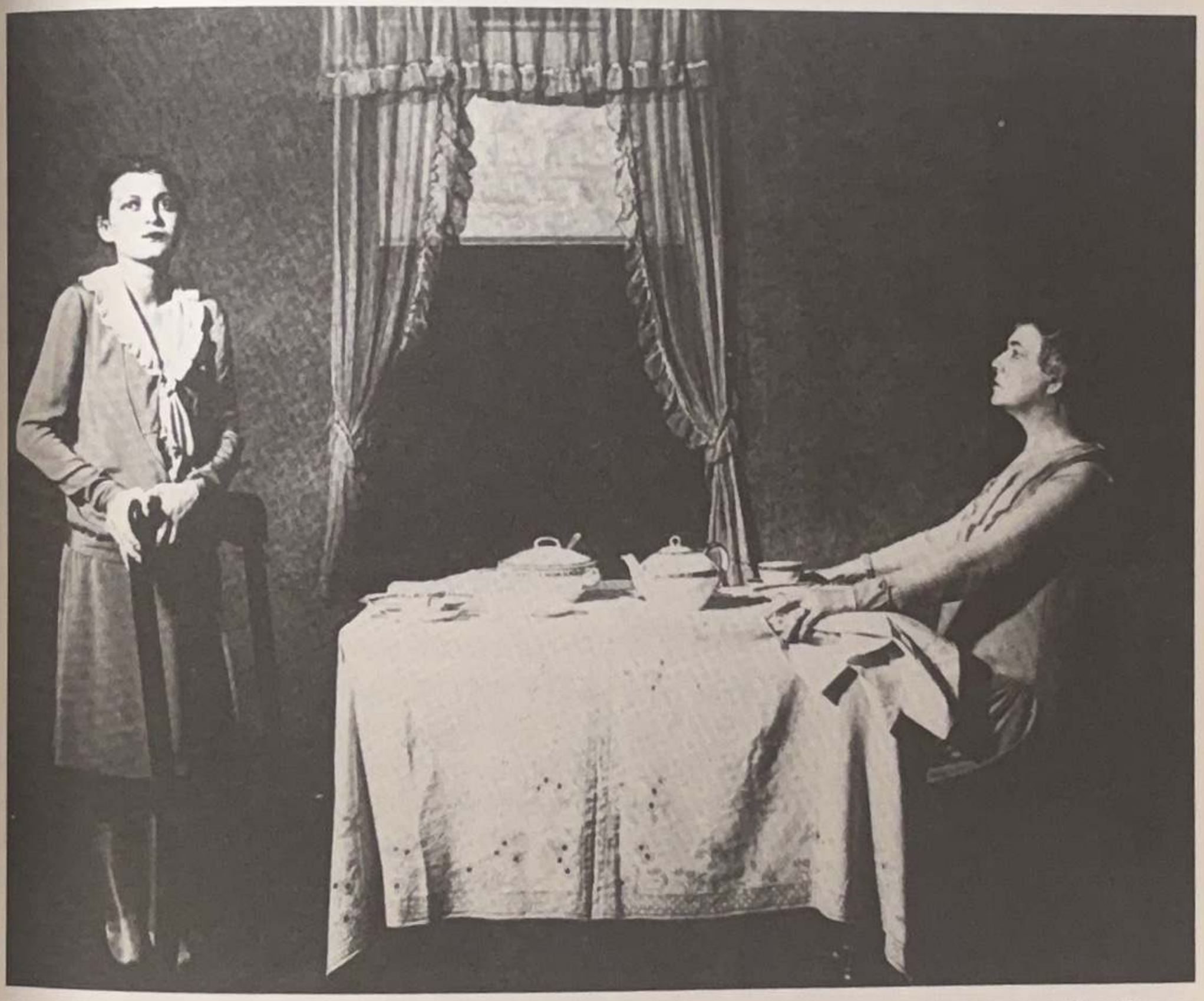
George H. Jones—he likes me—loves me—loves me not—loves me. You are late, my dear—ah, yes—the subway—could fire me. . . . George H. Jones—Mrs. George H. Jones—Dear Madame—in reply to your . . . He says he loves my hands—his are fat hands—fat hands that never grow weary . . . Ninety-sixth street—change for express—don't crowd—don't push—I must get out or I'll scream . . . George H. Jones—Mrs. George H. Jones . . .

The Stenographer brusquely interrupts her reverie, the others start to speak out loud again, blending speeches. The scene blacks out.

Episode Two: in a flat

Through the open window of a tenement flat, street cries are audible, interspersed with the wailing of infants and jazz on the radio. The lights come up on a kitchen where a table is set for supper—a tablecloth embroidered with flowers, dishes with a flowered border. The back wall is printed with a floral pattern and the window upstage of the table is framed by sheer ruffled curtains.

Seated at the table are the Young Woman and the Mother. The radio fades out as they start to talk. The Young Woman wants her mother's advice on love and marriage,



The Young Woman (Zita Johann) tries to explain her reluctance to marry the Boss to her Mother (Jean Adair).

The Mother's insensitivity provokes an outburst from the Young Woman.

but the Mother is only half-listening until: "Ma! Listen! Listen! There's a man wants to marry me." Intercut are snatches of offstage conversation coming through the window from other apartments—a mother calling in her young son, a boy getting a girl to sneak out to meet him, a woman questioning her man's nightly excursions, a husband's physical advances rebuffed by his wife. These offstage conversations comment ironically on the onstage conversation between mother and daughter.

The Young Woman becomes increasingly agitated in her frustration: "Sometimes in the subway I think I'm going to die—sometimes even in the office if something don't happen—I got to do something—I don't know—it's like I'm all tight inside." "You're crazy." The ensuing outbursts ("I'll kill you . . . You haven't got any pity . . .") is cut off by a voice singing a sentimental Mother song on the radio, and the Mother begins to cry. The Young Woman apologizes, offers to do the dishes and puts on a pair of rubber gloves—she needs to take care of her hands. "It's my hands got me a husband." "A husband? So you're going to marry him, now?" "I suppose so." "If you ain't the craziest!"

Offstage the Mother song has gone faintly jazz. The lights fade slowly. The curtain falls.

Episode Three: in a hotel

At rise, the set is dark. A small jazz band (violin, piano, saxophone) is heard, very dim at first, then louder. The Bellboy, Husband and Young Woman enter at the right with the Bellboy carrying luggage. He switches on lights by the door revealing a simply furnished Atlantic City hotel room. A door at the back opens into the bathroom, and the one window at the right rear opens on a casino across the way, where a band plays for dancing. A double bed and a chair are left of door, an armchair is at the front right. At the edge of the light at the left are four couples dancing to the muted jazz of the casino band.

After the Bellboy exits, the Husband goes off into the bathroom singing to himself. The Young Woman watches the dancers going round and round. The music is louder. The Husband re-enters. Very pleased with himself, he tries to get the Young Woman to

relax but only succeeds in disturbing her further. He puts her on his knee, kisses her along the back of the neck; she tries to get up. "Say—stay there! What you moving for?—You know—you got to learn to relax, little girl (pinching her above the knee)—Say—what you got under there?" He continues to laugh and tease and make jokes while the music dims and the dancers fade off.

With dread, the Young Woman finally goes into the bathroom to get undressed. She comes back on in a straight white chemise. The Husband pulls down the window shade and switches off the light. The room is in shadow except for a dim light by the bed. Faintly audible is the sound of the Young Woman weeping. As the Husband tries to console her, the dance music continues. There are shadows of the dancers flickering on the wall and ceiling. The lights gradually fade. The curtain is lowered.

Episode Four: in a hospital

The rhythm of the music is gradually replaced by the almost incessant sound of steel riveitng. The light reveals a sterile hospital room, with a door at back opening into a corridor. A stretcher-wagon is seen passing by. Through the bare window at the right, the steel frame of a tall building under construction is seen.

On a single bed in the center of the room is the Young Woman, quite still. A Nurse, very professional, enters making cheerful noises, "You're getting along fine . . . Such a sweet baby you have, too . . . Aren't you glad it's a girl?" The Young Woman is negative, listless.

The Husband arrives with a large bouquet. His attempts to boost her morale precipitate a gagging/choking fit in the Young Woman. The Husband is sent away.

A young and arrogant Doctor enters. The Young Woman is unresponsive until he orders the Nurse to have the baby brought in. "No!" she insists.

Finally alone, she talks to herself, slightly delirious:

> *Oh, let me alone! Let me alone! I've submitted to enough. I won't submit any more. I'm empty . . . I was dead . . . I was climbing golden stairs . . . I met my baby coming down . . . dead going up . . . babies coming down . . . Mary had one . . . the Virgin Mary.*

The rivet machine continues on. The lights fade. The curtain is lowered.

Episode Five: in a speakeasy

The lights come up on a speakeasy in the area of Hell's Kitchen. The back flat is covered with gaudy striped paper down to a dark wainscoating; at the rear left is a door, at the rear center a copy of an old Dutch master-style painting, rear right an electric piano, and at the far left is a small bar. Front center are three tables: at the left table sit a man and a boy; at the center table a man and a woman; at the right table two men, a salesman and an adventurer, wait for their dates to show up—who happen to be the Telephone Girl from Episode One and the Young Woman. The focus of the scene is on the right table, but interpolated in their conversation are snatches of dialog from the other tables—a middle-aged man gently seducing a young boy; a woman being persuaded by her lover to get an abortion.

The women finally arrive. Almost immediately the salesman and the Telephone Girl

conspire to be alone. After they've gone, the adventurer recounts his Mexican exploits to the Young Woman, brandishing a bottle for illustration:

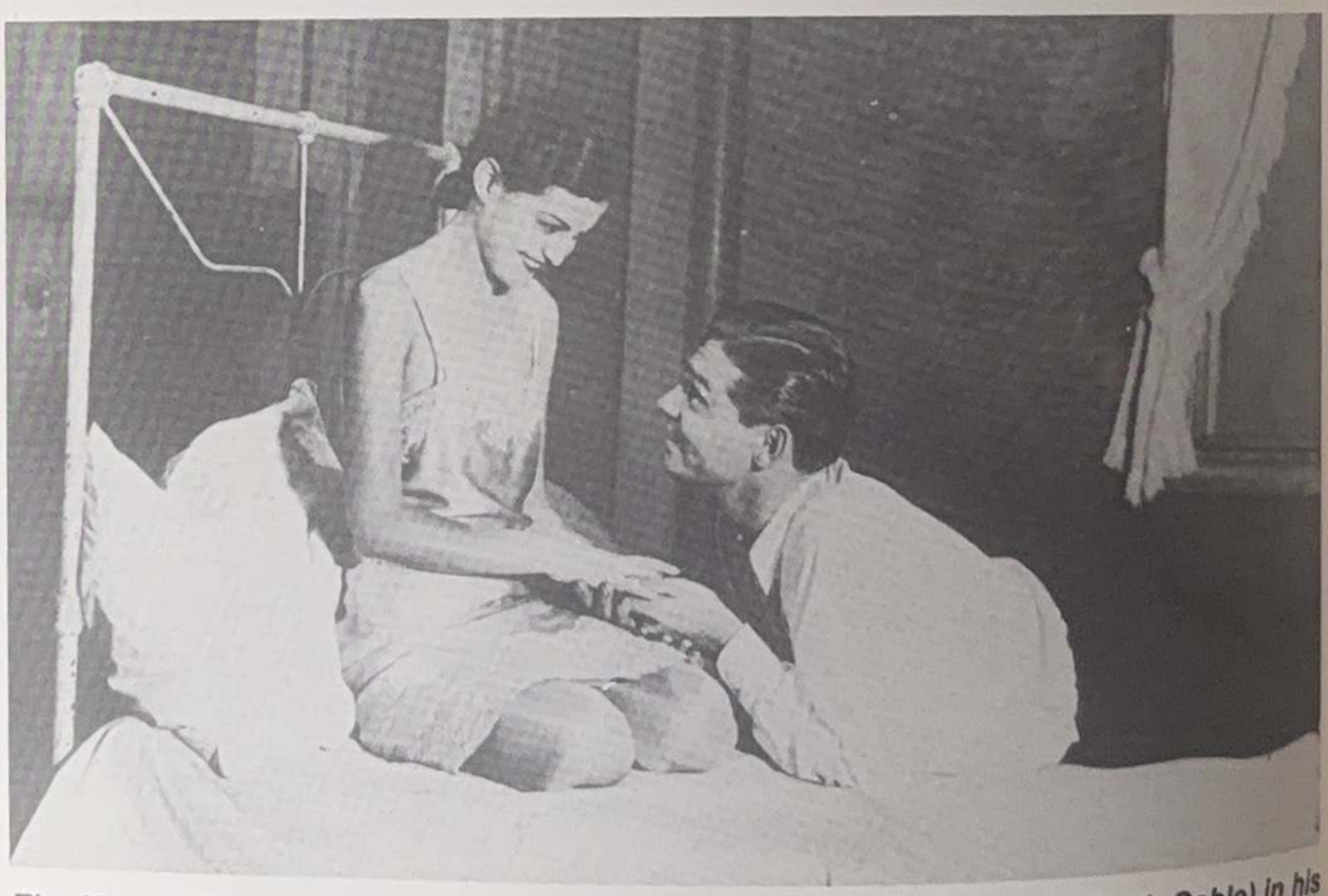
> *There were a bunch of* bandidos*—bandits, you know, took me into the hills. What was I to do? I got the two birds that guarded me drunk one night, and then I filled the empty bottle with small stones—and let 'em have it . . . I had to get free didn't I?*

As the other couples leave, the conversation of the Man and the Young Women turns more personal, and he convinces her to return to his room with him. He goes into the next room at the left rear and comes back carrying a bottle. A Boy and a Girl pass them laughing at the door at the right (in the permanent frame). The boy drops a nickel into the piano. As the music starts, the lights fade. Curtain.

Episode Six: in a furnished room

The curtain rises on a dark stage. The electric piano music has become the music of a hurdy-gurdy, very faint, playing "Cielito Lindo." Also from outside is heard the irregular rhythm of passing feet.

Lights come up just enough to reveal a shabby room, with a bed at the left and a chair at the right. At the rear center is a dresser with a mirror hung over it; curtained windows are on both sides of the dresser; a lily blooming in a bowl of pebbles and water sits on the right window sill. The Man is at the dresser, in shirtsleeves. The Young Woman, in her slip and stockings, is sitting up on the bed. It is late afternoon, so the gloom has a rosy hue.



The Young Woman has spent the whole afternoon with the Man (Clark Gable) in his room.

The Young Woman leaves the Man, who gives her the lily to keep.

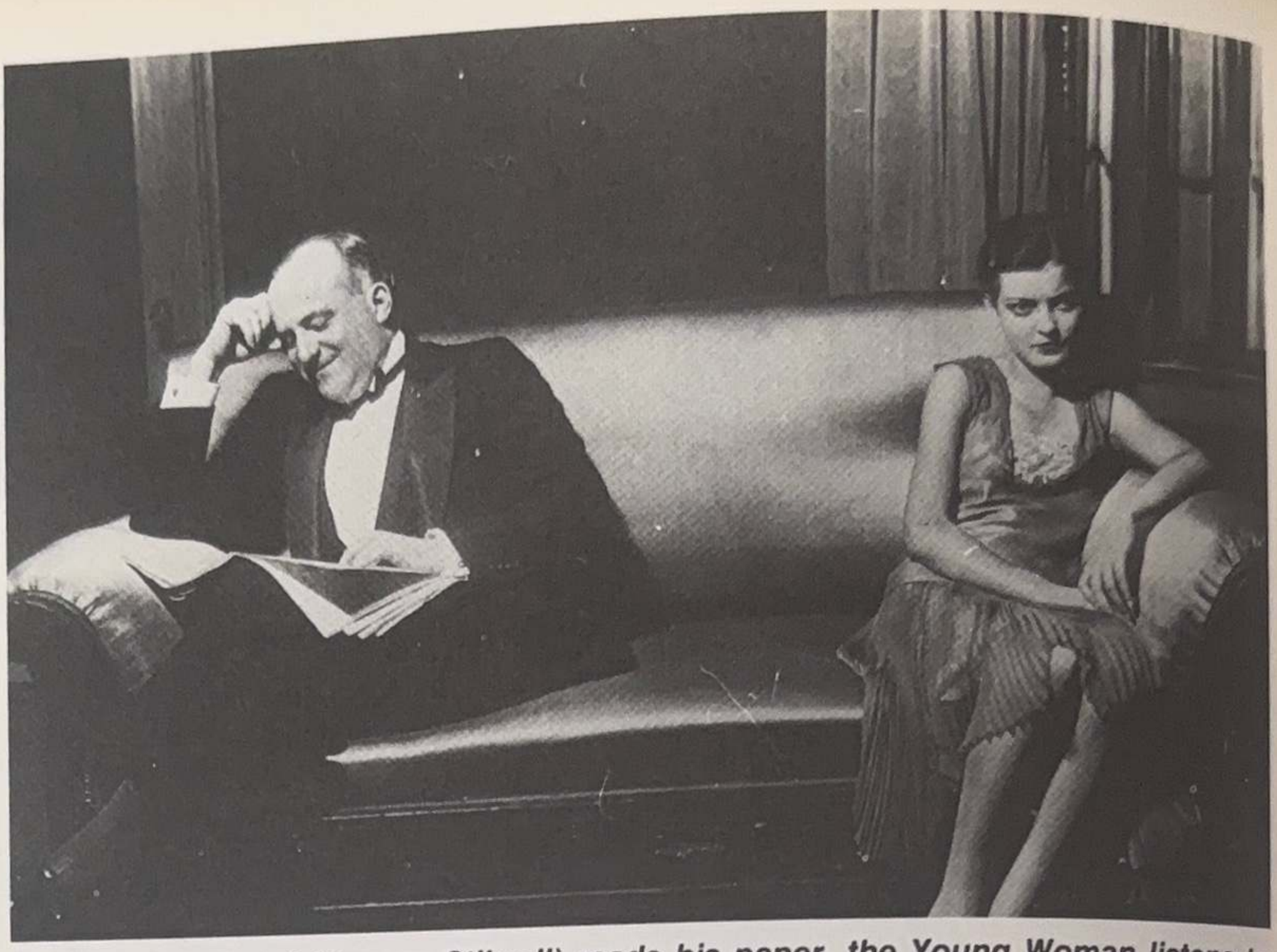
The two of them talk playfully, sing along with the hurdy-gurdy, talk some more. The street lights begin to flicker, outlining the windows. The constant going and coming of feet (mostly in couples) can be dimly seen. The Young Woman realizes it's gotten late and prepares to leave; as she dresses she notices the lily. After finishing at the mirror, she embraces the Man. She fixes her hat, crosses to the door at the right but stops, impulsively asking to keep the lily. He consents. She takes the flower and goes out. The lights fade. The music continues on as the curtain falls.

Episode Seven: in a drawing room

The curtain rises in silence. Though the drawing room is spare, a certain degree of financial success is indicated by the large shiny sofa at the front center, smooth shiny drapes at the right rear window, the shiny crepe satin of the Young Woman's dress and pumps, the Husband's patent leather shoes and tuxedo with shiny lapels. At the left is a table with a telephone on it where the Husband is standing, finishing his conversation about a successful deal. The Young Woman stands by the window looking out at the full moon and dutifully picks up her cues:

Did you put it over? —*Sure I put it over.*
Did you swing it? —*Sure I swung it.*
Did they come through? —*Sure they came through.*
Did they sign? —*I'll say they signed.*
On the dotted line? —*On the dotted line.*
The property's yours? —*The property's mine.*

Two more times the phone rings—the conversations are virtually identical to the first. The Young Woman is more than usually restless; she talks about wanting to get away for a bit, but the Husband says no, not yet, not with this big deal going through. She



While the Husband (George Stilwell) reads his paper, the Young Woman listens to the hurdy-gurdy music and voices outside.

decides to go to bed, but again he says not yet, he doesn't want her falling asleep on him. So she sits, staring ahead of her, on the opposite end of the sofa while he resumes reading his newspaper. "Before this country gets through, there'll be peace all over the world . . . The world's spiritual leader, that's what we'll be."

The music of the hurdy-gurdy sounds off right very dimly, playing "Cielito Lindo." Voices begin to sing the chorus—"Ay-ay-ay-ay"—and then the words; the voices and music get louder. A man and a girl enter left by the footlights and cross slowly to the right. He's telling her about *bandidos* and bottles and getting free: "Just a bottle and some stones." They exit. Voices pick up the refrain, repeat it over and over while the music continues.

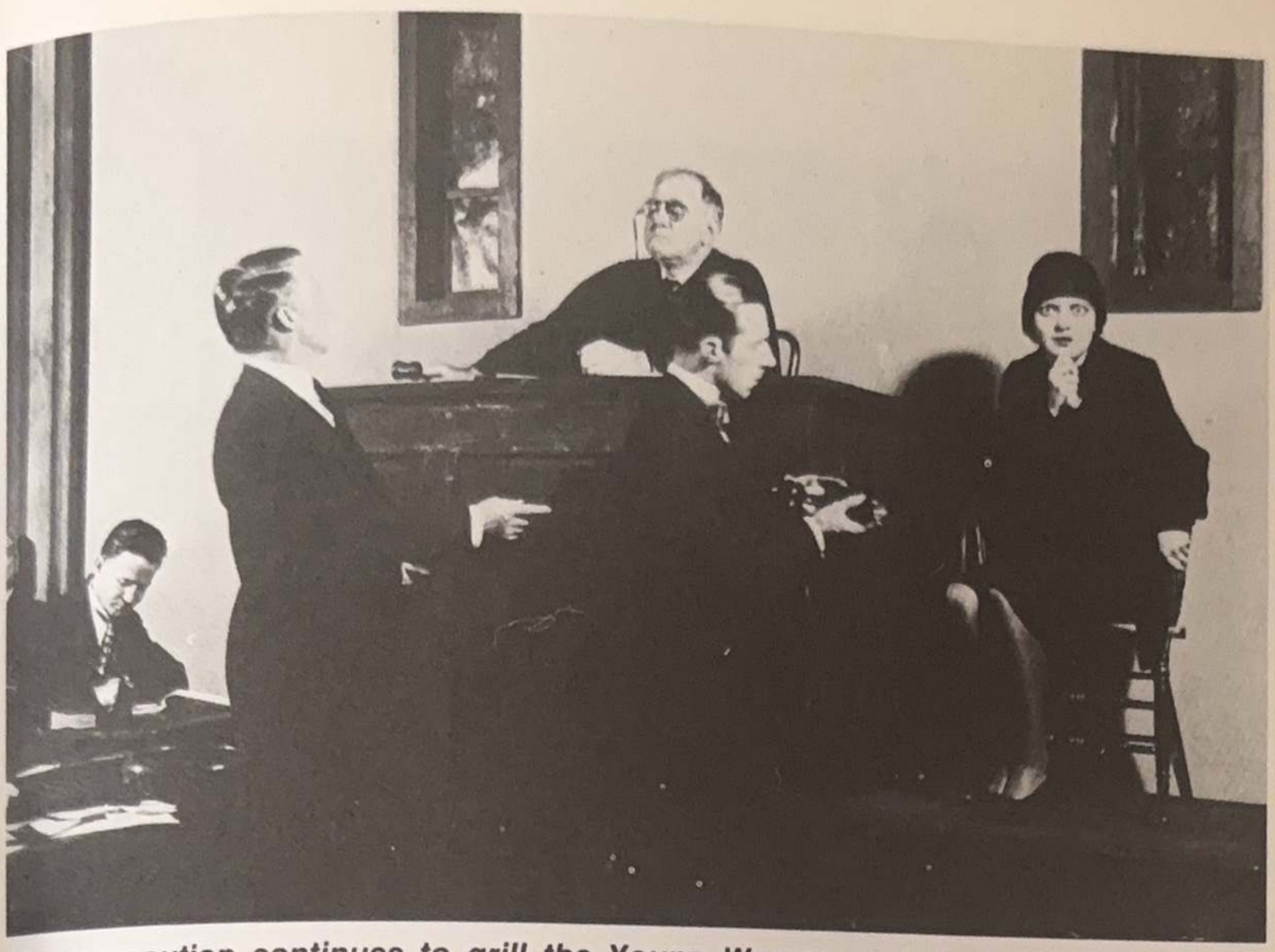
An old man, a ragpicker, crosses from left to right, calling out, "Old bottles, new stones . . . head stones . . . stepping stones . . . tombstones . . ." while the voices and hurdy-gurdy continue to increase. In a sudden frenzy, the Young Woman rises up and screams, "You must let me get away," rushing out of the room at the left rear. The Husband follows, "You'll be all right," still talking as the door closes. The lights fade. The curtain falls, as the music and the dim voices, "Stones—stones—stones," continue.

At this point there was a fifteen-minute intermission.

Episode Eight: in a courtroom

The clicking of telegraph instruments is heard as the curtain rises on a crowded, buzzing courtroom. At the right are the twelve jurors; at center is the judge's bench, with the witness stand to the right and the Court Reporter to the left. At a table at the left are three newspaper Reporters and the Bailiff. The two lawyers are situated at a center table in front of the judge. The plain pale background flat is broken only by two bare narrow windows that frame the judge's bench. Everyone's reactions are ritualized, automatic.

The Defense begins his statement to the Jury, then in a surprise move, calls the



The prosecution continues to grill the Young Woman and shows her the broken bottle used to kill her husband. (Left to right: John Hanley, Bailiff; Otto Frederick, Court Reporter; John Connery, Defense Lawyer; Tom Waters, Judge; James MacDonald, Prosecution Lawyer; Zita Johann, Young Woman.)

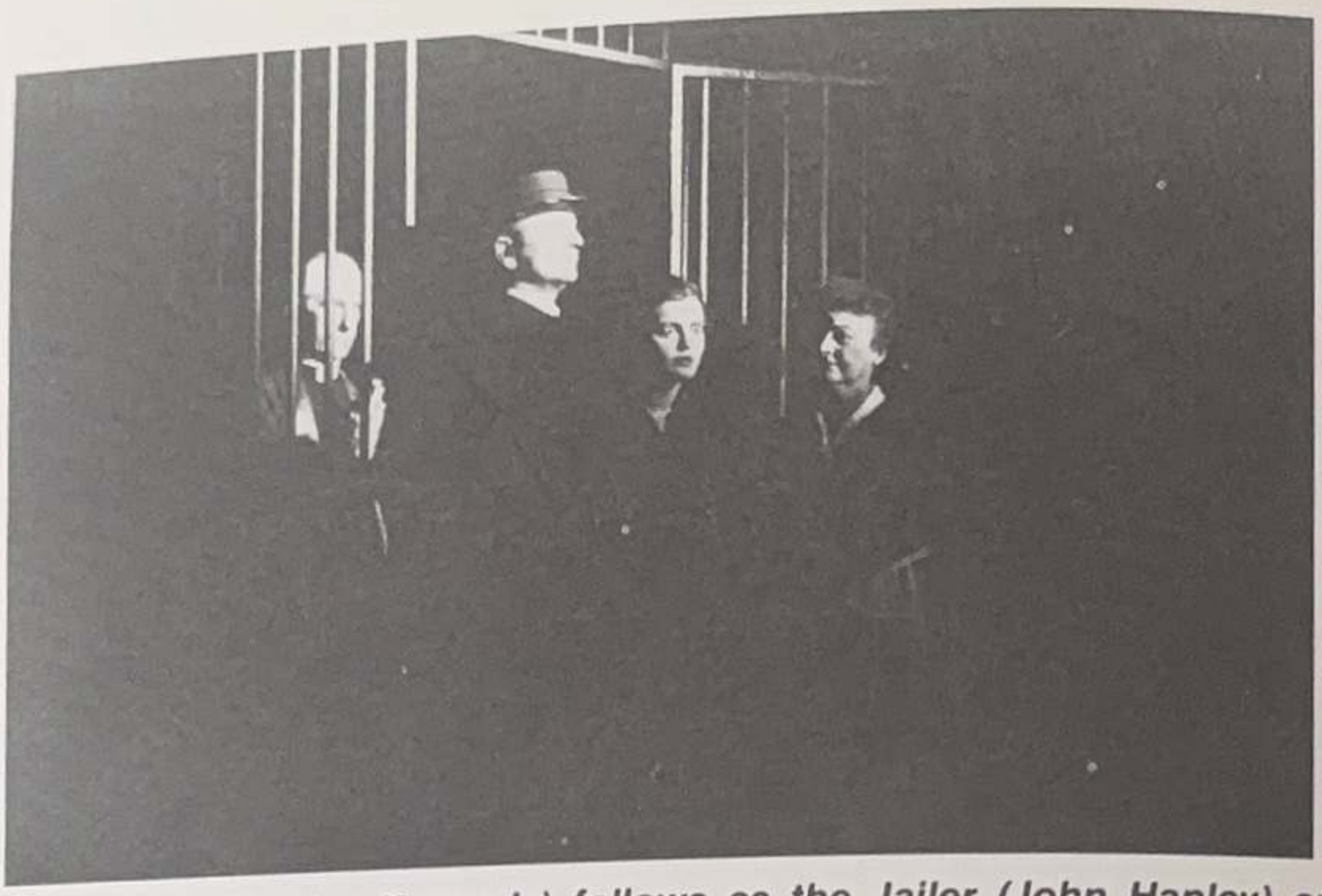
Young Woman to the witness stand. The Reporters interject different versions of the action. In the course of her testimony, the murder of her husband is described—he had been smashed in the head with a bottle filled with pebbles. First Reporter: "The accused woman told a straightforward story of . . ." Second Reporter: "The accused woman told a rambling, disconnected story of . . ."

The Prosecution has its turn with the witness. The evidence is circumstantial until an affidavit from Mexico is produced, signed by the Young Woman's lover, describing his liaison with her. As the paper is read aloud, she interrupts, "Don't read any more . . . I did it." Asked why, she says it was to be free, she couldn't divorce him, she couldn't hurt him like that. This gets a great burst of laughter from all in the court. She stares out, goes rigid, starts to moan and continues like this to the end of the scene. The courtroom empties as the buzz of talk rises and the telegraphic instruments pick up speed, a constant accompaniment to the Young Woman's moans. Two policemen are standing by her as the lights fade. The curtain falls. The sound of the telegraph continues through the change.

Episode Nine: in a prison

The chanting drone of a Priest is heard as the curtain rises. A few black steel gratings are set at the left with room for a clear passageway in front. The prison bars are picked out by a single beam of light shooting from the right; the rest of the stage is left murky. The background frame unit has disappeared. In front of the bars, at one side, sits the Jailer; at the opposite side, the Matron. Behind the bars sits the Young Woman, the Priest beside her continuing his prayers. The offstage voice of a Negro singing a spiritual breaks in now and again.

The Young Woman tries to question the Priest, but he is only able to respond with stock catechism phrases. Heard overhead is the whirring of an airplane engine:



The Priest (Charles Kennedy) follows as the Jailer (John Hanley) and the Matron (Mrs. Chas. Willard) lead the Young Woman to the electric chair.

> *He has wings but he isn't free. I've been free Father! For one moment—down here on earth . . . When I did what I did . . . How can that be? A great sin . . . for which I must die and go to hell—but it made me free.*

The Priest continues to chant. Out of the shadows emerges the Mother. The Young Woman first rejects her, then embraces her.

It's time. The Jailer takes the Mother away. The Matron and a Guard take the Young Woman by the arms and start through the door. The Priest follows, praying. The lights fade. The voice of the Priest dies away. There is darkness.

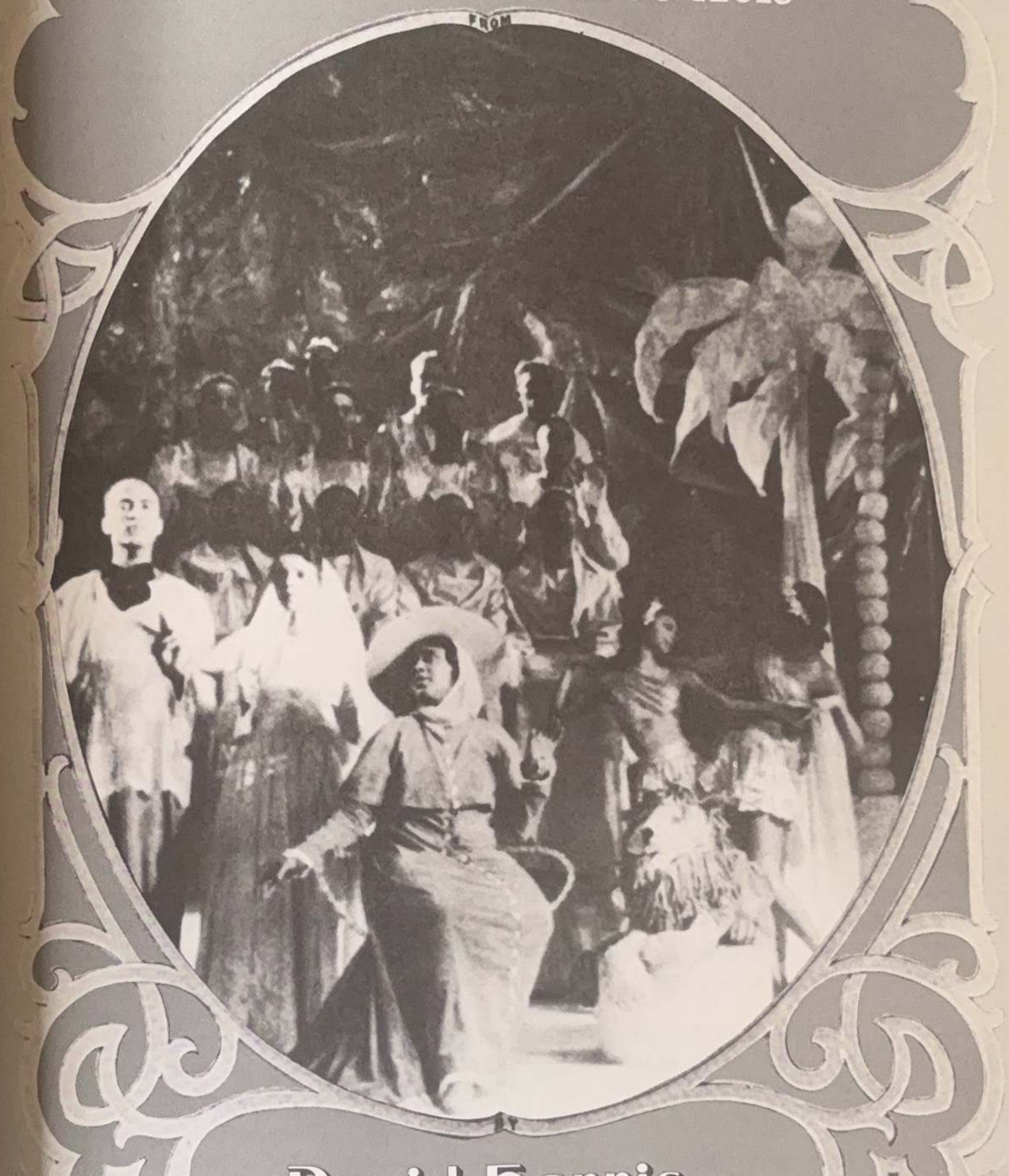
Episode Ten: in the dark

The stage is totally black. After a moment, faint footsteps are heard, and then the Priest's voice again, chanting more prayers, dimly at first, then louder. The matter-of-fact voices of the three Reporters intermingle, commenting on what they see in the execution chamber and shushing each other to be quiet. The clanking of electrodes is heard, a brief dead silence, then a scream. The Young Woman is calling out, "Somebody! Somebod—" but her voice is cut off. The voice of the Priest fades out. A pause. The overhead lights come up on the cyclorama, first faint blue, then red, then pink, then amber. The bare draped stage becomes saturated with beautiful lights; they are thrown up full. A pause . . . then . . .

CURTAIN

Jennifer Parent *is founder and artistic director of The Performing Salon, which specializes in private performance in New York City.*

The Original
Four Saints in Three Acts



David Harris

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a landscape does not move nothing
really moves in a landscape but things
are there, and I put into the play the
things that were there.
(Gertrude Stein, "Plays" *in* Lectures in America)

An expectant drum roll, the parting of bright red curtains, and then stillness. So began the 1934 production of the Gertrude Stein/Virgil Thomson opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, a seminal work of the American avant-garde. For Thomas Anderson, a cast member who doubled as stage manager's assistant and recorded the production's blocking, the amazement lingers, even forty-seven years later. For a moment, he reminisces, obviously impressed by the initial stillness, "Nothing moved." Kneeling quietly at the edge of the stage, garbed in an ample robe of violet, was the solitary, rapt figure of a saint, an image deemed by a New York art critic as "ecstatic as any vision painted by El Greco." Behind the saint, as if augmenting the aura of his saintliness, there shone a brilliant background, faintly blue, resembling crystal rock.

Presently the light dimmed. The opening tableau disappeared while more than thirty fellow saints—garbed in a splendid array of colors and carefully arranged about the tiny stage of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford's art museum—filled the auditorium with a crisply articulated lyric in simple melody:

To know to know to love her so.
Four saints prepare for saints.
It makes it well fish.
Four saints it makes it well fish.
Four saints prepare for saints it makes it well well fish it makes it
well fish prepare for saints.

Though maintaining in a Paris interview during "*Four Saints'* " rehearsal period that "physical movement always expresses the spiritual state," Gertrude Stein was only distantly involved with the physicalization her own libretto. Conspicuously absent from both Hartford and New York, she left her landscape in words to the moves of other artists, offering scarcely a clue as to how it might be staged. It was the young Virgil Thomson who, over a period of seven years and with the collaboration of an odd assortment of artists, produced Stein's libretto.

Stein and Thomson had their initial discussion about making an opera together in the first months of 1927. By March, Stein had "begun beginning of studies" (Virgil Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*). A letter to Thomson, written at the end of the month, indicates her original conception:

I think it should be late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century saints. Four saints in three acts. And others. Make it pastoral. In hills and gardens. All four and then additions. We must invent them. But next time you come I will show you a little bit and we will talk some scenes over.
(James R. Mellow; Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company)

On Christmas night of that year, Thomson celebrated by entertaining close friends—Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and Tristan Tzara, among them—with a solo performance at the piano of the newly composed first act. Having the librettist's permission to make whatever cuts the music required, the composer chose both to eliminate some passages and to

In 1934* Variety *claimed that* Four Saints in Three Acts *had captured more media space than any other production in recent seasons. This* New Yorker *cartoon is one of several of the opera published by newspapers and magazines.

set the "stage directions" to music. As the stage directions consist almost entirely of act and scene numbers indiscriminately sprinkled throughout the text, Thomson would have sung out that Nöel a double forte, "Act Two," somewhere in the middle of his new first act.

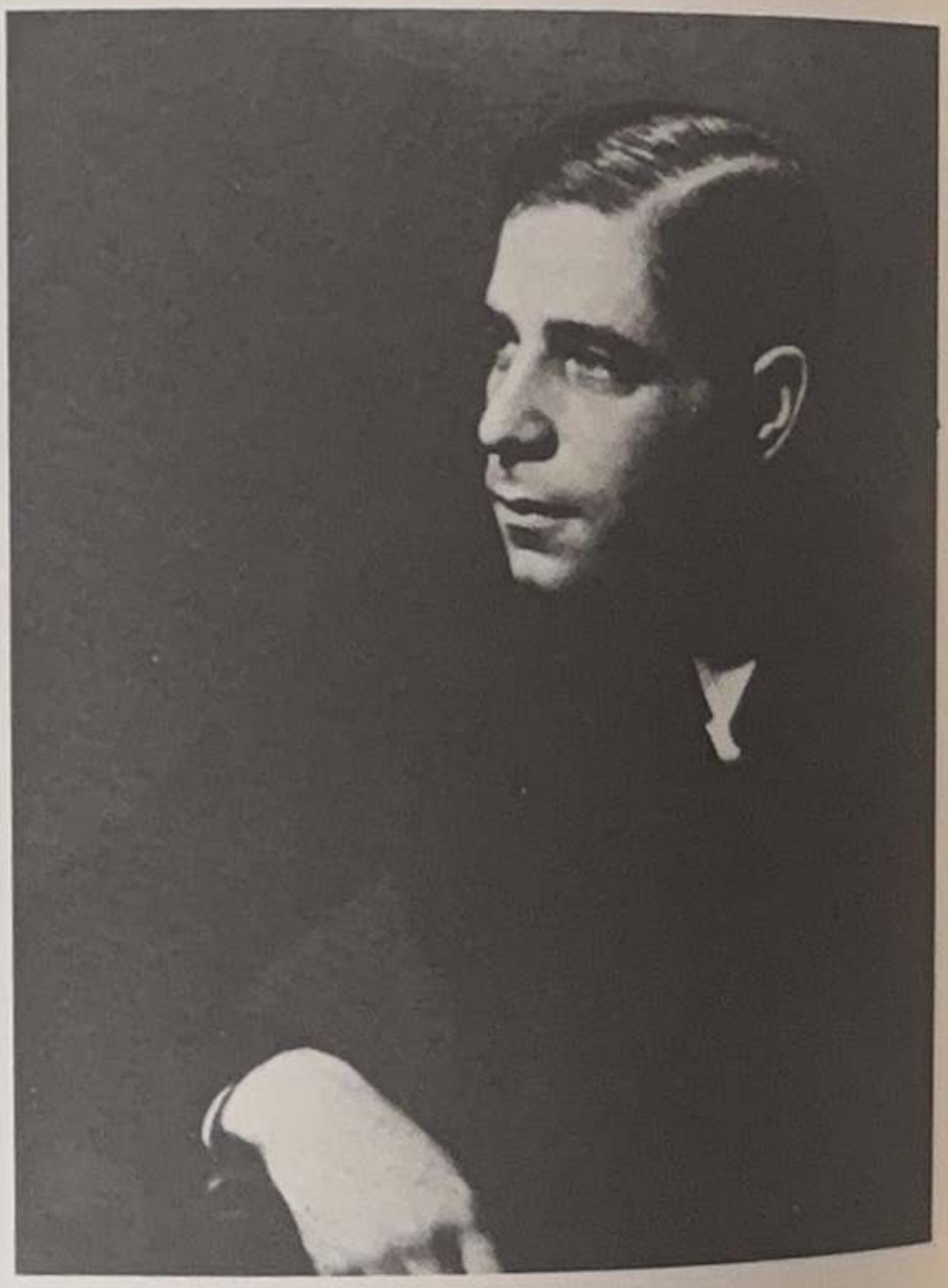
Although the fourth and final act was completed the following summer, no support for a production was forthcoming in that Depression era until 1933, when Kirk and Constance Askew resolved to ensure the opera a production. According to John Houseman in his published memoirs, the habitués of the Askew Salon that exerted "such a dominant modernistic influence on the art fashions of its time" (*Run-Through: A Memoir*), included Julien Levy, whose gallery was beginning to introduce the works of Dali, Tchelitchew, Gris, Kandinsky and Magritte to an American audience; Alfred Barr, who in 1929 founded the Museum of Modern Art; and A. E. "Chick" Austin, the young director of the Wadsworth Athenaeum.

Austin had already formed—around 1928—a non-profit society, The Friends and Enemies of Modern Music, whose contentious name reflected their aim to stir controversy among the established art elite in New England. Certainly, the production of "*Four Saints*" was an appealing project for such an organization. Austin would open the new Avery Memorial Wing of the Athenaeum in February, 1934 with the first American retrospective of the works of Picasso and with his newly acquired collection of original sketches for the Diaghilev ballets. What better complement than an original mise-en-scène in the French art performance tradition with Thomson as "impressario, producer . . . the Diaghilev of the whole enterprise" (*Virgil Thomson, Composer,* PBS TV, 1979). At the same time, Austin was anticipating the import of Lincoln Kirstein from France to establish a ballet school in

Hartford, and he suggested that Balanchine choreograph the opera. Though the vision never materialized, the guaranteed budget of $10,000 *was* delivered by the Friends and Enemies. It represented, for Thomson, "the ultimate in dream fulfillment—a production backed by enlightened amateurs and executed by whatever professional standards [he] chose to follow" (*Virgil Thomson*).

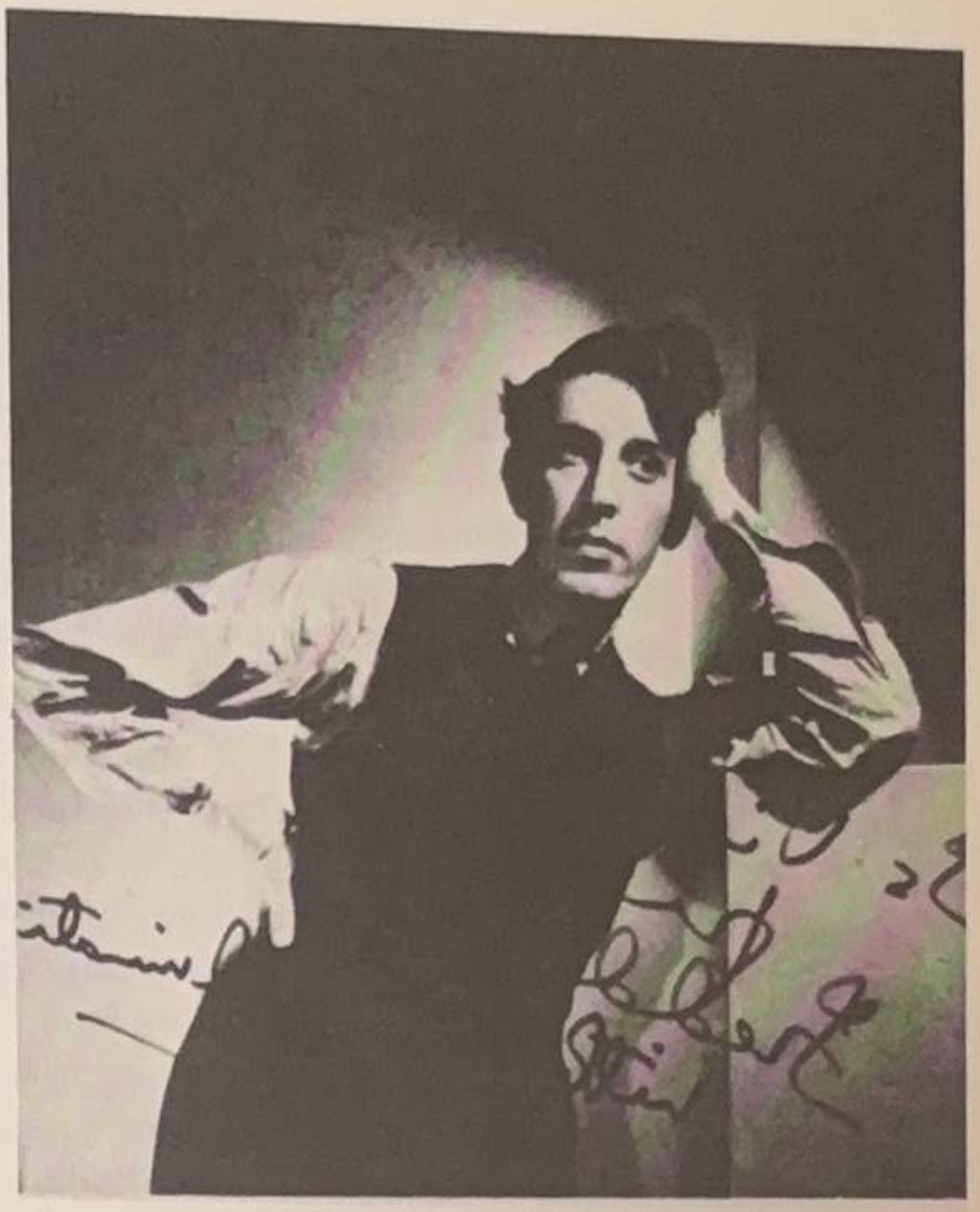
Thomson chose to begin by assembling a group of artists, who, despite their lack of experience at staging opera, are now—as a team, and as individuals—legends in this field. Alexander Smallens, Stokowski's assistant in Philadelphia, agreed to conduct. The painter, Maurice Grosser, contributed a scenario—a plot of images and movements inspired by the multiply connotative, alogical Stein script. John Houseman, at that time a playwright who had never staged a play, was engaged to handle the production, and he, in turn, acquired the expertise of Abe Feder, just out of college, as lighting designer and electrician. The two smartest coups of the American Diaghilev were in securing the talents of a young Englishman called Freddie, then almost unknown in this country, and of a reclusive New York artist named Florine, who had until that time rarely exhibited her delicate, whimsical, and vividly hued paintings. Indeed, it was "the lovely patterned movements" choreographed by Frederick Ashton and the "Botticellophane" scenography of Florine Stettheimer that, perhaps above even the inscrutable "Steinese" libretto and the all-black cast, made *Four Saints in Three Acts*, according to *Variety*, the most publicized theatrical event in years.

Virgil Thomson and 'Saints,' in a publicity shot which appeared in newspapers throughout the United States.



***Maurice Grosser, painter and scenarist for* Four Saints.**

Florine Stettheimer, the notable American painter who designed the production.



"Freddie" Ashton, choreographer-director, in 1934.

The Landscape Has Its Formation

> *The landscape has its formation and as after all a play has to have formation and be in relation one thing to the other thing . . . the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any sky and then any detail to any other detail*
>
> ***(Stein, "Plays")***

Florine Stettheimer's work as designer for "*Four Saints*" is perhaps, as Carl Van Vechten mentioned in a letter to the drama editor of the *New York Times* shortly after the Hartford premiere, the earliest instance of a painter of repute designing for the American stage. Although Stettheimer's notoriety outside the art world was not widespread until after her death (a retrospective exhibition of her paintings at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946 is largely responsible for the growth of her reputation), her work, often displayed only in her home or studio, was admired by many of the more influential artists of her day. The salon which she, her two sisters, Ettie and Carrie, and their mother maintained in an elegant flat in the ornate Allwyn Court Building on Manhattan's West 58th Street attracted the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Gaston Lachaise, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Marsden Hartley, Pavel Tchelitchew and, of course, Virgil Thomson.

Almost a year to the day after Stein had "begun beginning," the young composer performed the opera at a piano in the glittering ambience of Allwyn Court. Stettheimer, a faithful diarist, recorded the event:

> *He sang the whole. He makes the words by Gertrude Stein come alive and flutter and in sound have a meaning. He wants me to do the visual part of the opera.*
>
> ***(Parker Tyler,* Florine Stettheimer: A Life in Art)**

Thomson seems to have realized at once, on this early visit to the Stettheimers', that Florine's art had something his opera would need—a directness and decorative theatricality, qualities that Paul Rosenfeld has described as "the poetry and humor and pathos of what is merely embellishing." Soon she was at work gathering ideas for what was to be her sole stage endeavor, and although her mother and sisters, fearing failure, pleaded with her to abandon the theatrical venture, she persisted in not only designing but in overseeing the execution of her designs.

As an artist of means, and a newcomer to the world of the stage, Stettheimer was unaccustomed to the ordinary compromises of the theatre. As such, her fastidious attention to detail was a source both of endless anxiety to her collaborators and of the innovative stylistic unity of the opera as it appeared on the stage. Her theatrical style matched in spectacle and ornament and bright color the vividness of her figurative paintings.

Not only the textural qualities of "*Four Saints*" decor but its images and materials were paralleled in Florine's painting, and indeed, in her fashionable home. Her aesthetic was one of "the ornamental, the frivolous, the festive," and her flat as well as her paintings revealed a love of the old-fashioned and of shiny, glistening surfaces. The cellophane curtains, plumes, beads, gilt and lace John Houseman was to discover on his first visit to the Stettheimers' soon found their way into the setting on the miniature stage of the Avery Memorial Auditorium.

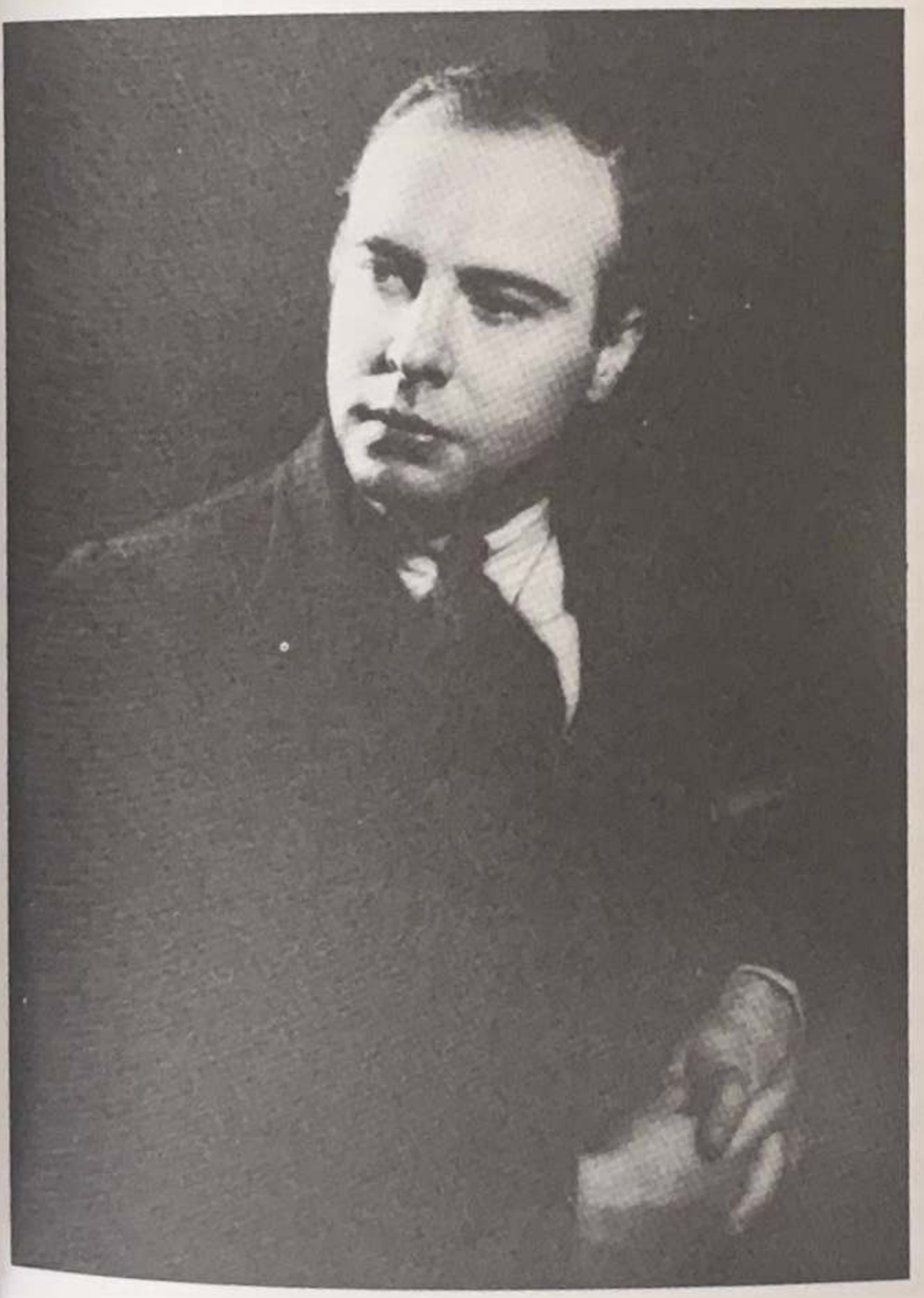
These same materials appeared in models for the three acts of "*Four Saints.*" (It must have been agreed upon early that there would be no entr'acte—only a brief scene played before the crimson curtain—between the third and fourth acts, and that there would be no structural additions to the set for the fourth.) Each of the three scenes was displayed in a toy theatre—probably constructed to the scale of Avery's auditorium—framed with a proscenium arch fashioned of an intricate lace doily, and backed by a miniature version of what was to become perhaps the most celebrated cyclorama in the history of the avant-garde. Her cellophane backdrop, which Houseman recalls as measuring "one foot square on her model and fifteen hundred square feet on the stage" had a slight blue tint to it and was creased and tufted to gather and reflect ambient light; behind was the actual cyclorama, also blue. The photographs of the maquettes show that inside were arranged delicate pipe cleaner dolls (now wrapped away in tissue paper, the little theatre apparently having collapsed). The figurines, just a few inches tall, were dressed in samples of material—laces and satin-like fibers and plush velvets—that Stettheimer had chosen from theatrical supply companies so that the stage costumes might be executed of the same fabrics. For the first act she set one of the Saints Teresa—the two dressed identically in loose robes of red velvet—in a frilly, silvered chair, near center. Her counterpart sat on an identical throne atop a small cardboard platform at the center rear of the toy stage. On either side, the artist placed a single palm tree with fronds of white tarlatan and, reaching up over the platform, a wire armature threaded with crystal beads and shaped into a double, pointed arch. A postcard in Virgil Thomson's collection picturing the portal of the Cathedral of Avila, Saint Teresa's home city, indicates the source of Stettheimer's archway. The picture also serves to explain the inclusion of a pair of set pieces: lions lounging on pedestals and chained down with links of cellophane (a sight that thoroughly baffled the theatre critics once the opera reached the actual stage).

Stone lions chained to the Cathedral seemed to Stettheimer such an extraordinary decorative detail that she included a figure of one in her paintings (dated 1930, and now in the Art Institute of Chicago) of Thomson singing and playing "*Four Saints*" on a piano amid radiant clouds. A stylized image of the musician was surrounded there by birds, bright palms, and banners proclaiming, "St. Virgil," "St. Gertrude," "St. Therese," "St. Ignatius" and "Florine St."—the pun on her own name being characteristic of the whimsy

in Stettheimer's art. At the top of the picture, a pair of hands, issuing from a classical theatre mask having a visage like Stein's own, manipulate the strings of four marionettes, dangling down in a scaled-down theatre not unlike that of Stettheimer's little dolls. A golden lion dominating the painting's foreground was to be succeeded in the toy theatre by a pair of yarn beasts beside the two palms, and by two felt, stuffed lions—themselves looking much like oversized, children's toys—in the staged first act.

Stettheimer's very creation of the models implies belief that painting alone was insufficient for theatrical design, an idea leading to her obstinate insistence that nothing in the setting be merely painted. Among her notes on her experience at Hartford, there appears a list of the "difficulties she had with direction of 4 Saints." She was horrified that the seats she had arranged in a "pyramidal formation" of risers for the chorus in the first act had been "painted instead of draped," and she "had to insist" that the sculptural, baroque quality of drapery so essential to her conception (and evident in the photographic reproduction of Bernini's "Saint Teresa in Ecstasy" in the production program) be maintained throughout. In the same list, she lamented the problems of draping a curtain between the two palms and in front of Saint Teresa's arch, a similar difficulty in draping having occurred with some of her costumes as well.

Stettheimer's difficulties became the difficulties of those with whom she worked. Kate Drain Lawson, a Theatre Guild technician brought into the production staff as technical director, labored inexhaustibly to fulfill the requirements of the Stettheimer design, and, according to Houseman, managed to supply ninety percent of what was wanted. Nonetheless, a "red velvet runner" leading to Saint Teresa's "throne" was omitted because of the problems it caused the actors in rehearsal. Abe Feder was able to convince the designer that her demand for glass globes in the double arch was unreasonable because



Producer John Houseman.

they would not light well, and she acceded to his suggestion of a substitute, balls formed of compressed cellophane. She was not, however, convinced that the machine-made lace Lawson was able to find at a reasonable price could replace the antique lace she had wanted for the proscenium, and it seems that no compromise on that point was ever settled. Some sort of filigree proscenium did appear, nonetheless.

Her major point of contention—and, ultimately, her most significant victory—was the great cellophane cyclorama. Despite objections that the light reflected off such a background would be "too dazzling for [the] audience," making them "unable to see [the] singers' expressions," Stettheimer "*had to insist*"—perhaps aware, as her biographer suggests, that " 'dazzle' can be relative and its after-images all the more potent and significant." Variously described by those who saw it as "stage heaven," "crystal rock," a "sea with cellophane waves created with white light," and "a great curtain of jewels," the tufted backdrop when lit was a dazzling source of journalistic metaphor. The material itself—actually a slightly blue, semi-opaque substance mounted on a strong cotton net—was judged important enough to be credited in the program as a product of two companies, Dupont Cellophane and the Dobekmun Company.

Left in its original state, the product was also extremely flammable. Just two days before the New York opening, February 20, 1934, at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre, the Fire Marshall, according to Houseman,

> *. . . walked up to our highly publicized cellophane cyclorama, took out a penknife, cut off a strip, set a match to it and dropped it just in time to save his hand from being burned.*

The incident was sufficient cause for the marshall to close down the production. "He condemned every single physical element," but a maintenance man brought in a viscous chemical solution known as "waterglass," which, though perhaps tarnishing the brilliant firmament, proved an adequate fireproofing substance and led to the proverbial zero-hour reversal of the Fire Marshall's initial decision.

The production, under both Feder's well-trained supervision and the focused beams of more than two hundred projectors, was marked by an "almost continuous change of lighting" (considered something of a novelty by the New York reviewer who described it) (*New York Journal*, Feb. 9, 1934). By result, the appearance of the cellophane did, in fact, vary greatly from scene to scene. Several permutations were possible, dependent on the direction as well as on the color of the lighting and on the relationship between the lighting washed onto the cellophane and that onto the light blue, curved cyclorama. When the cellophane was lit from behind and there was no light on the front, it produced "a sort of twilight, with (the) folds in the cellophane visible." Maximum brilliance was achieved by lighting the cyclorama, which stood about two feet behind the translucent backdrop, while lighting the latter from the front. Of course, the addition of color further increased the possible variations. One critic wrote of the range "from blue of midnight to the blue of midday and the rosy blue of evening and dawn" (*Hartford Daily Courant*, Feb. 9, 1934).

Virgil Thomson remembers that when the drop was lit solely from the front, the result was "absolute crystal"; this was the effect produced in the first scene. Believing that the combination of colored lights could only produce a "greyish-white" light, Stettheimer was adamant that the scene be lit by "pure white" light. She refused to consider Feder's professional judgement that white light is achieved only through the careful mixing of various colors. Ultimately, after a series of fruitless attempts to change the designer's mind, however, Feder succumbed and offered Stettheimer—even in the footlights—the

no-gel white she demanded. He limited the use of gel colors to the subsequent three acts. The white light of the first act was considered necessary for the illumination of a series of costumes in brilliant primary and secondary hues—saturated reds, blues, violets, greens—to complement the orange and yellows in the lounging lions. In later acts, when the costumes afforded less brilliance of color, lighting and scenic pieces could provide it.

The sheer number of costumes—approximately two hundred in an opera that ran only one hundred minutes—contributed to the baroque richness of the spectacle. Most of the nearly forty performers, all but eight of whom portrayed saints and were costumed in ecclesiastical habit, had a costume change at each entr'acte. One newspaper correspondent with an eye for detail wrote that (as can be confirmed by the photographs of production) the majority of the costumes were "designed in simple, unshaped robes, with wide sleeves and cowl hoods, varied by lace bordered tunics like ecclesiastical surplices" (*Women's Wear Daily*, Feb. 23, 1934). Among the characters so dressed, there were twelve individual, fictionalized saints with names such as Plan, Answers, Guiseppe, Settlement, and Chavez; two separate choruses of six male and eleven female saints; and the two central, canonized figures, Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila—the latter appearing in two persons. The composer had created both a Saint Teresa I and Saint Teresa II as a conceit meant to permit the opera's strong female character the unusual liberty—as both contralto and soprano—of singing duets with herself.

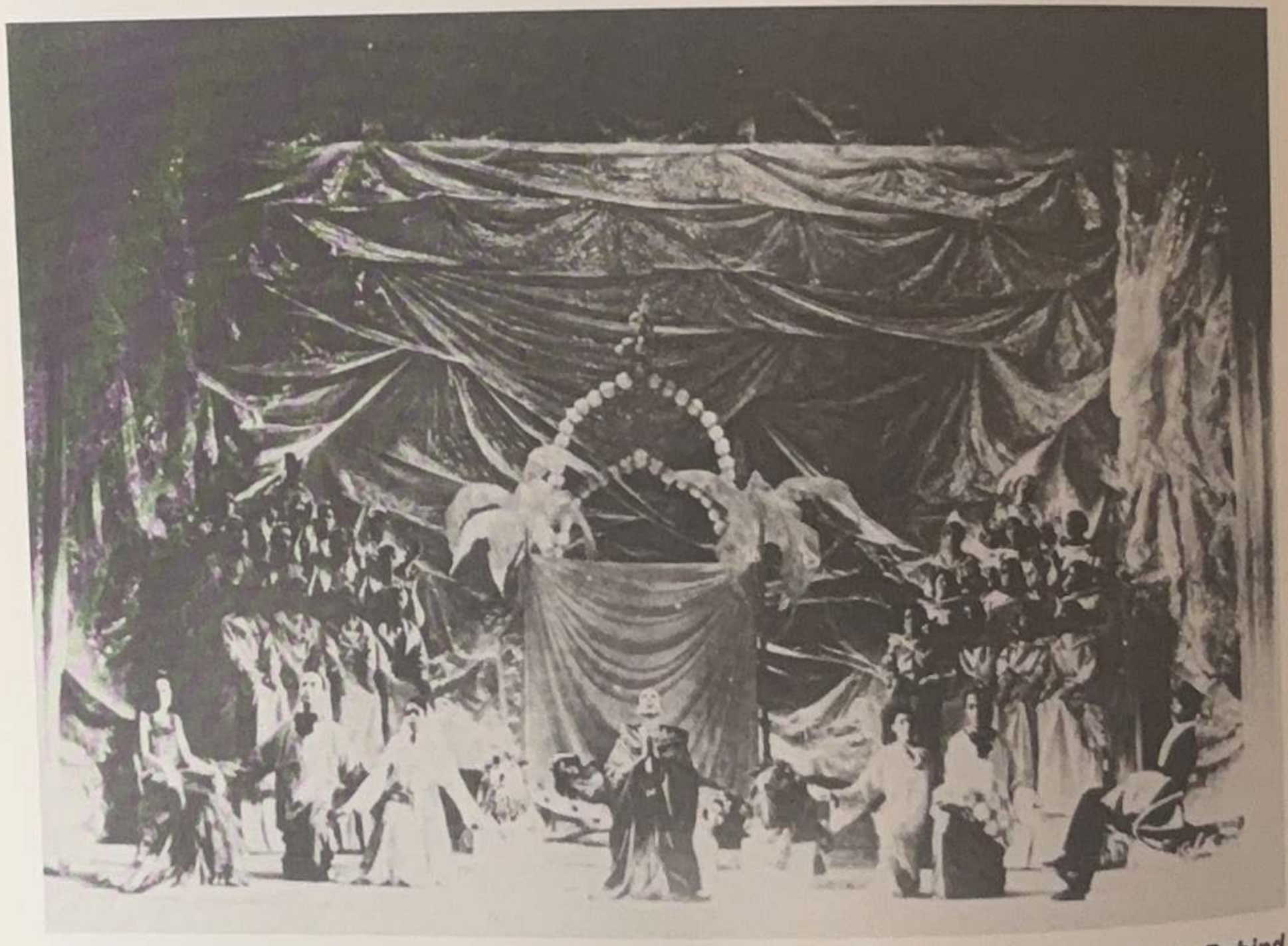
The two Saints Teresa wore fitted bodices with bright buttons and "full-gathered skirts." Their hats, "over silver lace short mantillas," were wide-brimmed and circular, posed chicly at a wide angle and resembling somewhat the haloes of Renaissance and baroque paintings. Identical except for size—Saint Teresa I being described as "portly" while her counterpart was slender—both wore Cardinal red in the first act, white in the second (the costumes for the two acts being identical except for color) and again the white basque with a tan cape in the performance's third section. Ignatius in the first act wore a surplice of green moiré silk and, like all the other characters save the Compère, had a white version of his costume in the second. Stettheimer's chorus members posed on the first act pyramids wearing light blue tunics, as if to blend into the blueness of the tinted cellophane sky. Throughout the performance, both the choruses and the minor saints wore little silvered haloes and what are variously described as "white," "diamond-studded," "silver-studded," and "silver" gloves—an accessory demanded by the fastidious designer during a costume parade only a few days before the Hartford preview on February 8, 1934.

The costumes of the less saintly personnages, six dancers whose characters seemed to alter with their change of costume and the Compère and Commère, introduced a contrast to the fullness and solemnity of the habit's shape. The Commère and Compère, characters drawn by Thomson from the French music hall to serve as the master and mistress of ceremonies, were dressed in clothes of contemporary design. The Compère was attired in black tie and tails with a long black cape and a stiff, obsidian, Spanish hat for accents. The Commère had three different full-length evening gowns—in red sequins for the first act, white tulle ruffles for the second and, for the third, black paillettes. The dancers' secularity, in opposition to the sacredness of the other characters, was emphasized in all three acts through their assumption of character and through the visibility of their limbs and bare feet. In the first act, the three girls dressed in costumes of reflective material—short skirts and halter-like tops that left a bare midriff and a single bare shoulder. In Act II, as angels, they wore gold tinselled wings and decidedly sexy, white, semi-transparent tunics. Their male companions were similarly erotic in shiny blousing shorts, bare chests, and bright headbands. ("The transparence," Thomson had earlier assured Stein in a letter, would not be aimed "at titillating the audience with the sight of a leg but

at keeping the texture of the stage as light as possible.") The dancers' reappearance for the third act tango, cast as sailors and Spanish ladies, showed them in typical costume. The men wore light-colored bell-bottom trousers, sailors' hats and sashes crossing their chests, and the women, black mantillas and flowers in their hair. The ladies' dresses, each of a different material, featured a gathered waist and a full skirt adorned with Spanish lace that permitted the extended leg movements of the Ashton tango.

Houseman had announced to a reporter during one of the earlier rehearsals for "*Four Saints*" in the basement of a Harlem church that the entire cast might be masked in a single color for the sake of uniformity. The meticulous designer, it seems, had been upset that the various shades of brown and black faces in the cast would disrupt her perfect color scheme. As solutions—according to the report—silver, white, and gold face paint were all considered but were later abandoned in preference for a neutral shade of brown makeup that was, indeed, used by all the performers.

Thomson's decision to cast black performers in roles not specifically written for them was probably the first such instance in what, in the early thirties, was still a very white American theatre. In Thomson's case, the decision was made for the furthering of neither commercial nor humanist values but of peculiarly artistic ones. He chose to utilize what he termed the precise diction of black singers. "Whites just hate to move their lips," he would explain to friends, whereas "Negroes enunciate" proudly. In addition to clarity of speech and musical articulation, Thomson would praise "the dignity and poise" of the race, believing black performers less self-conscious when dealing with religious themes and less likely to be bothered by the novelty and apparent senselessness of the Stein



The Commère, Altonell Hines, in her red paillette evening gown from Act I. Behind her are some of the saints, chorus members, female dancers, and one of the celebrated stuffed lions.

text than white singers, inured to traditional operatic forms. Today the composer remains convinced that his choice of black performers—who managed to make audible nearly every extraordinary word, who even began to converse with each other offstage in phrases of the Stein script—was as important to the artistic success of his endeavor as was the choice of the aristocratic lady who provided him such a dazzling theatrical landscape.

The Story Is Only of Importance

> *. . . the story is not the thing as anyone is always telling something then the landscape not moving but being always in relation . . . the story is only of importance if you like to tell or hear a story but the relation is there any way.*
>
> **(Stein, "Plays")**

If Thomson was pleased with the contribution of Stettheimer's iconography—an iconography like that of the Latin country where the opera is laid, paralleling "the dazzling fairy-tale effect ordinarily aimed at in the construction of [its] religious images out of twine and tinsel and painted plaster and gilding and artificial flowers" (as he wrote to Gertrude in the spring of 1933 [*Virgil Thomson*])—he was also pleased with the narrative iconography of his friend, Maurice Grosser. Beginning in 1929, the same year that Stettheimer started to explore her design ideas, Grosser, another painter, composed a scenario for "*Four Saints*"—a scheme by which the baroque "fantasy" was produced. Selecting connotations from among the many, fleeting, random meanings of Stein's enigmatic text and imagining a sequence of actions to physicalize them on the stage, Grosser served as the definitive interpreter for his fellow artists.

Grosser admits that his scenario was arbitrary, one of any number of possible interpretations, that it fixed certain meanings in "a train of images . . . a train of action," while permitting a myriad of other meanings to escape illustration. His work on the opera reflected an actual, painterly concern for the physical expression of spiritual states, which Stein—despite the physicality inherent in the controlled, aural patterns of her asyntactical language—only theorized.

Although Stein's input on the making of the scenario was limited to two interpretative details—that the "Pigeons on the Grass" section refers to a vision of the Holy Ghost, and that the cadence in the second "Scene IX" ("in wed led dead," etc.) in Act III might be the inspiration for a sort of propitiatory procession—she is said to have liked the scenario as a whole. What the production's press representative was to call "the vague tracery of a plot," conveying "impressions, rather than concrete things" (*New York Evening Post*, Mar. 3, 1934), effected something else entirely. Grosser did make a set of concrete images, but the images, in the context of the libretto, had no intelligible, assimilable messages. For example, he chose, quite arbitrarily, to illustrate the line, "Saint Teresa could be photographed having been dressed like a lady," and chose not to picturize another equally stageable line, "A croquet scene and when they made their habits." Without an awareness of the almost aleatory quality of the combination of image and text, the historian is likely to view the staging of "*Four Saints*" as that of a simple, episodic narrative, when in fact, for the audience of three hundred in the Wadsworth Athenaeum, the effect was nothing of the kind.

The opera opened with a Prologue or choral prelude. It featured the Commère and Compère as "endmen," positioned at either side of the stage, singing lines such as, "Acts three acts," and "Four saints born in separate places." The Prologue served to "prepare for saints," to introduce the characters. Beginning with "To know to know to love her so/

A scene from the Prologue, probably the opening tableau.

Four saints prepare for saints," and leading to the introduction to the stage of Saint Teresa I and Saint Ignatius, the prelude culminated in a sung list of the names of twenty-one auxilliary saints. Directly, one of the players detached from a palm one end of the curtain hung in front of the short platform that represented the Cathedral at Avila. With the fall of the cloth, the first act proper began. Revealed there beneath the arch was Saint Teresa II. Holding a palette in one hand, a brush in the other, and an ostrich-size, pink egg on her lap, she mimed the decorating of the egg. Her scene was the first of eight tableaux vivants staged in the first act of "*Four Saints*" and described by Grosser in his Introduction to the piano-vocal score as the representation of a Sunday School entertainment on the steps of the Cathedral.

Next, Saint Teresa II, probably remaining on her throne, received her guests, including Saint Ignatius and Saint Teresa I, with whom she joined in a bit of spoken dialogue:

TERESA I: How do you do.
TERESA II: Very well I thank you.
TERESA I: And when do you go.
TERESA II: I am staying on quite continuously.
TERESA I: When is it planned.
TERESA II: Not more than as often.

The subsequent tableau—which repeated, as did several of them, the dropping of the curtain—was the photography tableau, Grosser's inspiration for which was the line quoted above. For it, a large, old-fashioned camera on a tripod, was carried onto the stage, maybe by a dancer but more than likely by one of the minor saints. One of the saints, Settlement, picked up the delicate black lace mantilla attached to the camera and wore the covering over her head as she "focused" the lens. From a position just in front and to the side of the Cathedral arch, she mimed the taking of the photo.

The justifications for the third and fourth pictures were also single lines of the written text. The Commère sang, "Leave later gaily the troubadour plays his guitar," and while what sounded like banjo music rose from the orchestra pit, Saint Ignatius pantomimed the strumming of a fake stringed instrument that had the neck of a banjo and the body of a lute. Photographs of the tableau show him down on one knee, in almost the precise center of the stage, a Teresa on either side a yard away, with the choruses standing on their triangular risers and the minor saints standing on the floor just before the choruses. The same general arrangement was probably maintained throughout the act, certainly through the succeeding tableau. There, Ignatius presented Teresa II a heart-shaped bouquet of bright, cellophane flowers that had been made in Hartford by Florine Stettheimer herself.

The fifth tableau seems not to have made too lasting an impression, for there are no extant photographs of it, and Maurice Grosser cannot remember for certain whether or not it was included in the production at all. However, Thomas Anderson, who portrayed Saint Giuseppe, has a vague remembrance of a stage property about two feet in length, meant to represent the Heavenly Mansion, an icon returning in two-dimensions in a later act.

More memorable was the next picture, in which one of the female dancers portrayed an angel and hovered over Saint Teresa II. The latter posed in an attitude of ecstasy while her "sister" Teresa intoned an *allegretto* aria, mellifluently ranging an octave and a half:

> *There can be no peace on earth with calm. There can be no peace on earth with calm with calm and with whom whose with calm and with whom whose when they well they well they call it there made message especial and come.*

The image of an angel hovering over Teresa in an attitude of ecstasy was an illustration, not of any image or idea in the language, but of the enraptured character of the music. Hence, the sixth tableau was exemplary of the work Grosser did in interpreting not only the opera's libretto but its musical qualities as well. (Thomson had finished the vocal score a full year before Grosser in 1929 undertook the task of writing a scenario. Although Grosser was not a musician, he was quite familiar with the music simply from having heard his friend perform it at the piano on so many occasions.)

Tableau VII returned to the style of libretto-to-picture orientation of the previous tableaux. With her hat as a halo and looking something like a madonna figure, Saint Teresa II rocked an imaginary child while the chorus and Saint Settlement sang, "summer summer makes a child happening at all to throw a ball too often to please."

With the completion of the seventh tableau, the "entertainment" was ended, and the rest of the act was devoted to the extension of the colorful landscape. "Saint Teresa has begun to be in act one," sang the chorus, reflexively, whereupon both incarnations of the Saint descended from the Cathedral steps and greeted the members of their orders. Finally, some sort of attempt was made to match the staging to the childlike simplicity of the music. Just before the act's end, the chorus joined in what were almost unadorned scales. "One two three four five six seven all good children go to heaven," they all sang as they began a slow, processional exit. On the line, "This makes Saint Ignatius Act II," the curtain closed.

As Act I and its Prologue assume nearly half the score of the opera, the second act's scenario was much shorter and more unified. It depicted the chorus of saints having a lawn party or picnic. For the outdoor, pastoral scene, Stettheimer called for—in addition

to a new set of palms—a bright green carpet of stage grass to be draped over both the floor and the platforms supporting two of the act's three major set pieces. Because the stage space was so small for a production with a large cast—only about twenty-three feet from the front to the backdrop and with a proscenium opening of only twenty-eight feet—the three structures were all positioned at the peripheries of the stage. That left a relatively wide central area of the stage open for the enactment of the picnic's unusual festivities.

The set piece furthest downstage and to the right was an opera box in two separate parts, an almost semi-circular partition behind which sat the formally attired Commère and Compère. The second piece—a sweeping, rounded canopy—was suspended above their heads. Both parts were draped—not painted!—in white fabric, elegantly festooned and tasselled with gold fringe. The entire "box" was set upon a rectangular platform, as were the other two equally ornate pieces of scenery.

Lifted one step off the stage level and located far left, there was an elaborate tent for Saint Teresa. Just large enough to hold her glistening, filigree throne of the first act, the tent was totally transparent, made of a filmy, white gauze, its entryway trimmed with a tinsel garland. At least ten feet high, the conical structure seems to have been built on a tripod of poles. Because of its height and the sharp, attenuated angle of its airy ceiling, the diaphanous pavilion was quite fragile. In contrast, the six-foot banquet table was covered with a white cloth that fell to the green of the stage grass, giving the whole a solid, almost monumental, appearance. The table was placed at the rear right corner of the stage, nearly parallel to the proscenium. Its position justified the face-front presentation of the chorus members. They stood behind it, as formally arranged as were the two gaily decorated cakes and the feather centerpiece that graced the table. Palms framed the entire banquet area.

Within the painterly stage environment, the theatricality of which was made explicit with the presence onstage of an opera box, the saints, with Commère and Compère as their audience, revelled in a series of singing games. Grosser, after nearly half a century, recalls that there were stylized representations of "ring around the rosey" and "drop the handkerchief"; in addition, there was, as in the first act sequence of tableaux, a performance-within-a-performance. The dancers, dressed in their sheer angel costumes, entertained the gathered host with a dance routine. The incidental ballet was capped by Saint Teresa II's acknowledgement to the dancers, "Thank you very much." Her comment, which was a direct response to what had preceded it, was judged by an otherwise favorable critic to be too "naturalistic," an inappropriate intrusion of cause-and-effect into a form whose conceptual strength was its abandonment of traditional "reason and logic" (*New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1934).

The entertainment was followed by the gradual darkening of the stage and the departure of all the saints. Thereupon, Commère and Compère, leaving their private box for center stage, played a scene in subdued tones. Embracing, they sang a hushed, measured dialogue:

COMMÈRE: Scene one.
COMPÈRE: And begun.
COMMÈRE: Scene two.
COMPÈRE: To and to.
COMMÈRE: Scene three.
COMPÈRE: Happily be.

"Scene eight./To wait," the final couplet in their secular responsory—which Maurice Gros-

The first of the Act I tableaux, Saint Teresa II, seated on the Cathedral platform, decorates a large egg. Her identical counterpart is seated in the foreground.

ser had decided, becuase of the tenderness implicit in the musical setting, would be played as a "love scene"—was observed by the returning Saints Teresa.

After conversing with her other self about the lovers ("With them and./And hand."), one of the Teresas took a stage property glass and, tasting what was meant to be champagne, sang in a lilting melodic line, "To be asked how much of it is finished." Grosser explains that she sang as if asking, "Is there any champagne left?" The line reading was typical of the concrete style of the scenario. In another version, that same bit of text might have been considered as a reference to the opera as it was in progress in the auditorium. The scenario developed for the 1934 production, though, was a vehicle for a specific subtextual interpretation of the libretto, a pretext by which the singers were able to do something more with the lyrics than to voice them as they would have done in an oratorio version. Hence, the sung repetitions and variations on "ask how much of it is finished," which followed Saint Teresa I's initial toast to the couple, became a rousing drinking song for the reassembling saints. The similar echoing of "once in a while," which was shouted forthwith twenty-six times in unison by the entire company (and was not, as is indicated by the published score, divided among the cast), was staged as another jovial toast to the lovers.

After the toasting and the playing of some sort of dancing game, Saint Plan entered with an unexpected property, mentioned by many a bemused critic—a telescope. He assumed center stage between Ignatius and one of the Teresas. Divided almost evenly on either side of the stage, the eleven other minor saints looked on while Plan knelt and lifted the telescope in the direction of the cellophane sky. His back to the audience, he held the prop almost perpendicular to the stage floor, presumably so that it would not be

blocked from the view of the theatre audience. A photograph of the scene shows the verticality of the telescope paralleled by that of white stage prop altar candles (each about four feet long and topped with a glowing, incandescent bulb) held up by his fellow saints. The picture discloses that all except the leaders had their backs to the audience, at least by the time he had focused the glass, for everyone wanted to see the "vision of the Heavenly Mansion" that lit up in the distance when Plan first looked through the blessed instrument. What they saw near the midpoint of the backdrop was actually a faint, small, front projection of a large building in the classical style. Had it not been for the technical director having cut off the building's dome, they would have seen a photographic likeness of the United States Capitol. Lawson's work with the scissors managed to make sure that the production, in the middle of the Depression, did not make any figurative endorsement of the current administration in Washington.

After a sequence of repetitions of "How many windows and doors and floors are there in it," sung with a Gospel flair by Plan, Chavez, and both Teresas, there was an extended bit of pantomime. Teresa wanted the telescope, and Chavez gave it to her, whereupon she turned out and looked through it directly over the heads of the spectators. Ignatius let his disapproval be known, and Chavez (who Grosser names the "moderator" of the scene) retrieved the instrument. The composite Teresa—one of whose voices sang, "Theirs by and by"—acquiesced to the male ownership of the visionary device, and all left the stage slowly as Chavez ended the act on a very high note, singing, "With noon."

Saint Teresa in conversation with herself, flanked by elegantly postured dancers.

Act III belonged to Saint Ignatius. The program for the performance noted the setting as "*Barcelona:* St. Ignatius and One of Two literally." Similarly, Act I, in which the female saints dominated the staging, was described as "*Avila:* St. Teresa half indoors and half out of doors." By choosing those two locations and mottos, the original "*Four Saints*" interpreters chose to emphasize in the mise-en-scène certain character contrasts. According to an interview with Stein, Teresa of Avila "lived for a long time in her convent. She had her friends and her luxuries. She lived almost as a society woman" until "she got a mania for founding convents" (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 29, 1934). Although Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts* is far from explicit in its characterization, Teresa's baroque luxuriousness was contrasted in the Grosser scenario, and consequently in the original production, with the authoritarian qualities of Ignatius, a soldier who came to found the Jesuit order. Reflecting on the contrast between his two characters, Virgil Thomson reminds us that, "Saint Ignatius organized the Society of Jesus with chains of command just like in an army."

Although set out of doors like the previous two acts, the setting of Act III was dominated by a series of perhaps five solid walls, which produced for the first time in the opera a sense of enclosure and opacity. The walls were of varying rectangular shapes and heights—all a bit taller or a bit shorter than the actors onstage. Described by some as a seawall, trimmed with large sea shells (fashioned out of fluted paper plates, each with two cut-out arcs) and draped with an assortment of deep orange nets, the walls were

Saint Settlement *photographs* ***Saint Teresa.***

meant to provide the cloistered air of a "monastery garden." The walls were beige or tan and the four palms arranged "inside and outside" had burnt orange trunks, possibly of crepe paper, and fronds of dark ostrich plumes. It is also probable that the cellophane, for at least part of the act, was bathed in an amber light, which would have turned the backdrop's blue cast to a vision of the green, wave-created sea. Far upstage at the left was positioned Saint Ignatius' "throne of white coral," actually a large, round stool on a wooden pedestal with painted sponges attached as a suggestion of the coral's texture.

Before the parting of the curtain, Saint Ignatius sang, "With withdrawn." Presently the curtain parted, and the twenty members of the orchestra (which included instruments unconventional for an operatic score, an accordian and a harmonium) played a brief overture. Ignatius' subordinates, sitting in a circle at the far side of the stage, mended their fishing nets. Soon the performers completed the pantomimed mending, rose, and took the nets to the back of the stage where they dressed the walls with them. Following a discussion by Ignatius—with Teresa I and II, and their confidante, Settlement, appearing momentarily behind the wall—on the subject of the disciplined, monastic life ("This is how young men and matter"), the men, once again alone onstage, assumed a military formation. With the help of his "lieutenant," Chavez, Ignatius lined up his followers:

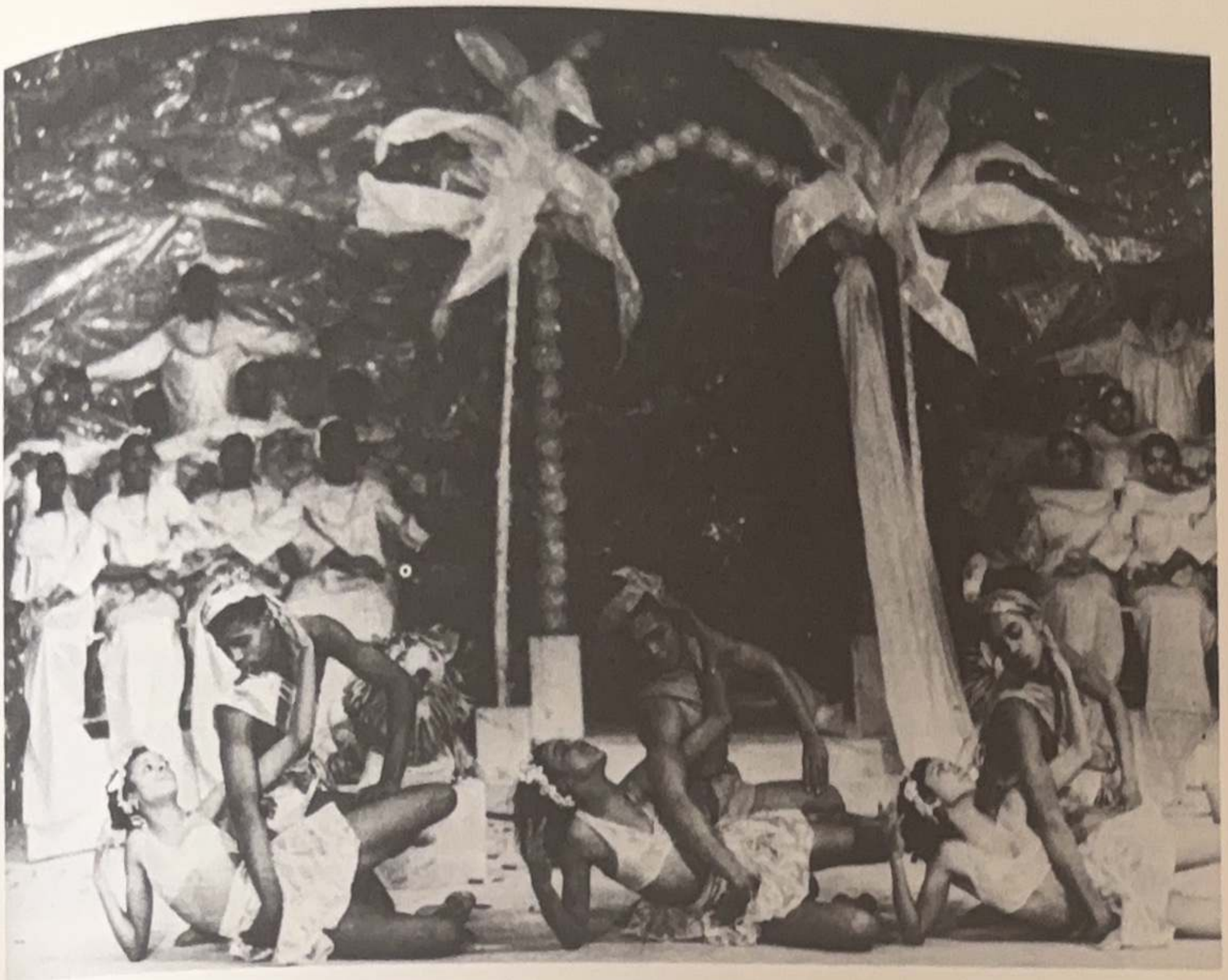
> **IGNATIUS:** Do and doubling with it at once left and rignt.
> **CHAVEZ:** Left left left right left with what is known.

The line of men was parallel with and near the proscenium opening, and the two leaders paraded in front, at first heading directly left and then wheeling about, inspecting the saints once more while crossing stage right.

At some point the lighting dimmed once more, and the opera's most somber setting—which featured tans and burnt orange and brown—heralded a scene much graver than those of preceding acts. The solemnity was evidenced in Saint Ignatius' aria, which became the most widely quoted and parodied lines in the entire libretto:

> *Pigeons on the grass alas*
> *Shorter longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass*
> *Pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass alas*
> *pigeons on the grass*

At Stein's suggestion, the aria was interpreted as Ignatius' vision of the Holy Ghost, and by almost all accounts, it was played with "magnificent dignity" by the baritone, Edward Matthews as Ignatius. "Not for a moment did he relinquish his ascetic and visionary interpretation of the role," wrote one reviewer (*Hartford Daily Courant*). In the scene, Matthews, one of the few established concert singers in the company, walked slowly and smoothly across the floor, his arms held out from his body at almost shoulder height, the hands looking quite void of tension, almost reverential, the palms lifted upward. The other saints, in a loose group—each saint with space enough around him to extend his arms—crossed the stage behind Ignatius. The saints stepped carefully; the heads, bent down slightly, turned from side to side, and the eyes scanned the stage before and below them. They were, in fact, as Thomas Anderson, one of the saints, has disclosed in an interview, looking down "to see where the pigeons were." They were, nonetheless, not yet convinced of the vision; they sang, "might be very well very well very well they might be," indicating their belief in the possibility, not in the fact, of Ignatius' prophetic gift. Their doubts were allayed, however, upon hearing an affirmation from a miraculous "heavenly chorus." The celestial choir was actually constituted of the company's female performers, offstage,



The six dancers strike a particularly baroque pose.

singing an extended, shimmering musical phrase, the random combination of three words, "let," "Lucy," and "Lily." Once convinced by the musical miracle, the men huddled around their captain. Ignatius sang, "In line and in in line please say it first in line" and put them through another military drill. His next sermon to them was subsequently given a sort of exegesis by Chavez, the moderator.

In keeping with what he calls the tango tempo of the act as a whole, Grosser decided to reintroduce the dancers as sailors and their Spanish ladies enjoying the popular dance. Thomson recalls that the dance excited the onstage audience of celibates, which may explain why they were drilled by Ignatius in yet another sequence of martial maneuvers.

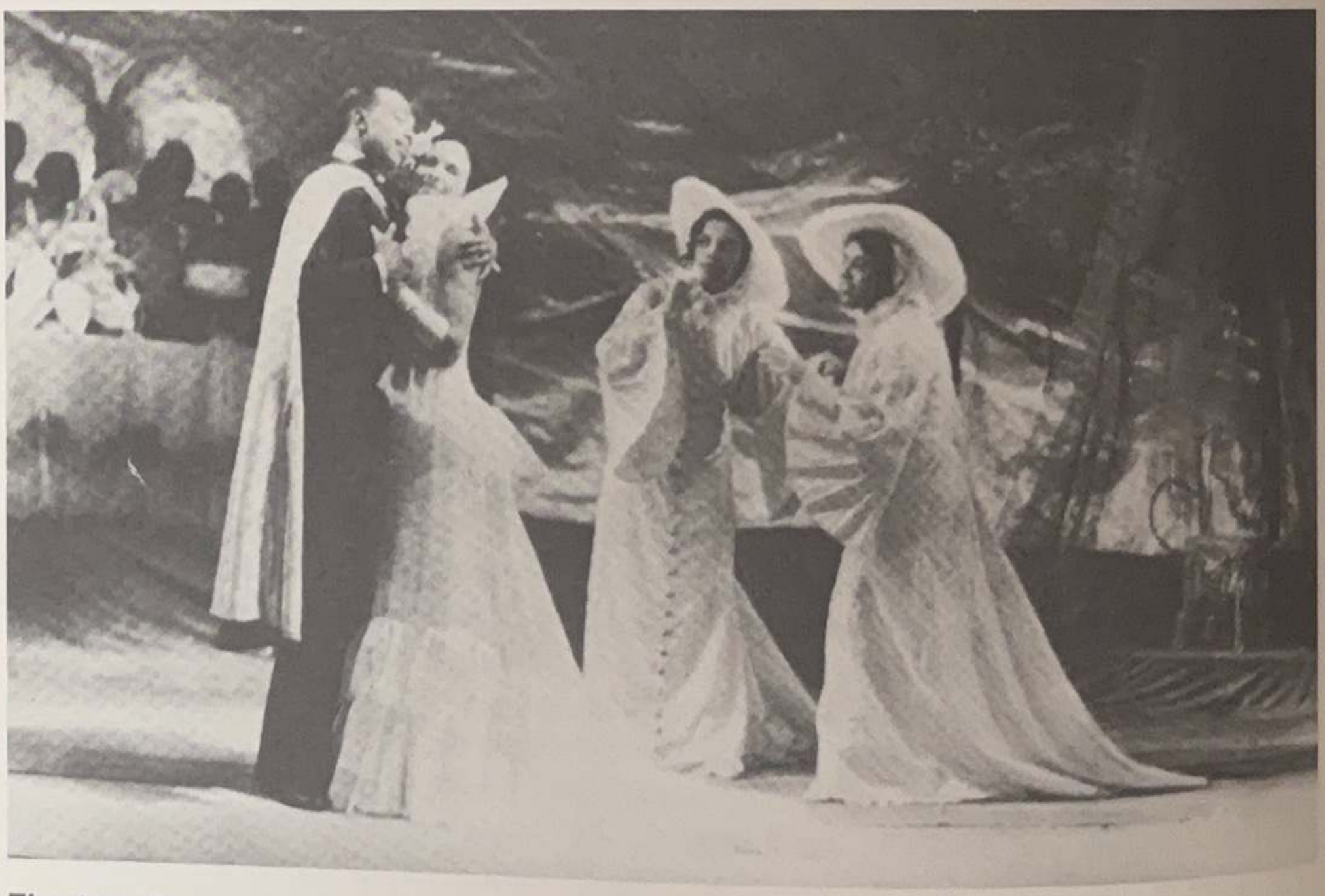
A little later a storm was created with complicated lighting effects by Feder. During the storm, the woman entered, each one with an artificial white dove strapped to her wrist. According to the published scenario, they had "heard of the vision and (did) not believe it" (Maurice Grosser, intro. to *Four Saints in Three Acts*). In vain they tried somehow to reproduce the miracles, and their lyric about "ordinary pigeons and trees" was directed as an expression of the disappointment over their failed scheme.

Grosser had wanted to have another storm follow, as justification for Ignatius' delivery of his prophecy of the Last Judgement. The storm was omitted from the production, however, proving too difficult to achieve. Photos of the prophecy scene show Ignatius at center stage, facing the audience with his arms out, away from the body at right angles, elbows broken at a right angle as well, and with open palms and spread fingers. Standing on a short step-ladder masked by the central wall at the back of the stage, he was lifted up as much as a yard above the lesser saints, who were congregated before him in a loose semi-circle, their backs to the audience. His height relative to theirs, coupled with their focus on him, provided him strong emphasis. "Around is as sound and around is a sound and around," his prophecy circled. Before him, in faint light, the others fell to their

knees in fear. Some fainted into the arms of their fellows; others wrapped mantles tightly about themselves or lifted their hands skyward. Except for the Commère and Compère, who observed calmly from a distance, everyone reached out in some way, with one hand or with both, as if physicalizing a consistent desire for solace. The significance and solemnity were, perhaps, redoubled because of the variety of the physical attitudes: the scene seems to have been the only one in "*Four Saints*" that allowed each person on the stage to strike an individual pose. Although the attitudes taken seemed studied and the composition painterly, the aberration from the use of choral gesture—even if it remained outside the conscious thoughts of the spectators—must have had a potent effect in setting the scene apart from the others. Certainly such an amplificatory tendency was at work in the next scene. A four-minute-long "propitiatory procession," which had been suggested by Stein herself, it carried the gravity of the preceding scene through the end of the act.

The fourth act Prologue, a duet played on the apron by the Commère and Compère, marked a clear reversal from the solemnity of Act III. According to Grosser, the two "performers" teased each other about the number of acts and saints in the production. The audience, no doubt surprised to discover a fourth act in an opera called *Four Saints in Three Acts,* was teased by the music hall players at the same time. Five times in the course of the brief Prologue, the Commère sang, "How many acts are there in it." With each such solicitation, her partner avoided her, singing random-seeming lines such as "Ring around a rosey." In the fifth such exchange, the master of ceremonies sang out, "Four acts," and the curtain parted behind him.

The most certain feature of Act IV was brevity; it was more of an epilogue, being not even half as long (including its Prologue) as the opera's Prologue. The single extant photograph of the act reveals the stage almost void of trappings. Although in poor focus, the print is evidence that one saint, in all probability one of the Teresas, was seated facing front at the midpoint of the stage, probably on her jewelled throne of earlier acts. Dressed



The two Teresas observe the love scene between the Commère and Compère.

Beatrice Robinson Wayne, Saint Teresa I, before her diaphanous tent.

all in white, including a sort of scarf or veil over her head, she was framed by a semi-circle of about half a dozen dancers and saints grouped around and behind her and all facing the audience. Beyond the small group was a larger one, about thirty performers in all, loosely gathered at the back and the sides of the stage. The theatricals, Commère and Compère, had returned to their usual positions, one on either side near the proscenium arch. Hanging above the saints was a squat, two-dimensional star of many points made of gold cellophane and wreathed with three-dimensional, dark orange clouds. The bright "sunburst," as Strettheimer called it, stretched a distance of perhaps ten feet (a third of the width of the proscenium) from point to furthest point. Fancifully, the sunburst suggested Grosser's locale for the act, which he called "saints in heaven." Little action took place in "stage heaven." The saints, Teresa foremost among them, reminisced of their "happy life on earth." Afterward, all sang what Grosser took to be an allusion to the Eucharist, "When this you see remember me," at which point a large glass was passed among the principal players, who, by raising the cup to their lips, displayed—what else!—a bit of red cellophane as wine at the bottom of the glass. Soon, the deep voice of Abner Dorsey, playing the Compère, dropped a perfect octave: "Last Act." Immediately, everyone else joined in unison, shouting "Which is a fact," and the curtain fell.

It Moves But It Also Stays

> *Anyway the play as I see it is exciting and it moves but it also stays and that is as I said in the beginning might be what a play should do.*
> ***(Stein, "Plays")***

Maurice Grosser has said recently that his production outline was actually a "dance scenario," and the manner of its fulfillment, "at the discretion of the choreographer." When in the first half of December, 1933 the scenarist took the *Ile de France* from Europe to

Saint Ignatius greets the two Saints Teresa.

New York so that he could be on hand to explain his interpretation to his collaborators, he was joined on board by Frederick Ashton, the young man whose job it would be to handle that "discretion."

Hoping to ensure that his opera be staged as the "controlled music spectacle" he had envisioned it to be, Virgil Thomson, unable to find nearby a director he could trust, had telegraphed Ashton in London, inviting him to join, almost without remuneration, the company of "*Four Saints.*" Thomson, as impressario, had already taken on as producer John Houseman, whom he had told in their first interview together, "I don't really want them to act. I want them to be moved." Finding Houseman more efficient as manager than mover, however, he subsequently called "Freddie" in to help. Having never seen any choreography of the twenty-seven-year-old Englishman, Thomson's decision to secure him as choreographer-director was based primarily on the impression made by Ashton in their initial meeting the previous summer. On that occasion, Thomson, performing a solo version of his opera, had found that Ashton, to whom he attributes a stunning intellect, "understood it thoroughly."

Reporting to Gertrude Stein while Grosser and Ashton were en route to New York, Thomson wrote that the dancer would:

> *. . . make choreography . . . Not only for the dance-numbers, but for the whole show, so that all the movements will be regulated to the music, measure by measure, and all our complicated stage-action made into a controllable spectacle.*
>
> **(Virgil Thomson)**

Through the telescope Saint Plan sees the vision of the Heavenly Mansion.

Upon arrival, Ashton found the singers already in rehearsal in the basement of Saint Phillip's Episcopal Church on Harlem's 137th Street. He soon took responsibility for the rehearsals, and performers learned music and movement simultaneously, a practice which, Thomson recalls, made a simple task of the memorization of the non-syntactical, alogical Stein libretto. Memorizing movement was not quite as simple. Ashton has reflected that the company's inexperience at learning dance movement made the process of choreographing "*Four Saints*" "frightfully exhausting." He "would get a whole scene set" in the morning, but, returning in the afternoon to run through it again, would discover that "they always forgot" (*Ballet Review,* Vol. 4, No. 6).

As there were almost no ballet schools in the United States at the time, the collaborators had found it impossible to locate six black dancers with ballet training. Eventually, a swimmer and a basketball player joined "three girls who'd had extremely elementary . . . *fancy* dancing" to make up five of the six dance parts (David Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets*). The men, it seems, were discovered by Ashton at the Savoy Ballroom on Lenox Avenue, the enormous nightclub where just six years earlier the Lindy Hop had been devised. The chosen dancers, in whom Ashton found great vitality, were "very plastic" and adapted themselves to the choreography as he adapted his dances to them.

While avoiding, according to Thomson, the artificialities of vaudeville soft shoe, Ashton drew on the traditions of black social dance as well as on those of ballet, for he "had to (create) something becoming and appropriate out of what they (the dancers) could do

easily and naturally." A four-minute clip of film shot by Julien Levy (and edited into John Huszar's PBS documentary, "Virgil Thomson, Composer"), which contains fragments of a Hartford performance of the two "incidental ballets" (in addition to about fifteen other scenes), reveals just how easily the supple corps of six performed. They looked particularly relaxed during the execution of the "Angel Ballet," a complicated sequence of movements, many of whose steps made allusion to the Charleston and Snake Hips, if not to the Savoy's own Lindy Hop.

At some point during rehearsals in Saint Phillips' "Hospitality House," Ashton told a newspaper reporter, as if willing to admit the application of colloquial reference, that "his choreography would be a combination of 'snake hips and Gothic' " (*Hartford Daily Courant*). Readers at the time would have recognized "snake hips" as the dance created in the mid-twenties by Earl Tucker, a performer whose stage name was the same as that of his dance. Thus, just as Stein in her libretto had alluded to passages from nursery rhyme and "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and Thomson had quoted them again in the music, Ashton quoted passages from popular dance and from known types. The Commère's line, "Please be coming to see me," for instance, was, under Ashton's direction, illustrated with mimic reference to Mae West. In the dancing, the allusions were almost as explicit. In addition, they were the only acknowledgement in "*Four Saints*"—with the possible exception of the Gospel music quality (itself a sort of quotation of style)—of the traditions of the black performers.

The most specific allusion to the black popular dance tradition was made in the second act's "angel ballet," an interlude the choreographer chose to structure on the idea of little angels learning to fly. Featuring circular movements, dips, swinging and rocking, and at least three different sorts of lifts (all in perhaps one minute of film), the most remarkable aspects of the dance were its compact variety of steps and its pace like that of much "hot" jazz dance. In one of its steps, the scantly clad dancers executed a series of undulations from the pelvis; at the same time they were circling their legs by rolling on

Florine Stettheimer's maquette for Act III features the tango between the sailors and the Spanish ladies.

the balls of the feet and swinging the arms from the shoulder joint in converging circles out in front of the body. Sometimes the arm movement was punctuated in rhythm with sharp, shrugging moves, the elbows dropping loosely into the chest as the hands, relaxed, palms forward, rose to shoulder level. At other points, the arms flailed in wider arcs, and the wrists would cross in front, chest high. Other variations of the undular movement, which was not performed by the dancers in unison (although it is possible that both sexes had a version performed in unison), included the addition of sideways locomotion, with feet scooting across the floor as in the Charleston. In a last permutation, one of the three girls, bending from the waist with hands hanging down, assumed a posture very much like that of Earl Tucker in a photograph of him doing his Snake Hips, a dance routine also built of exaggerated pelvic rotations.

The flying of the angels was illustrated in four ways, if not more. There were three distinct lifts. In each of them, one or two of the male dancers raised one of the females—who alone wore wings—either holding or rocking her so that the line of her body was arched and at least one of her feet was off the stage floor. In one such case, an angel was lifted by two men, each with a single hand grasped on an upper arm. Hanging by their support, she had her legs lifted up, about shoulder-width apart at the toes, which were pointed. With the legs parallel to each other and almost parallel to the stage and the head in an upright position, the body of the smiling cherub, in the plane of the proscenium, assumed a gently sweeping curve from shoulder to toe.

Cradling was a second method of launching an angel into flight. Two of the angels' attendants, facing each other and at ninety degrees to the audience, linked their arms in order to pick up one of the winged dancers. They proceeded then to rock her forward and back, her head facing the spectators, who could, with each apogee of the arc, see the pleasure of the flight in the expression on her face. More complicated was another sort of rocking lift. One of the muscular young men stood, legs spread, at the center of the stage. Holding a sort of muscleman pose—arms out from the body, elbow broken, forearm at a right angle to the upper arm—he took the hand of an angel at either side. (One of his fellows kneeled with the same arm position, briefly, making his hands into fists, and coyly smiling at the audience as he flexed his biceps.) By turns, he sustained the weight of one and then the other; each of them lifted a single leg, toe pointed. While raising the outside leg—and with her other hand held by a second attendant—the angel lowered her torso in the direction of her central column of support. The effect was the shaping of yet another curve, drawn from the supported hand, down the arm, through the lowered torso, and extended through the opposite lifted leg—an almost baroque spiral of a curve.

The last of the four means of flying brought the angel ballet to its close. The six dancers, paired in three male-female couples, chasséed off the stage in a line parallel to that of the proscenium opening. The illustration of flight was created by having the partners, facing each other, link their hands from extended arms. The men were blocked from view by the angels, who kept their backs to the audience during the cross—their wings shining brightly in the direction of the house.

Henry McBride, an art critic who saw the production of "*Four Saints*" repeatedly, said that its "very young dancers . . . kept getting under foot—like children" (*Florine Stettheimer*). In the context of a scenario depicting the lives of ecclesiastics, the playfully voluptuous angel dance—with its undulating hip movements, muscleman poses, tinsel and transparent tunics, and generally bouncy quality—must have seemed all the more lively, whimsical, and youthful. The critics' comments that the dances were parodic, presenting "an amusing travesty of the operatic incidental dance," can be considered in the same context. Ashton mixed the ebullience of youthful, vernacular dance with the pointed toe, chassée, and exaggerated ballet hand of his own theatre dance tradition. The alloy

One of three couples performing the tango in Hartford.

produced was not meant to be parody; neither was it meant to be joyless, purely formal, intellectual. It was but one lilting phrase in the patterned whole, one bright plume in the bouquet.

"*Four Saints*" was praised everywhere for what *Theatre Arts Monthly* called the "lovely patterned movement of the whole work" (Vol. 18, No. 4). Although he had the support in rehearsals of both Houseman and Grosser, Ashton was singularly responsible for the production's movement style, for he is said to have overseen not only the dance, but every gesture in the entire four act spectacle. (Actually, Houseman did stage one scene, the vision of the Holy Ghost, while Ashton was at home suffering from flu.)

One motif in particular that helped to unify the spectacle's several aspects—scenography, music, dance and other movement—was the childlike, whimsical character of the whole. John Cage has counted thirty-eight allusions to nursery tunes in the Thomson score (Cage and Kathleen Hoover, *Virgil Thomson: His Life and Music*). With its children's songs, enormous toy lions, Sunday School setting, and its round games of "ring around a rosey" and "drop the handkerchief," almost every scene in "*Four Saints*" would have contained some element naive and sprightly.

Stylistic unity was furthered as well by the use throughout the opera of choric movement and gesture. Perhaps a couple of scenes in the Julien Levy film fragment may be considered exemplary of the whole. In one section of the first act, four male and three female saints were lined up, evenly spaced and facing front, at center stage, just before the cellophane Cathedral arch. On either side and behind them there were choruses of saints standing on risers. All made emphatic arm and hand gestures in a steady beat: they pointed, raised up their right arms, all in unison as they sang. The saints at the center began to sway to the music. Arms extended downward, clasping their hands together, as if in prayer, all lifted their arms in a sweeping arc, beginning at their left, passing overhead, and descending again to the right. Directly, while turned at a ninety degree angle away from the audience and pointing skyward with the forefinger of the downstage arm, the group advanced toward the audience. After three large steps, all on beat, the sisters went down on one knee, still pointing, while the men remained on their feet.

Another example serves as evidence that not all of the choral gesture was performed in a rectilinear style, although it was limited to the sort of arm and hand movements easily executed in ecclesiastical habit. Again, the example is taken from the first act. At the middle of the stage, kneeling, was Saint Ignatius. Framing him, the two Teresas and other saints—and the chorus in its background, pyramidal configuration—rocked back and forth, all together, and swayed their arms with the rhythm of the rocking. Elbows soft and the arms loosely curved, the swaying was done fluidly by most, but not uniformly so. The amount of energy involved varied greatly, on a continuum from the dancers' enthused, flailing gestures, to the more rigid, perfunctory quality of the Teresas' smaller movements. While all those about and behind him were thus swaying and rocking, Ignatius rose, ever so gradually, from a kneeling position with hands held prayerfully in front of him, to a standing one, with hands before him, opened upward, still picturing a submissive attitude.

Not evident from discussion of the style of the moves in "*Four Saints*' " landscape is the swift pace at which they were accomplished. Although one music critic wrote that the tempo ranged "from the sedateness of a minuet to the comparative speed of a Victorian garden party" (*America,* Feb. 17, 1934), it seems likely that there was little time available to the spectator to think about the relationships between the rush of disconnected words and the images presented with those words. Certainly there was variation. The entire opera was not so full of activity as that one minute of the Angel Ballet in Julien Levy's film. Ashton himself praised the opera's "beautiful leisure . . . with its pauses" (*The Thunder and the Freshness*), and indeed, the solemnity of the third act was attributable to his controlled pacing. The first act, moreover, was marked by the stillness of a sustained series of tableaux. Nonetheless, as Stark Young observed in his careful analyses of "*Four Saints*' " movement, although Ashton's compositions reflected a borrowing from pictorial art, they never really suspended themselves as pictures (*Theatre Arts Monthly,* Vol. 18, No. 5). Instead, they were characterized by continuous flow. Within that flow, perhaps, attitudes took shape, but so briefly that they could scarcely have been recognized as having stilled the continuity.

The second dance interlude, in which three couples of sailors and Spanish ladies performed a tango in unison across the front of the stage, featured a less complicated sequence of steps than that of the earlier interlude. The sailors simply held both hands of the women, and—while maintaining the formality (not present in the social dance) of a regulated, negative space between the partners—the men supported their ladies as the latter performed the backward dip, typifying that popular dance. The ladies' backward arch appeared in several variations relative to the partnering style. In one case, the two partners were half facing each other, and in a second version, the woman arched backward with the sailor behind her. Between the instances of arching, the couples kept their hands linked most of the time. When the links were broken, which never happened with both hands simultaneously, the man's free arm was extended from the shoulder, parallel to the floor, in a flourish of style complementing that of the formality in spacing between partners.

Like the previous dance interlude and the choral movements thusfar described, the tango featured a direct, face-front, presentational performer-to-audience style. Also like those other examples of Ashton's choreographic direction, the proscenium defined a plane within which all substantial movement took place. When, arching their backs deeply into an almost semi-circular curve, the Spanish ladies lifted a leg up and held it suspended for a long, balletic pause—allowing the black, lace-trimmed, full-bodied skirt to cascade to the floor—the plane of their skirts and torsos was that of the picture plane as well. Recurring throughout the operatic performance, the flat, frontal style of composition was reminiscent of the bas-relief staging of Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune,* which Ashton had seen in Europe some years before choreographing "*Four Saints.*" The bas-relief style

was evident even in the Act III scene of the prophecy of the Last Judgement. In that scene, although the crowd of saints assumed individual, not choric, attitudes, and grouped itself around Saint Ignatius in baroque swirls and convolutions of mass, Ignatius himself, the strong focal point of the composition, assumed the same flat, planar quality that he had taken in the first act choral scene described above.

Moreover, just as the contrast of the Last Judgement scene's character-specific movement with the solely choral patterns of movement that had preceded it served to amplify the impact of the scene, the breaching of the bas-relief style in the subsequent procession perhaps served to make it the scene in the opera most frequently described and praised. The four-minute-long procession was staged with all of the performers at ninety degrees to the picture plane of the proscenium. In the dim light and somber tones of Act III, the procession introduced all the performers to the stage. The Compère and Commère were dressed all in black, and the saints, who had been wearing white surplices, then had them eclipsed with black, cowled cloaks. There were, as Thomson wrote his librettist, "a baldachino of black chiffon and bunches of black ostrich plumes" carried above the heads of the throng (*Virgil Thomson*). A photograph of the scene shows the chiffon canopy, made of a cloth about two feet wide and eight feet long, hanging down in an inverted arc, held up on poles attached to the shorter ends. The baldachin was perhaps prefigured in a letter from Stein calling for "something in the nature of (Spanish) out of door processions, with daylight and candle light and overhead canvas stretched between the houses" (*Virgil Thomson*). It was located at center, almost paralleling the proscenium. Beneath it, the mass of performers, clustered closely together at the sides of the stage, seemed to extend

The solemn wedding/funeral procession of Act III.

off into both wings. Among those at the center, just below the baldachin, was a female saint, probably Cecilia, wearing a long white veil with a sort of floral design at the cap and holding one of the banner's support poles. Just one step behind her, side by side were Teresa I and Teresa II, with Ignatius behind and between them. Of all the company, only the Teresa closest to the audience—dressed in her white basque, her face framed by a black mantilla worn over a high comb—was turned out at all, and only slightly, to the audience.

The problem for the director in the scene was to fill four long minutes with the procession and to present the movement of approximately thirty-five members of the company on a stage less than thirty feet wide without resorting to circular movements, which had been deemed inappropriate. The solution devised by Ashton for blocking the combined funeral and marriage procession ("in dead in wed") with its black mantillas beside a long, white bridal veil was to proffer the illusion of movement. He worked to produce:

> *. . . the impression that they were moving the whole time but actually they were only swaying backwards and forwards, then every now and again they took one step, and it gave an impression of a procession moving when actually they weren't.*
>
> **(Frederick Ashton and His Ballets)**

The procession began with the entrance of all the saints and both choruses, everyone coming from the same direction, walking at a very slow pace. The Commère and Compère, standing close together at the front, began to sing alternate lines of a solemn, quiet, steady flow of words—words disconnected from syntax—their rhythm, sound, and pitch bearers of a heavy emotional weight:

> *Letting pin in letting let*
> *in let in in in in in let*
> *in let in wet*
> *in wed in dead*
> *in dead wed led*

The lyric continued in a sustained meter for about another fifteen bars, all in accidental combinations of five words: "led," "in," "wed," "dead" and "said"—a style of composition that was repeated in several places in the text. Framing a lighter, lengthier, more celebrative passage for the chorus, this same lyric scheme repeated later. Immediately after the second incidence, the entire company joined in a *Maestoso* passage that swelled to an accented double *forte*: "With be there all their all their time there be there vine there be vine time there be there time there." The majestic quality of the full ensemble, singing a passage that Maurice Grosser found ripe with the promise of the saints' Christian tradition, and which broke the measured cadence of the liturgical "wed led dead," must have presented the audience with what Ashton himself, speaking of "*Four Saints,*" called "the ecstasy of ritual." "The action," he continued, "was ritualistic and ordered, and not balletic, but ceremonial" (*The Thunder and the Freshness*).

Gertrude Stein, having seen the opera and being aware that Ashton as a child had been an acolyte in Mass at the Dominican monastery in Lima where he went to school, wrote of him in *Everybody's Autobiography*:

> *. . . he does know what it is to be a Peruvian and that made it possible*

> *for him to do what he did with Four Saints to make a religious procession sway and slowly disappear without moving . . .*

In the combination of "snake hips and Gothic"—black and baroque—in the motion into and out of static tableaux and bas-relief attitudes, in the procession that seemed to many to be progressing continuously across the Athenaeum stage when it was, in fact, rooted in one place, the Ashton choreography moved but it also stayed. His choreographic direction of the opera, an innovation in its own right, styled in physical terms what Stein had detailed in her lecture, "Plays." Since the lecture was written while the opera was already in production on Broadway, it is likely that the moves (or rather, reports of those moves) in the original landscape of *Four Saints in Three Acts* not only paralleled but informed Stein's curt assessment of her own work. Continuing the assessment in the same lecture, she wrote:

> *Anyway I am pleased. People write me that they are having a good time while the opera is going on a thing which they say does not very often happen to them in the theatre.*

David Alan Harris *is interested in neo-Dadaist and post-modern performance. His article on Richard Foreman's* Penguin Touquet *appeared in T89.*

Theatre Reports

"Tricks and Treats" on Coney Island

by John Frick and Stephen Johnson

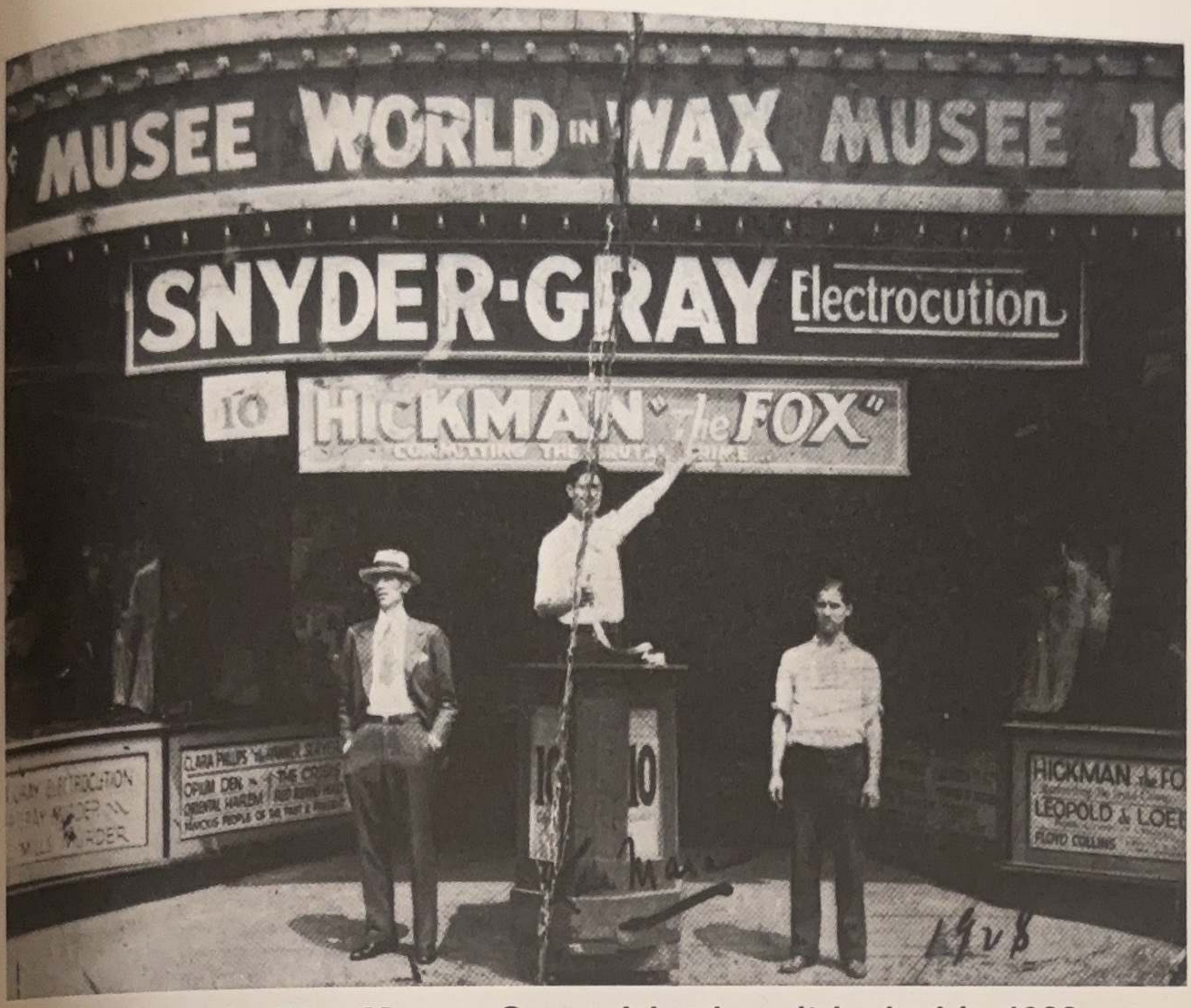
On October 31, 1981, "Tricks and Treats at the Wax Musée" was produced at the World in Wax Musée on Coney Island. The Musée, the only wax museum in New York and the oldest in the United States, was opened in 1926 by Lillie Santangelo, who still runs it, and by her husband. It is in financial trouble. The producer of "Tricks and Treats" was Coney Island, U.S.A., an organization dedicated to the preservation of American amusements and the presentation of performance art. To these ends, the Halloween show provided eight hours of contemporary performance pieces in an effort to raise money for the museum and to bring a new clientele to the old establishment. Twenty-four live attractions and the forty-nine wax figures of the Musée attracted an audience of several hundred.

Historically, the wax museum belonged to the popular entertainment form known as the "dime museum," which had a relatively fixed structure. Paying customers entered a large space with outside advertisements and a barker to see a collection of spectacular exhibits. In varying degrees, a dime museum included: wax works depicting unnatural wonders, recent or famous crimes, and dead celebrities; stuffed animals; paintings, usually of newsworthy people or scenes; and "live art"—acts on high wooden platforms scattered among the other exhibits, performed twenty or more times a day. The acts could be monologs, feats of strength, magic, comedy, or the presentation of a "freak." An "inside talker" or floorman introduced—and praised in high style—each live act. The whole was a spectacle requiring neither education nor money, and it appealed readily to the tastes of recent immigrants and the working poor.

Eventually the various elements of the dime museum left for other institutions. The freaks and novelty acts joined the carnival side show; legitimate works of art and unnatural phenomena were taken over by cultural museums of art and natural history. What remained were the wax figures, and the resulting wax museum continued as a lower-class entertainment long after the larger dime museum was dead.

The World in Wax Musée, because of its age, has—with its stuffed animals, paintings and freedom of movement—more elements of the older form than more recent institutions. What it lacked to restore to it the name of dime museum was "live art"—until "Tricks and Treats." The day's activities approximated in form, scale and degree of complexity a trip to an old-time dime museum. At one point in the afternoon, three scheduled acts were presented in different parts of the museum, two "floor men" made announcements, an actress in a cigarette-girl costume circulated through the audience selling wax teeth, Lillie Santangelo discussed an exhibit with several people, and children in Halloween costumes cavorted, interacting with both performers and spectators. The permanent exhibits drew spectators even while acts were in progress and, throughout the day, "competed" with the live performers for the audience's attention.

Inside the museum, the spectator passed a row of wax exhibits of once-famous murderers in the act of committing the crimes that had made them front-page celebrities: Julio Perez, the screwdriver killer, driving his weapon into the neck of a woman slumped in a chair; John Christie, the full-moon strangler, tightening a rope around the neck of a prostitute; Richard Speck in the act of murdering a nurse; and Hickman the Fox, knife in hand, dismembering his twelve-year-old victim in a bathtub filled with blood. On the back wall of each booth, signs in both English and Spanish briefly explained the exhibit.



The World in Wax Musee, Coney Island, as it looked in 1928.

Intermixed with these exhibits were unusual natural phenomena: a two-headed baby; Lina Medina, a five-year-old girl who had given birth to a normal-sized baby; etc. In an alcove, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, ex-Presidents Eisenhower and Truman, and other celebrities were on display; more-current personalities like John Lennon, Elvis Presley, and John and Robert Kennedy were more centrally located on the two major corridors. Above the exhibits were painted scenes from Dante's *Inferno* with appropriate quotations from the text.

Representative of the presentations at "Tricks and Treats of the Wax Musée" were pieces by Paul Zaloom, Sandra McKee, Charles Ludlam and Dick Zigun.

Paul Zaloom

Zaloom entered from the rear of the audience and, blowing on a hollow pipe to simulate a boat horn, moved through the crowd to the table. Wearing a tour-guide's cap, he conducted a Circle Line tour of New York, pointing out landmarks to a jar of plastic eyeballs that he carried. Dropping the pipe and placing the jar of eyeballs on the table, he led a tour of the Midtown area, represented by a row of styrofoam pieces from packing crates. Moving his props about the table to depict the bustle, Zaloom vocally reproduced the sounds of the city and intermittently rapped on the table with a screwdriver to imitate a jackhammer. Small yellow plastic cowboy hats were moved back and forth across the table, honking like taxis; a sponge-rubber man staggered across complaining about having

drunk too much and, when squeezed, "vomitted." The sounds of the streets were punctuated with an occasional obscenity.

Zaloom's act continued with the renovation of a Lower East Side tenement (a cardboard liquor case with a divider), a trip to the Bronx that included a stop at Yankee Stadium (a multi-tiered, crescent shaped, cosmetic display rack), a tour of the subway system represented by a three-foot clear plastic tube in which the plastic eyes were rocked violently from one end to the other as Zaloom announced the various stops, and a visit to the World Trade Center (two long pink plastic chutes).

Sandra McKee: "Stories My Mother Told Me"

In a booth with a door and a window, whitewashed walls, and a blood-spattered floor, Sandra McKee, seated in a chair with a raincoat draped over the back, told of violent crimes and various atrocities her mother used to read to her from the newspapers. The narrative was punctuated by the ticking of a metronome located on the floor by the chair and by McKee's repeated jabbing her hand with a small pocket knife.

Charles Ludlam: "Escape from a Regulation Straightjacket as Used on the Murderous Insane"

While the audience gathered, Charles Ludlam in street clothes and Everett W. Quinton in a nurse's uniform took their places in a booth. Quinton told Ludlam, whom he addressed simply as Charles, that he had been "bad" and deserved to be punished. He gave Charles

The performance group Disband improvises with the day's headlines.

a choice of punishments: the snake pit or the straightjacket. Ludlam chose the straightjacket, retreated to a corner of the room and pouted. Assuming a Christ-like pose with arms outstretched and head lowered to his right shoulder, he accepted the straightjacket, whimpering occasionally. For the next five minutes as Quinton laced Ludlam into the jacket, he lectured Charles on his transgressions and the necessity of punishment. During the final minute of the act, Ludlam writhed on the floor, stretched, and went through various contortions, ultimately escaping from the straightjacket, which he held aloft for the audience to see. (According to a program note, Ludlam had based this act on one created by Harry Houdini, who began his career in a dime museum.)

When Ludlam had finished, the floor man directed the audience to an area near the museum entrance where three members of the Polar Bear Club dressed in bathing suits stood around a large metal tub filled with crushed ice. For the next two hours, the Polar Bears rubbed themselves with ice, shook hands with the audience, lectured on the benefits of ice-water bathing and posed for pictures.

Museum of Wax, a black-and-white silent film made by Charles Ludlam and the Theatre of the Ridiculous, was projected with accompanying recorded music in another area while the Polar Bears were "performing." The ten-minute film, made in the manner of a silent movie short, showed Ludlam as an escaped prisoner hiding from the law. Shot on location in the museum, it offered ample opportunity for the display of both permanent exhibits and wax heads kept in storage.

An Untitled Exhibit by Vanalyne Green

A booth was filled with leaves of various colors, a broom leaned against the wall and a tape of birds chirping was playing. An ode to the seasons and the death of a mother was printed on a sheet of clear plastic suspended from the ceiling at the front of the booth. There was no live performer in this presentation.

"Grand Finale" by Dick Zigun

After the floor man introduced "Grand Finale: A Tabletop Theatre," part of *Three Unnatural Acts* by Dick Zigun, he explained that a small fire would be part of the act, but that there would be no danger to the audience. Asa Watkins, the performer, stepped to a small green metal table on which a miniature paper house had been set. Using small plastic figures, he announced the arrival of several relatives at the house, stepped back from the table and lit a cigarette. Saying "Someone smoked in bed," he touched the cigarette to the roof of the house. Momentarily, smoke was seen and the house burst into flames. Manipulated by Watkins, a toy fire engine arrived, the ladder was raised and miniture firemen climbed the ladder and jumped into the blaze. While the paper house still burned, Watkins picked up a seltzer bottle and doused the fire, flattening the house and spraying spectators sitting near the action. Then with the cry, "MASS MURDER!," he simultaneously announced the arrival of the police on the scene and squirted ketchup from a restaurant squeeze bottle onto what remained of the house. Stepping away from the table, he narrated the remainder of the story: how the mass murderer had gone to a singles' bar in another part of town and how he was finally killed by the Mob. He emphasized that the Mob had "tasted blood" by dipping his finger in the ketchup and licking it.

An impromptu performance at "Tricks and Treats" was a stream-of-consciousness

Dick B. Zigun, curator for "Tricks and Treats at the Wax Musee," shows the head of murderess Martha Beck.

monolog by Llona Granite about rape. Presented without introduction, Granite's talk took its incentive from the museum itself, which was filled with atrocities committed by men upon women, and she referred repeatedly to specific exhibits, at one point leaning out of her performance space and into the exhibit of Richard Speck attacking a nurse. Granite talked about the problems of living in the Lower East Side of New York, the fear of rape, and survival after rape. As she spoke, she became more and more visibly shaken by the subject matter—removing her jacket, lighting a cigarette, moving constantly. She spoke increasingly more quickly, making frequent jumps in logic, until her words were almost incomprehensible. Then she stopped, suddenly, and signalled to the audience that she was finished.

John Frick *teaches theatre at C. W. Post and is assistant editor of* Broadside. ***Stephen Johnson*** *is a free-lance researcher whose article on Joseph Jefferson's* Rip Van Winkle *appears elsewhere in this issue.*

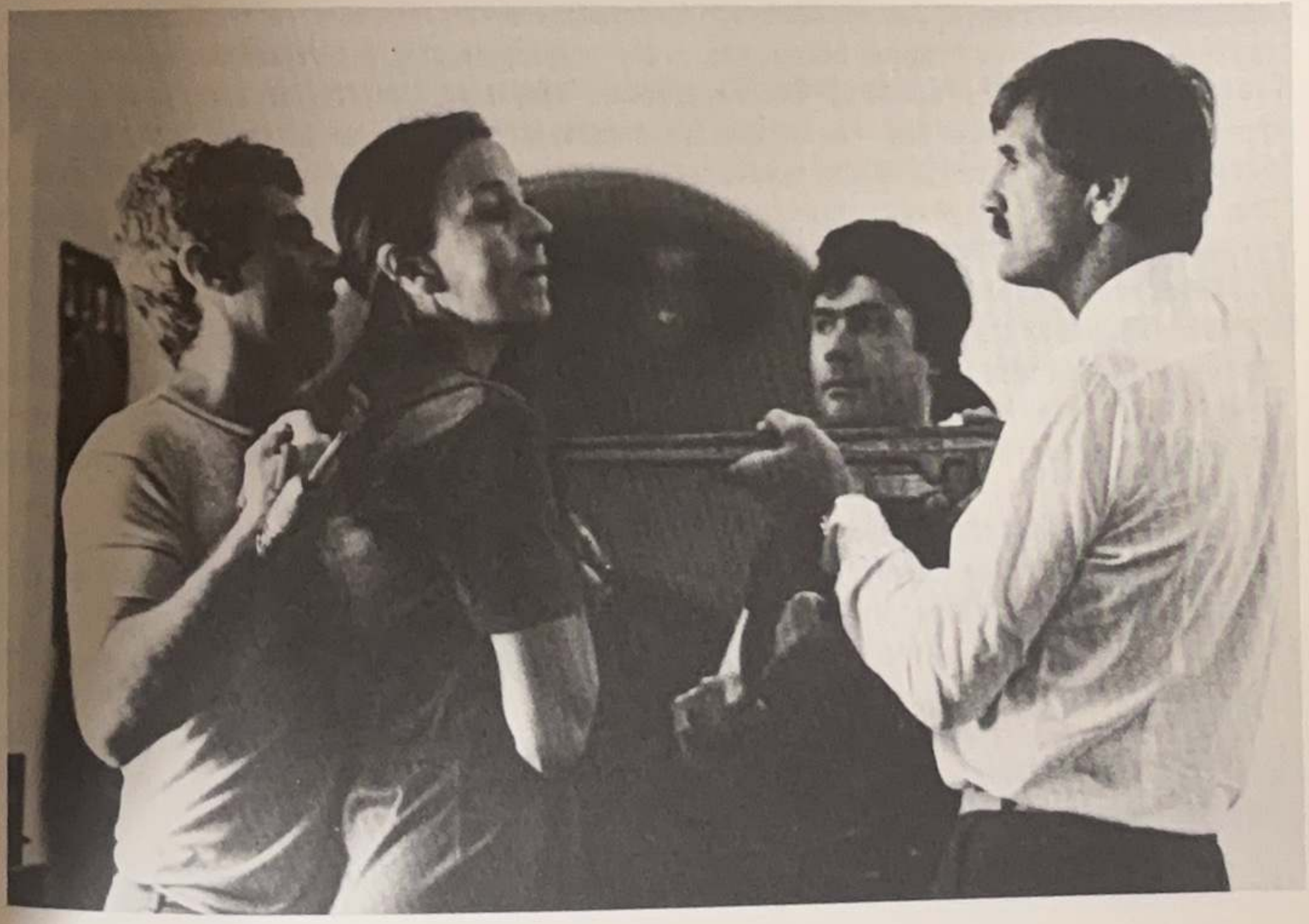
Dreams Against the State

by Susan Imhoff

Dreams Against The State, written by Deena Metzger and directed by Steven Kent, was performed in private homes throughout Los Angeles during the month of October and the first two weeks of November, 1981. One performance took place in a Spanish style house in Hollywood Hills. The audience entered from the courtyard into the living room, where seating for about thirty-five people had been arranged in rows of cushions and folding chairs. The performance space consisted of half of the living room and the dining area. On the left side of the living room, there was a sofa with an architect's lamp extended over it; on the right side, near the door, there was an armchair with an end table next to it with a small lamp on it. The dining area, separated from the living room by a wide arch, extended the performance space. In the center of the dining area was a long wooden table with chairs around it. Over the table hung an electric chandelier controlled by a dimmer switch. These three lamps provided the light for the performance; in some scenes candles were used as well.

The play begins in darkness. Tonio enters carrying a candle, switches on the table lamp and sits in the armchair. He begins to speak, addressing someone named Torres. His tone varies from serious musing to humorous chiding. He invokes Torres ("Come to me, Torres") a number of times, turning the first scene into a ritual of incantation.

The room is darkened again. One by one, the actors enter through the door from the courtyard, each wearing a coat or jacket; they enter with relief, as if entering a "safe



house." Each lights a chandle and is welcomed by Tonio. It is evidently a meeting of an underground group.

Each actor has two identities, a contemporary one and an historical one. The historical characters are: Camilo Torres, Columbian priest/revolutionary; detective novelist Dashiell Hammett; Rosa Luxemburg, German revolutionary; Victor Jara, Chilean folksinger and supporter of Allende; Ethel Rosenberg; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, feminist educator and author; and Velvel, a fictional composite of the last survivor of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

Kate walks to the center of the living room. The only light is from the candles on the dining table. She puts her hands out as if to feel a wall; she takes a few steps and confronts another wall; another, and another. She retraces her steps around and around the tiny box, and begins to speak. Her voice changes; she speaks now with a slight German inflection. She speaks, as Ethel Rosenberg, of her imprisonment in this closet.

The switch of identities in each actor usually takes place with no more than a change of voice. Some of the characters welcome their alternate dream identities easily and even converse with them; they encourage those who seem less experienced and are resistant and afraid of the dream police. The idea of the dream police and the underground setting suggests a connection between the nature of creativity—the unconscious, dreams—and subversion.

The room is dark. A tape plays: a woman singing. Her voice is mysterious, almost haunting. The song is called "There Are Three Women." The three women are Demeter, Hecate, and Persephone: three Greek deities, or three aspects of the same deity. They preside over the rites of the Eleusinian mysteries, which tell of Persephone's descent into the Underground.

Rio asks Tonio to help him complete the song he dreamed about the night before; their dream identities, Victor Jara and Camilo Torres, act out the dream until Rio/Victor begins to play the guitar and sing in Spanish.

The scenes change smoothly from one to the next. Chronology is sometimes indicated by a change of clothing; at other times it seems evident from the dialogue that time has

passed, but there is no indication of the length of the time that may have gone by. It is like time in a dream.

Val, Tonio, and Poppy discover a huddled figure near the door. The stranger is wearing a dark knitted cap and his face and hands are blackened, as if he were a guerilla fighter. He speaks first as Velvel (a survivor from the Warsaw ghetto uprising) and then as Wolf (who sounds American). He is unable to control the alternating personas.

He empties the contents of his bundle on the floor; it contains human bones. He describes each one: his wife, his child, his neighbor . . .

The room is dark again. A conversation (on tape) takes place between Demeter and Hecate. The voices of Val and Kate are recognizable. The teasing conversation is about satisfying physical desires for food and sex. (It is thought that the Eleusinian mysteries may have included sexual rites for the initiates.) The voices of Hecate and Demeter are warm and chuckling.

Velvel enters the dining area, swinging a bone tied to a piece of string and watching it intently. When the others call him by the name of Wolf, he replies that Wolf is gone. When approached, he surrounds himself with an imaginary circle and orders them to stay away. Tonio and Ace switch off all the lights except the one over the sofa. Val and Kate circle around Velvel; they snatch away the bone and order him to dance. A ritual of exorcism is evoked. Slowly, under their spell, almost against his will, his movement changes from frantic grabbing to awkward dancing; the tempo builds until he crashes onto the sofa, knocking out the light.

Ace bursts in to tell the others of Poppy's arrest by the dream police. Val collapses and Kate leads her away. Wolf leaves.

The room is dark. A tape plays: Demeter is enraged at the loss of her daughter. It is Val's voice. The parallel with the story of Persephone is made very clear at this point; however, an inversion of the common understanding of the myth is being created. The "underground" here is a place of creativity and comradeship, not without its own dangers, but a place to which one returns willingly. It is the outside, rational, controlled world that is seen as the place of death.

Wolf returns with Poppy. Her dream identity (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) has protected her from the dream police, and she says "I'm home!" as she is embraced by Val and Kate. They exit with their arms around each other as the tape of "There Are Three Women" plays.

The transformation of a home into a performance space extends the evocation of rituals in *Dreams Against The State.* The physical qualities of familiar objects and the images of personal rituals are heightened by the interpenetration of the private nature of the home and the public nature of performance.

Susan Imhoff *teaches writing at the University of California at San Diego.*

Beauty And The Beast at the Mickery

by Bruce Murphy

Beauty And The Beast was presented at Amsterdam's Mickery Theatre from August 29 through September 26, 1981. It was conceived and designed by long-time Mickery producer Ritsaert ten Cate and directed by English director Pip Simmons. John Schneider, Artistic Director of Theatre X of Milwaukee, collaborated with Simmons on the primarily English-language text.

The audience is seated behind an iron grill some nine feet above a vast, box-like staging area. On stage, below Amsterdam flags hung *à la* Nazi rallies, are rows of chairs and a podium with a microphone. The floor is littered with cigarette butts and political posters. A security guard sits off in a corner, his back to the audience, watching television.

A white-uniformed cleaning crew enters and begins folding chairs with choreographed, assembly-line precision. Muzak plays, punctuated by the rhythmic clap of the chairs. The flags magically fall into the outstretched hands of workers, who seem to accept this as routine. Other crew members clean the floor with industrial vacuum cleaners. One worker repeats an apparent domestic complaint: "She's always stroking me."

The iron grill is raised away as a T.V. swings down like a pendulum to audience level. The announcer talks reassuringly about the value of T.V. for children. If parents control what their children see or watch with them, television has a beneficial effect. Below, actors pedal tricycles across the stage. A window opens on the back wall, where a woman plays with a makeup-and-hair-styling kit and a human-sized doll's head.

A second window opens on a woman reading from the "Beauty And The Beast" fairytale. "Please, don't look at me . . . I'm so ugly," says the beast, and Beauty realizes she cannot let it die.

A toy salesman and his assistant are raised shakily on a hydraulic lift to audience level. Standing before shelves of toys, the sweating salesman rhapsodizes about toys you can trust, stressing that children learn so much about the world during their first 18 months. The salesman offers secretary and housekeeping kits for girls, or a transparent doll with detachable internal organs of poisonous hues. For boys there are submachine guns or B52 bombers.

The salesmen are lowered as a quartet in black evening wear sing the first movement of Faure's *Requiem.* Midway through the piece, dry ice smoke blankets the stage waist deep. A woman in general's costume appears and unbuttons the coat to bare her breasts, against which she presses a toy airplane. A male general takes the toy from her and, much like a little boy, sails it through the clouds. There is a toy-sized nuclear explosion and mushroom cloud. Miniature Christmas trees appear within the smoke and burst into flame.

Three music stands are set at center stage and the quartet returns. An enormous transparent curtain is drawn diagonally from the left front to the right rear across stage. Projected images of Dutch Christmas celebrations appear only as white paint is sprayed on the curtain by an actor. The images appear and melt away, replaced by other images, as a pianist plays and sings "Come Away Melinda," a haunting war–protest song of 1960s vintage.

Quartet members now portray a child–woman, her mother, uncle and grandfather, based on excerpts of R. D. Laing's interviews with schizophrenics. The mother grieves that her daughter never appreciated the expensive dresses she bought her, while the

uncle complains that his niece was always stroking him. Bluntly, the daughter says she cannot love them and walks away. After repetition of their complaints, the uncle and mother descend into a lighted hole in the stage. The roof of a fall-out shelter closes over them. As the transparent curtain is pulled away, more fall-out shelters appear with T.V. antennae poking out.

A window on the back wall opens to reveal the daughter, who speaks intensely. "I'm afraid to think . . . it screws me up . . . I don't know what to think . . . or feel."

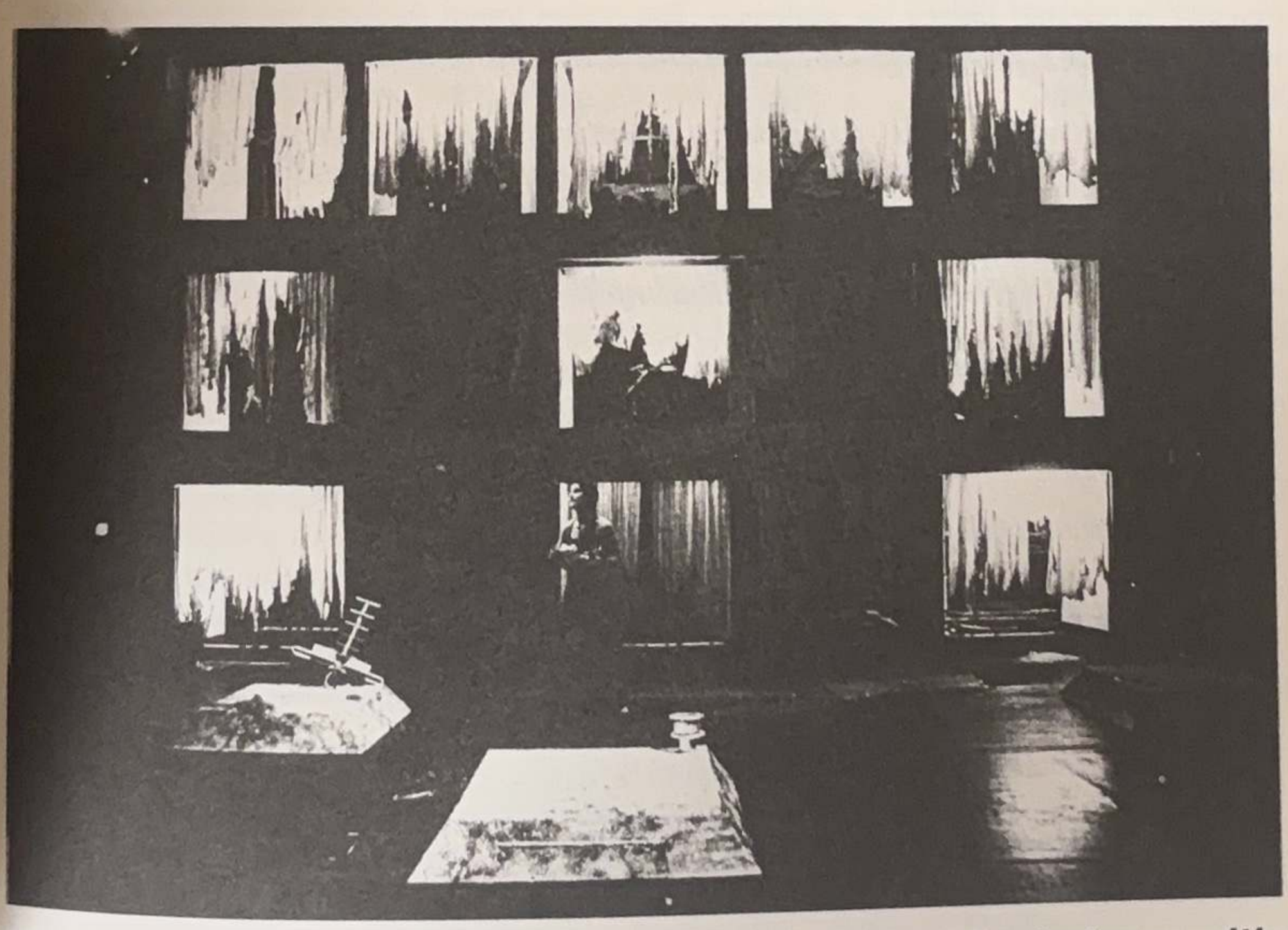
On stage, the grandfather, still standing, removes his white hair and beard. He talks sadly of his love for his granddaughter. He built his life around her, loved her, yet as she got sick, they grew estranged. Nonetheless, he continues as before and says nothing about it to anyone. He walks down into a fall-out shelter as "Come Away Melinda" ends.

A T.V. swings down. It is a commercial for fall-out shelters and firearms for fall-out shelters, all mail order specials. Buyers receive a bonus subscription to *Survive* magazine. Meanwhile, on the back wall, three rows of 15 windows open, lowering charred curtains that blow lightly. There is the sound of wind chimes and a weather report in Dutch, reporting movement of radiation.

The daughter climbs down from her window and finds a ukulele. Playing it, she sings "Cruise Missiles," a Dutch rock group's recent song with English lyrics. "We're sitting on those cruise missiles . . . not five miles away." Her tone becomes increasingly disgusted.

A huge, double-barreled shotgun is extended from a fall-out shelter and fires, a gut-walloping explosion.

The daughter throws down her ukulele and cracks it. She begins to paint graffitti on the wall: "WE WILL CONTINUE." (Dutch squatters painted this on buildings from which they were ultimately ejected to make way for a subway to the suburbs.)



The daughter sings "Cruise Missles" in front of windows with charred curtains.

From the curtained windows, four actors enter, each dressed as "Black Pete." (Black Pete is the Moorish assistant to Santa Claus who, in Dutch Christmas mythology, writes down each good and bad act of children.) They watch the daughter, scribble in their notebooks, and exit. She writes more graffitti. "DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE."

Huge double doors open the back wall and Santa Claus and Black Pete enter on a madly revolving mechanical crane, as snow begins to fall. They carry sacks of gifts and birch sticks. The crane lowers them to drop gifts on each fall-out shelter and raises them to audience level. Santa Claus aggressively leads the audience in singing a traditional Dutch carol. The last line translates to "Our hearts are beating . . . who gets the cake, and who gets the stick?"

Santa Claus lectures the audience with excerpts from speeches by Margaret Thatcher and other British officials during the recent youth riots. "I blame the parents . . . if parents can't take care of their kids, we will."

Black Pete shakes his fist at the daughter as the crane rolls him and Santa back through the double doors. The daughter sits in the snow, opening gifts. Each gift turns out to be a brick. The music is ominous. She begins to build a wall, perhaps a home of sorts.

The double doors open to reveal folding chairs set up again, this time faced away from the audience. Santa Claus and several Black Petes watch a televised soccer match. The Black Petes change into Santa Claus suits. All actors take up rattan shields and truncheons similar to those used by Amsterdam's riot squad. The head man tries to explain riot tactics to his squad but has to turn off the T.V. to get their attention. "The job of the police is to restrain these kids, for the good of the community. If unusual tactics are necessary, then unusual tactics will be used."

As the Santa Claus police advance, two of their members perform a tap dance. The iron grill is lowered before the audience. The police tramp through the daughter's brick wall and destroy it. They climb to audience level, holding their shields between the audience and the daughter.

The recorded sound of Amsterdam's squatter riots of 1975 is played. (At that riot squatters threw bricks at police. Before the riot was put down, two police inexplicably dressed as Santa and Black Pete stood on a building overlooking the scene.)

The daughter smashes bricks in half and begins throwing them at the police. An order is given and a high-pressure hose is trained on the daughter. She balls up her body for protection.

The order to withdraw is given. As the police exit, one cop speaks in the voice of the mother, again complaining about her daughter. The daughter, drenched and defeated, plaintively sings the Dutch carol, repeating its question: "Who gets the cake, and who gets the stick?"

Rain begins to fall on her. The grandfather enters and holds an umbrella over her. "Do you remember the fairytales I used to tell," he asks. She says she remembers the one in which Beauty learned to love the beast.

They exit. Rain falls. Uniformed workers enter and sweep away the stage's debris, as the pianist–singer refrains "Come Away Melinda."

Bruce Murphy *writes about the arts for* Milwaukee Magazine, The Milwaukee Journal, Stage Bill, *and other publications.*

NEW BOOKS

Edward Gordon Craig and The Pretenders: A Production Revisited by Frederick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981. xiv + 134 pp. (5½″ × 8½″) 40 illus. $19.95 (hardcover)

A recreation, focusing on Craig's contribution, of the last production on which he worked directly: Ibsen's *The Pretenders* staged in Copenhagen in 1926. In addition to designing *The Pretenders,* Craig offered directorial advice; an appendix contains his notes at a dress rehearsal. Illustrations include Craig's sketches, many of which were not actually realized, and ground plans and costume designs for earlier productions of *The Pretenders,* which are compared to those of the 1926 presentation. There is a bibliography and an index.

Performing Arts Books: 1876–1981 bibliography, New York: R. R. Bowker, 1981. 1,750 pp. (8½ × 11½) $150 (hardcover)

Bowker has produced *the* exhaustive bibliography of performing arts books. The volume catalogs approximately 50,000 books published or distributed in the U.S. within the period 1876–1981, dealing with all aspects of the performing arts, including music, dance, theatre, television, radio, film, opera, circus, and popular entertainment. The titles are indexed under 12,000 Library of Congress subject headings. Also included is an international index of current serials.

Poets' Theatre: A Collection of Recent Works ed. by Michael Slater & Cynthia Savage, New York: Ailanthus Press, 1981, 91 pp., $4.95 (paper)

This anthology consists of plays and excerpts from pieces in which language is a primary concern—according to the editors, "language supported by the range of technical means available to the writer: imagery, association, music, precision, even non-sequitur, engaged with the unique circumstances of the stage." In their introduction the editors define a poets' theatre as distinct from both mainstream theatre and avant garde works that are primarily visual or musical. Some of the writers featured in this collection are best known as poets (Kenward Elmslie, Ted Greenwald, Patricia Ryan, Bob Holman & Bob Rosenthal), while others (Spalding Gray and Lee Breuer, for instance) are theatre people whose work is particularly language oriented.

Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists: An Anthology trans. and ed. by Laurence Senelick. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. iv + 336 pp. (5⅞″ × 8 15/16″) $37.50 (hardcover)

A collection of theoretical and critical writing from 1820 to 1914, this volume concentrates on "the so-called Crisis of the Theatre of 1904 to 1914, a . . . debate between the symbolists and the naturalists. . . ." Selections include pieces, all published in their entirety, by Pushkin, Gogol, Belinsky, Sleptsov, Chekhov, Bely ("The Cherry Orchard"), Annensky, Blók ("On Drama"), Sologub ("The Theatre of a Single Will"), Bryusov, Evreinov ("Introduction to Monodrama"), Meyerhold ("Russian Dramatists"), Ivanov and Andreev. There is a 41-page introduction by Senelick, a selected bibliography and an index.

Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture 1890–1930 by Lewis A. Erenberg. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981. 18 illus. 1 table. xix + 291 pp. (5¾″ × 8½″) $23.95 (hardcover)

Erenberg's study describes socio-cultural changes in turn-of-the-century New York as they coincide with the development of night club entertainments in the city. The book is divided into four sections. The first section, "Victorian Culture and Amusements," chronicles the first breaches in Victorian culture as exemplified by the emergence of large restaurants like Delmonico's, where patrons could congregate with people they would not have met at traditional balls. The second section focuses on women's changing status in the culture and the altering of amusements such as vaudeville, which were made more suitable for a mixed audience. Part Three: "The Cabaret and the Decline of Formalism," describes the development of cabarets, lobster palaces and dance halls which allowed for an even greater freedom, both social and sexual, than previous amusements. Part Four presents the nighttime entertainments of the jazz age and prohibition era in light of society's changing mores.

Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics by Michelene Wandor. Eyre Methuen, London, 1981. 88 pp. $5.95 (paperback)

Michelene Wandor is a feminist British playwright and theatre reviewer. Drawing on her experience as a theorist and practitioner, Wandor traces the emergence of gay and feminist theatre groups in Britain from the late 1960s to the present. She contends that "feminist and gay activism has so far had its greatest cultural impact in theatre work." She explores the "understudy" status of women and gays in theatre work, as well as in the theatre's reflection of them in society. Wandor analyzes the feminist/gay spinoff from radical socialist theatre groups of the early 1960s, and makes a further distinction between gay male and feminist approaches to issues and work. She cites specific examples of "sexually political" theatre as it developed from agit-prop to theatrical sophistication, discussing The Women's Company, The Women's Theatre Group, Gay Sweatshop and Monstrous Regiment, and playwrights Pam Gems (*Piaf*) and Caryl Churchill (*Cloud Nine*). Wandor includes a look at radical plays before 1968, a chapter on male writers of the 1970s, and a conclusion that suggests new directions and a new role for criticism in feminist and gay theatre work.

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Dreams Against the State: Tom Cleaver. Pp. 137, 138.

Beauty & The Beast: Bob Van Dantzig. Pp. 141.

BOOKS RECEIVED

HISTORY AND THEORY

The American Theatre by Ethan Mordden. Oxford University Press, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $19.95.

The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema, Essays by Martin Walsh ed. by Keith M. Griffiths. British Film Institute, London, 1981 (paperback) £4.25.

Chekov's Great Plays ed. by Jean-Pierre Barricelli. NYU Press, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $27.50.

The Chemical Theatre by Charles Nicholl. Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, Mass., 1980 (hardcover) $35.

Coming of Age in Shakespeare by Marjorie Garber. Methuen, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $30.

The Deathday of Socrates by Jerome Eckstein. Columbia Publishing Co., Inc., Frenchtown, N.J., 1981 (hardcover) $18, (paperback) $12.95.

Directory of Hispanic Artists and Organizations, ed. by Association of Hispanic Arts, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1981 (paperback).

The Essential O'Casey by Jack Mitchell. International Publishers, New York, N.Y., 1981 (paperback) $2.95.

The Jonsonian Masque by Stephen Orgel. Columbia University Press, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $22.50, (paperback) $8.50.

Pocket Companion to Shakespeare's Plays by J. C. Trewin. Simon and Schuster, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $5.95.

The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576–1642 by Ann Jennalie Cook. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1981 (hardcover) $20.

Readers Theatre Handbook, Third Edition by Coger/White. Scott, Foresman & Co., Glenview, Ill., 1981 (paperback) $9.95.

Represented by Audrey Wood, A Memoir by Audrey Wood with Max Wilk. Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $15.95.

Shakespeare's Comedies of Play by J. Dennis Huston. Columbia University Press, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $15.

Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage, Volume VI, ed. by Brian Vickeis. Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, Mass., 1981 (hardcover) $55.

Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes, ed. by Dan H. Laurence. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $150 per boxed set.

Theatre and Alchemy by Bettina L. Knapp. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Mich., 1980 (hardcover) $19.95.

Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre by Garaff B. Wilson. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981 (hardcover) $19.95.

Viveka . . . Viveca by Viveca Lindfors. Everest House, New York, N.Y., 1981 (hardcover) $13.95.

PLAYS

The Best Short Plays 1981 ed. by Stanley Richards. Chilton Book Co., Radnor, Penn., 1981 (hardcover) $12.95.

Collected Plays by Nathalie Sarraute. George Braziller, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1981 (paperback) $5.95.

Color of Time by Guillaume Apollinaire, trans. by Barbara Gerber. Zone, New York, N.Y., 1980 (paperback) $3.

The Plays, Volume II by Edward Albee. Atheneum, New York, N.Y., 1981 (paperback) $9.95.

The Rabbi from Tarsus by Phil Goble. Tyndale, Wheaton, Ill., 1981 (paperback) $4.95.

Space and Science Fiction Plays for Young People, ed. by Sylvia E. Kamerman. Plays, Inc., Boston, Mass., 1981 (hardcover) $12.95.

The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Volume VI, Volume VII, by Tennessee Williams. New Directions Books, New York, N.Y., and Toronto, Canada, 1981 (hardcover) $19.95 each volume.

The Wedding of a Poet (The First Modern Turkish Play) by Ibrahim Sinasi, trans. by Edward Allworth. Griffon-House, Whitestone, N.Y., 1981 (paperback) $4.95.

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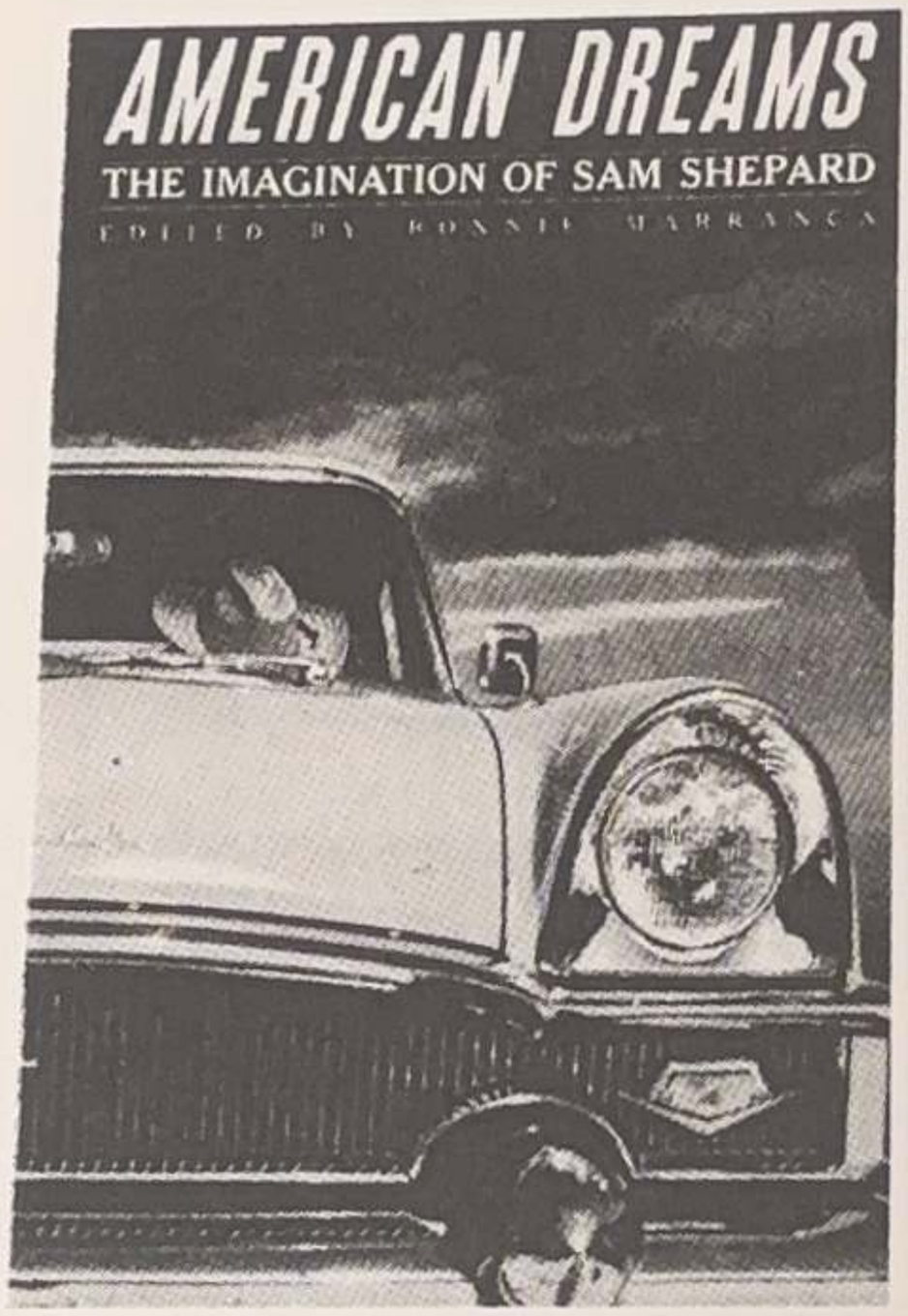

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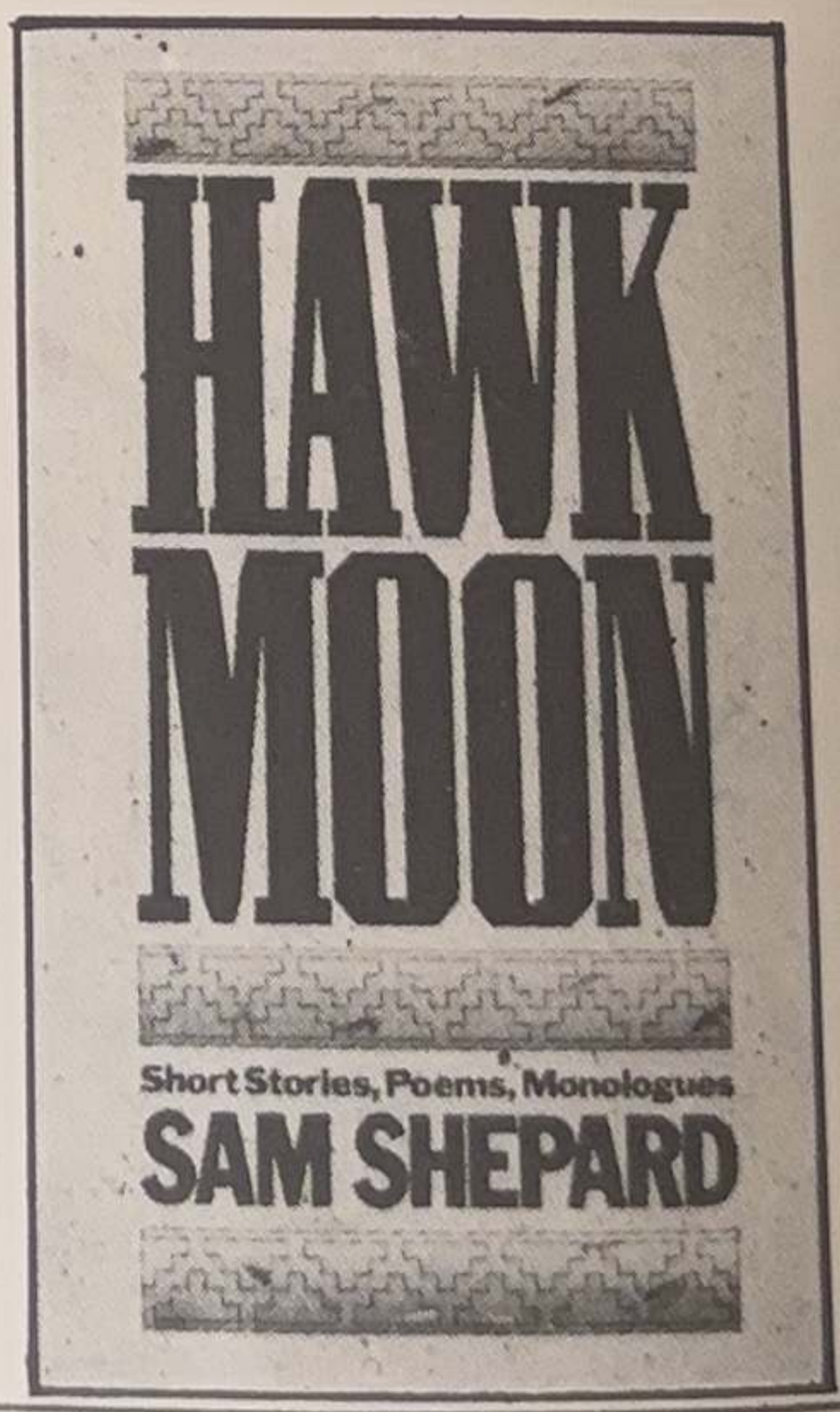

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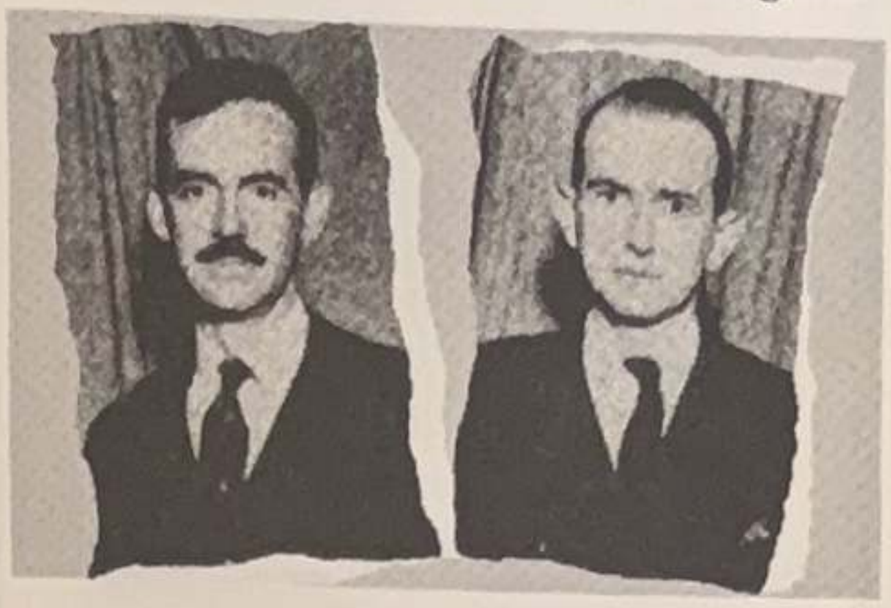

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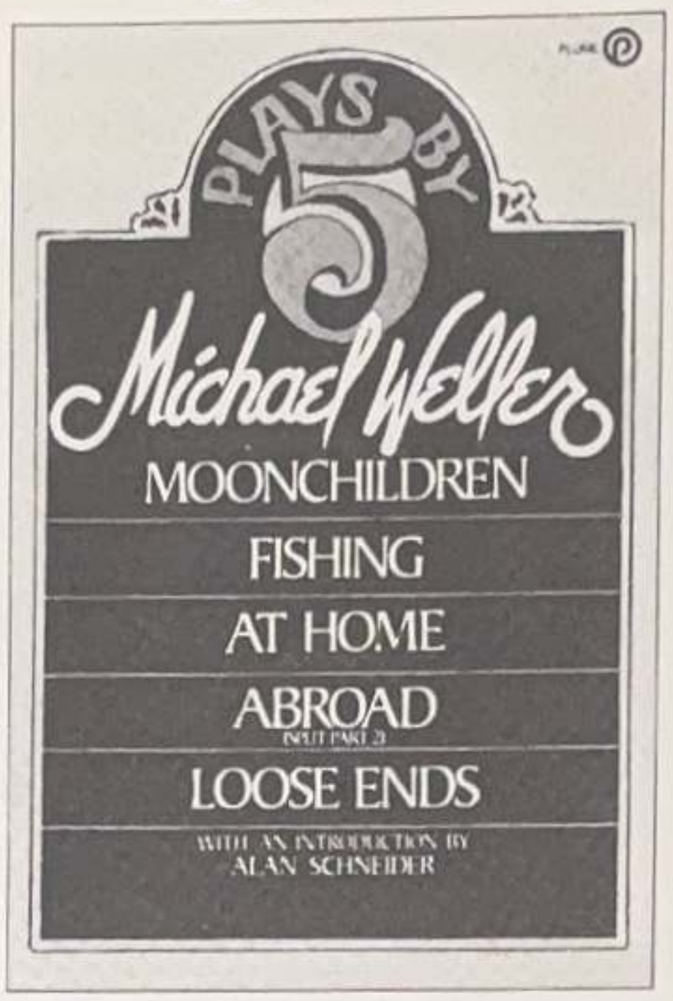

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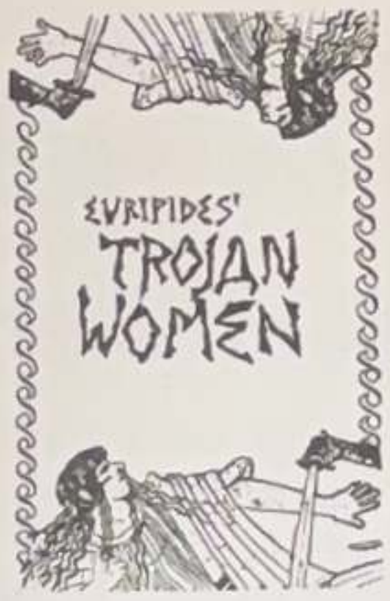

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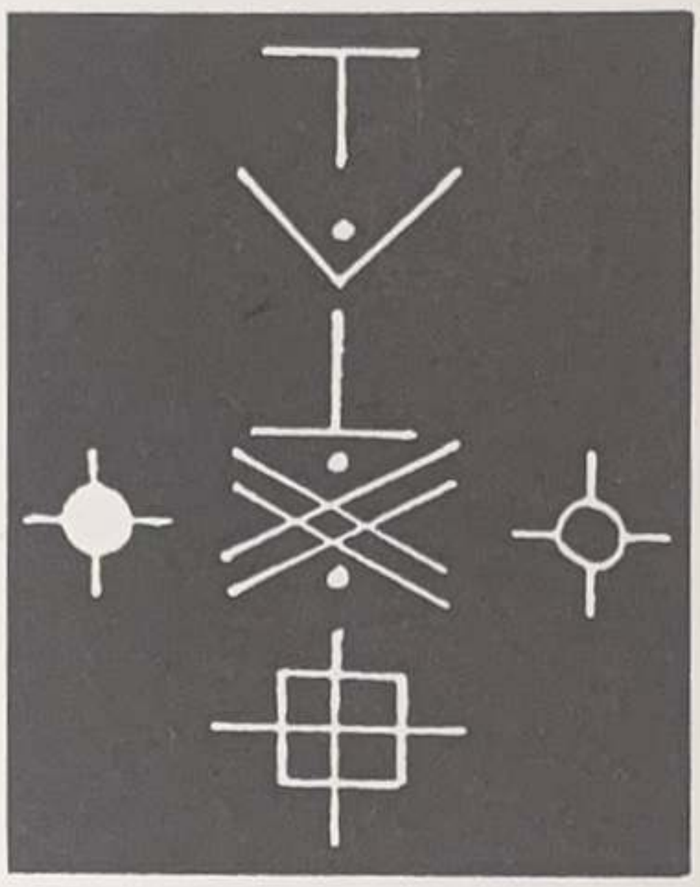

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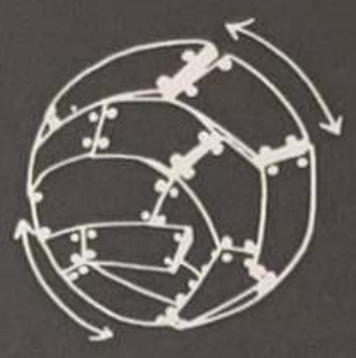

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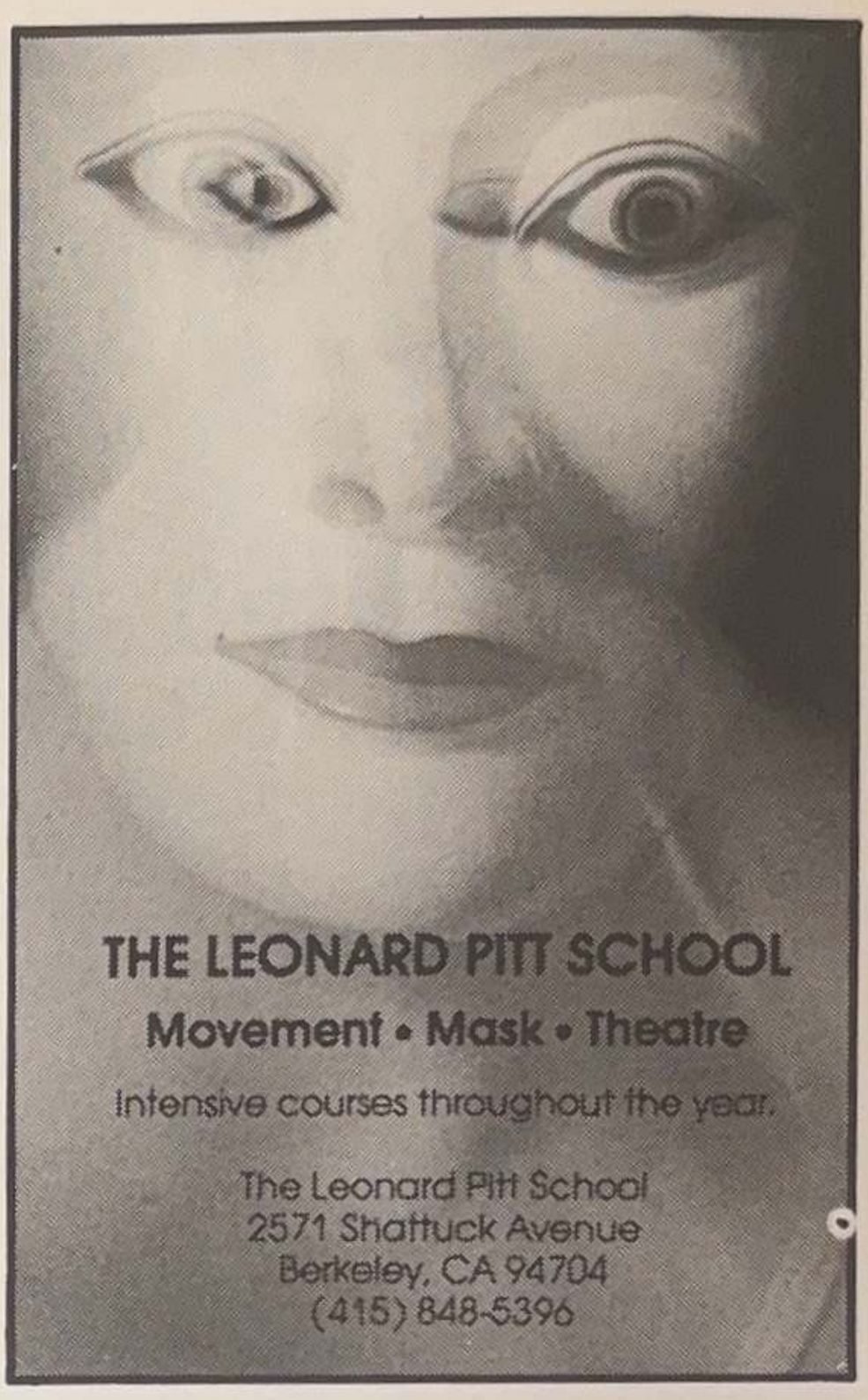

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