

✓
Experiencing Theater

by

Alfred S. Groh

/ Beckett and Albee bring a new rhetoric to the stage. Their plays deal with the human condition. They expose life to us by presenting experience as it seems to happen -- raw, senseless, incomprehensible. What is the meaning? Ask instead what our own logic and absurd actions mean.

Perhaps a better name for it than "theater of the absurd" might be "the looking glass theater," for the plays shatter accepted theater conventions and ^{alter} our fixed notions of viewing plays.

✓ In this theater we are spectators, not participants. We watch with horror and fascination. In a conventional play the action is an orderly progression of events, shaping itself to a moral end; these playwrights shake our conception of a logical and moral universe. We do not want to identify with that world or its characters. We have an aversion toward it and for them. Thus theirs is the anti-play, their hero the anti-hero.

✓ Their voice is in reality a cry for life not a negation of it. If they were to write their plays out of hate for mankind, they would choke on the words. They destroy illusions not people.

✓ Is it our charge that their vision is limited and that they choose to show us only the dark side of life? If so,

(2)

then we can be accused by them of holding a narrow view and of falsifying the bright side. If they see us in a world of cages, out of touch with one another, tied more to our primitive ancestors, the munching monkeys, than shaped by a divine destiny, at least they cannot be accused of distorting a genealogic perspective.

✓ "Sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly," Albee says in The Zoo Story. If we cannot hear the mermaids singing, we can, in the meanwhile, listen to the howling voice of the new playwright protesting against our inability to perceive and understand the human condition.

✓ These plays are an entertainment. Although they are the work of a relentless and probing intellect, they were not written to be ^{performed or} viewed as intellectual exercises. You will discover that they are good theater precisely because they are good plays.

if

2-19-65

FILE: ~~HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA COACHES~~
EDUCATIONAL THEATER-
WILKES COLLEGE

SUBJECT: Report on program for high school drama coaches
FROM: Alfred S. Groh, Director, Wilkes College Theater
DATE: August 26, 1966

I.

1. Education and the Theater

Education in a free society provides choices, presents challenges, and demands attention to matters of importance. Education in a free society not only throws light on the subject but enlightens the student, thus converting the student into a participant.

Education is a private matter between the individual and his mind, but in a free society both are subject to public scrutiny and examination. When the mind is authoritarian or is closed not only the individual but society suffers.

The stage must also be open to new ideas and exposed to former ideas. The Theater Arts condition men to understand themselves and those who differ with and from them, to explore their world environment, and to feel the presence of unseen forces that elevate men above themselves. The theater, like the classroom, converts spectators into participants.

Colleges can not insulate themselves from a world that is changing any more than students can alienate themselves from a society that is shaping the world we live in. The philosophy of education must also be the philosophy of educational theater.

2. Importance of the Theater Arts

The theater must always be a public testament to the private conscience and bear witness to the power of the dramatic imagination in its constant quest for truth. Educational theater has its roots in those values which have contributed to and maintained freedom for the individual. In the schools educational theater must always be linked with freedom.

The history of the theater is proof that the arts keep alive human aspirations. They deal with some fundamental aspect of human experience. In a world where private decencies deteriorate, individuals lose their freedom and are cut off one from another; they talk no longer of salvation but of salvage.

Our heritage is preserved in architecture, painting, sculpture, music, drama, the dance, and literature. That same language that produced a Shakespeare, a Moliere, an Ibsen, a Eugene O'Neill, or a Bible, also orders groceries, instructs the children, or builds bridges. It can lead to friction and to war, or to peace through understanding.

3. Educational theater

Mutual problems faced by the high schools and the colleges and universities have alerted each to re-examine their responsibilities to the student. Colleges and high schools, still acting independently of one another, no longer can react separately to the student's need for better teaching, for improved curricula, and for instructional facilities.

Within the last decade there has been developing at colleges and universities a new concept of educational theater, stimulated in part by the role of higher education in preparing students for careers in teaching. The concern for theater in its educational aspects is also articulated by high school principals and superintendents who view the theater as a learning experience outside the classroom.

4. Wilkes College Theater

From its inception as a junior college in 1936, Wilkes College has been dedicated to twin goals: making educational benefits available to all students who can profit from them and cooperating with community leaders to improve the educational, economic, and cultural climate of the region. The philosophy of the college defines as well the character of the campus theater. The Wilkes College theater offers electives in a liberal arts program that emphasizes the humanities as preparation for an undergraduate degree, for graduate study, and for a career in teaching. Its members enroll as drama majors in university graduate departments, participate in community theater, perform in summer stock, and teach courses in drama and direct plays in high schools throughout the country.

II.

1. Purpose of proposed program

Wilkes College plans to offer a summer program to provide training for high school drama coaches. Emphasis will be on methods and techniques to improve

the presentation of plays and musicals. The project will be conducted in seminar fashion, with lectures, discussions, and laboratory workshops on all aspects of high school drama production. In addition there will be outside reading assignments. The course of study will deal generally with choosing a play, staging it, interpreting it, and directing it. A concentrated summer session, when high school and college personnel are readily available, offers the greatest opportunity to teachers from distant areas to meet together for their mutual benefit.

2. Need for Teacher Training in Theater Arts

There is a definite need to solidify and expand the high school drama program. If the high schools require the student to study Shakespeare in the classroom, then similar standards should be met on the stage. It is to be expected that secondary schools shall make every effort to hire qualified drama coaches. In the liberal arts institutions there is a more urgent need to provide students with a background in the humanities and practical experience in the theater. It is expected that colleges shall make every effort to help teachers prepare for their work in educational theater on the secondary level.

3. Course Level

It is hoped that as an in-service program the course will satisfy the requirements of superintendents who encourage high school teachers to continue their education. It is hoped that the course will satisfy the requirements of teachers

who seek additional training and those who desire transfer credit at graduate institutions.

4. Length of course

It is suggested that the length of the course be a minimum of four or five weeks with daily meetings Monday through Friday. Seminars will be scheduled during the morning and workshop periods during the afternoon. It is felt that two weeks might be too limiting to cover the work, and an overlong session would prevent high school teachers from profiting from a summer vacation.

5. Course option

Plans include attendance at summer theater productions in the area and invitations to touring companies to perform at the campus theater.

6. Course credit

A grade for the course will be optional. Certificates will be awarded upon completion of the program.

7. Topics

A list of topics for discussion will include the following:

- (1) building a solid high school drama program
- (2) responsibilities to students and community
- (3) budgeting a production

- (4) selecting a play
- (5) blocking and business
- (6) scheduling rehearsals
- (7) preparing the script for the stage
- (8) interpreting the play for presentation
- (9) directing the student performer
- (10) backstage procedure

8. Staff

The following list includes the professional staff essential to organize, operate, direct, and teach:

- (1) director--chairman
- (2) technical director--designer
- (3) costumer
- (4) lighting technician
- (5) assistant director(s)
- (6) secretary

9. High school student summer stock program

To augment the program designed for high school drama coaches we propose a summer drama program to provide opportunity in the theater for high school juniors and seniors. Under professional supervision and working with college trained members at the Wilkes College theater, they will present workshop productions and public performances of selected plays. It is recommended that high school students be chosen under the following conditions: (1) The student must present an overall B average or better or an 85 or above.

(2) Applicants should be entering the eleventh or twelfth grade in the fall of 1967. (3) The student should present a signed recommendation by a high school

principal, guidance counselor, or drama coach stating his confidence in the student's deportment and ability. (4) The student must present a statement of consent signed by his parents or guardian. (5) The student will be required to pay all necessary fees before entering the program, including meals and lodging. (6) The student must present an application and submit a recent photograph and a tape recorded reading to the Director, Wilkes College Theater, Center for the Performing Arts, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, by April 1. (7) The student must be willing to appear for an interview at the college theater if it is deemed necessary.

Copies to: Mr. Wesley E. Davies
Mr. Leo Pelton
Mr. Walter Wood
Mr. Robert French

Toward a Program in Educational Theater

by Alfred S. Groh

The Summer Theater Workshop was a plea to make a permanent place for the drama in general education.

The Workshop offered teachers in elementary and secondary schools an opportunity to extend their background in theater, to receive further instruction and training in techniques of production and directing, and to broaden their understanding of the student's ability to illuminate an experience.

The Workshop demonstrated for the student the need to discipline himself and his talent. He was encouraged to become more fully aware of himself as a person and thereby better realize his responsibilities to himself and other people.

As teachers we are involved with the student's work in the classroom, but we are equally concerned about what stimulates the mind and imagination of the student.

It is clear that the relationships between the colleges and the schools are most effective when both concentrate on common problems. If answers are forthcoming, they are in response to the needs of the student.

Summer Theater...2

What matters most is what the student learns, and if new ground must be broken by school administrators, new patterns must emerge out of a commitment by school teachers. Colleges and high schools, still acting independently of one another, no longer can react separately to the student's need for inspired teaching, an improved curriculum, and better instructional facilities.

It is possible that a summer graduate project for teachers and drama coaches might lead to a fulltime undergraduate program in educational theater at the College. The movement is underway.

11/25/67

August 1976

Department of Theater Arts

A Progress Report

The completion in October 1965 of the Dorothy Dickson Dart Center for the Performing Arts represented a positive commitment to the creative spirit and dramatic imagination of the people of this region. In the past ten years, this commitment has guided a facility whose yearly offering now includes over 250 programs in theater, dance, music, and film sponsored by over 50 groups from the College and community. The College has been able to develop a theater program designed to prepare a student in the spirit of the liberal arts tradition in the art of living as well as for the business of living.

In the time elapsed since the completion of the building, the program has met the demands created by students with a broadening awareness of the many facets of the performing arts. In order to continue to meet these increasing demands we must adapt and expand the program so that it will continue to stimulate the curiosity of their imaginations and provide them with a solid foundation in the many fields which are now being called the communications arts.

To meet the increasing needs of both student and community the program at the Center for the Performing Arts should be expanded to include:

1. A Degree Program in Dramatic Arts -- designed to provide students with academic background, training, and experience in the creative, performing, and communicative arts established within the liberal arts tradition.

2. A Program in Mass Communications -- designed in cooperation with the local public broadcasting stations to give students training and experience in radio and television.

3. A Program in Dance -- to develop creative expression through the study of body movement and to present an outlet for this expression in a future resident dance company affiliated with the College.

4. A Related Arts Program -- combining theater arts with fine arts and music to allow the student to explore the arts in their fullest expression.

5. An Experimental Theater Program -- consisting of workshops, reader's theater, children's theater, puppetry, documentary drama, socio- and psychodrama, role playing, and other genre which offer the student the opportunity to study theatrical form in its broadest context for direct application to related fields.

6. An Artist-in-Residence Program -- which would bring to the campus working playwrights, directors, and actors to give students a broader background in theater from a wide variety of approaches.

7. An Expanded Summer Theater Workshop -- including music, dance, fine arts, and film which would train students, provide an outlet for their talent, and encourage the arts of this region.

8. A Repertory Company -- composed of undergraduate students able to explore performance through tours, drama festivals, and pageants.

9. A Community Service Program -- including the Family Service Plays-for-Living Series, Religious Drama, and cooperative programs with community theater groups to give students an opportunity to develop their skills in as wide a spectrum of activities as possible and to assist the community in developing its performing arts.

The above proposals should be considered as areas which the theater arts student explores in an ever changing curriculum of expression. To maintain this expression requires a new commitment of resources.

The operation of the theater at the present time with its growing list of activities places a severe financial burden on the College and excessive demands in time and talent on a small staff. We cannot with limited resources plan and implement long term programs and fulfill the artistic needs of the students and community. To meet future needs requires an endowment. Historically, the visual and performing arts have flourished only when communities and individuals have allowed artists the resources to explore and develop their craft.

From its inception the Center for the Performing Arts has evolved as an open workshop for artistic expression. To maintain the commitment, to nurture these ideals in an age of expanded communications technology, requires support

greater than the College can continue to provide. The programs of the last decade have demonstrated the potential of the facility and verified the faith of its founders in the students and the community it serves. The programs of the next decade will reaffirm that faith and vision.

In dedicating the Center for the Performing Arts ten years ago, Dr. Farley referred to its completion as the fruition of a dream. To bring that dream to fruition, new seeds were sown which have made the facility a testament to the human spirit, providing sustenance for future generations.

Dorothy Dickson Dart left as her legacy for this community a facility that provides an inexhaustible resource for the human spirit. Annette Evans, Gilbert McClintock, Arnaud Marts, Eugene and Eleanor Farley, and others closely affiliated with Wilkes College had the vision to bring the liberal arts tradition to the Wyoming Valley. It is the responsibility and obligation of our generation to sustain their ideals and insure the continued fulfillment of their dreams for succeeding generations.

Summary of Programs

Explanation and Revenue Sources

1. Degree Program in Dramatic Arts

This program would include the liberal arts core; additional training in other disciplines; and theater arts courses, ie: acting, directing, technical theater, and theater history. This would allow the student to combine the theater experience with such fields as English, teaching, business management, fine arts, history, foreign language, and social sciences.

The program will be self-sustaining, support coming from tuition from students enrolled in the program.

2. A Program in Mass Communications

This program would be an offering within the dramatic arts degree, giving students specific training in the use of radio and TV equipment, and in performance for mass media.

Funding is possible through state and federal grants in conjunction with Intermediate Unit 18 and WVIA.

3. A Dance Program

Dance is an artistic expression and performing field whose merits demand an opportunity within existing programs in fine arts, music, and theater.

The CPA provides an environment which will allow it to grow within sound educational structures. The CPA has the facilities to offer a program and there exists a talented student body within the community who would be served by it.

The program would be funded by tuition from students in the program and through community support.

4. A Related Arts Program

This would be an interdisciplinary program sponsored by the music, fine arts, and theater departments which would offer elective courses for students enrolled in those disciplines. The courses would draw upon resources from each department in such areas as musical theater, scenic design, puppetry, opera, etc.

The program could be supported with existing faculty and tuition. Arrangements would be made among the departments involved.

5. Experimental Theater

There is a need to explore new techniques and materials in a laboratory environment.

Partial support is expected to come from the College and Intermediate Unit 18.

6. Artists-in-Residence

The student's total theater experience would be enriched by bringing to the campus professionals and educators who reflect the high aspirations of their craft.

Foundation support is needed to implement this program.

7. Summer Theater Workshop

With an increased commitment from private sources this program could be expanded to include music, fine arts, photography, dance, and media.

8. Repertory Company

This program would allow a number of undergraduate students to develop a series of performances for presentation at the theater, and as a touring group. It would give students experience in performance before a wide variety of audiences and the opportunity for development of acting and stagecraft techniques for an extended production schedule.

Initially the program would require private sources for funding productions and staffing. Ultimately support could come from subscriptions as is presently done with the Northeast Philharmonic and the Ballet Society.

9. Educational and Community Service Programs

(A) Community Sponsored Programs -- The College receives increasing requests for the use of the CPA by community cultural groups. As a general rule, costs for these activities are borne by the community groups using the CPA. Personnel, however, are needed to coordinate these activities for the College.

(B) Public Service Programs -- the College sponsors the Concert and Lecture Series, which brings performances, lectures, and other cultural activities to the College for the benefit of the students and community. The College bears the costs for these programs as part of its commitment to the students and the community.

(C) Community Service Programs -- would extend the Public Service Programs offered by the College. It would be an effort by the College to reach out into the community and provide services to its schools, hospitals, playgrounds, and civic enterprises. Performances by the Repertory Company and the creation of summer pageants and festivals would enhance the life of the community and provide experience for the students.

This program would need funding for equipment for touring and performing outside the theater. Portable scenery and lighting equipment as well as the means for transporting and assembling performances would be required.

We hope that you will be able to continue your mother's legacy to Wilkes College. In order to provide the programs listed, an endowment of \$500,000 is required. With this substantial grant the theater will become an independent, self-sustaining entity. The quality and diversity of the theatrical presentations already attract and affect the entire community. As a primary educational and cultural resource, the theater can continue to play a vital part in the development and enrichment of the area.

We are all grateful to you and your family for your encouragement and support. You have always responded generously to the College's needs. We hope that your vision and financial commitment will enable the Dorothy Dickson Dart Center for the Performing Arts to provide new sights and insights, to create and meet new challenges, and to improve the lot of mankind.

SCHEDULE
CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JANUARY 1975 - JUNE 1976
COLLEGE

Event	No.	Attendance	Time: Hrs. Prep. & Perf.	Stud. Pers.	Staff	Stud. Hrs.	Staff Hrs.
Films	52	7,900	260	1	1	260	260
Music Dept.							
Rehearsal	46		138	1	1	138	138
Performance	26	7,800	130	4	2	520	260
Concert & Lecture	10	6,000	90	8	2.5	720	225
Meetings	25	2,500	100	1	1	100	100
Theater Dept.							
Plays	16	4,500	740	50	4.5	37,000	3,330
Musicals	18	5,500	840	130	5	109,000	4,200
			COMMUNITY				
Meetings	15	3,500	60	2	1	120	60
Dance							
Rehearsal	12		60	6	2	360	120
Performance	10	4,000	50	6	2	300	100
Music							
Rehearsal	25		150	1	1	150	150
Performance	6	2,000	30	3	1	90	30
TOTAL	256 261	35,700 43	2,648	213	24	148,758	8,973