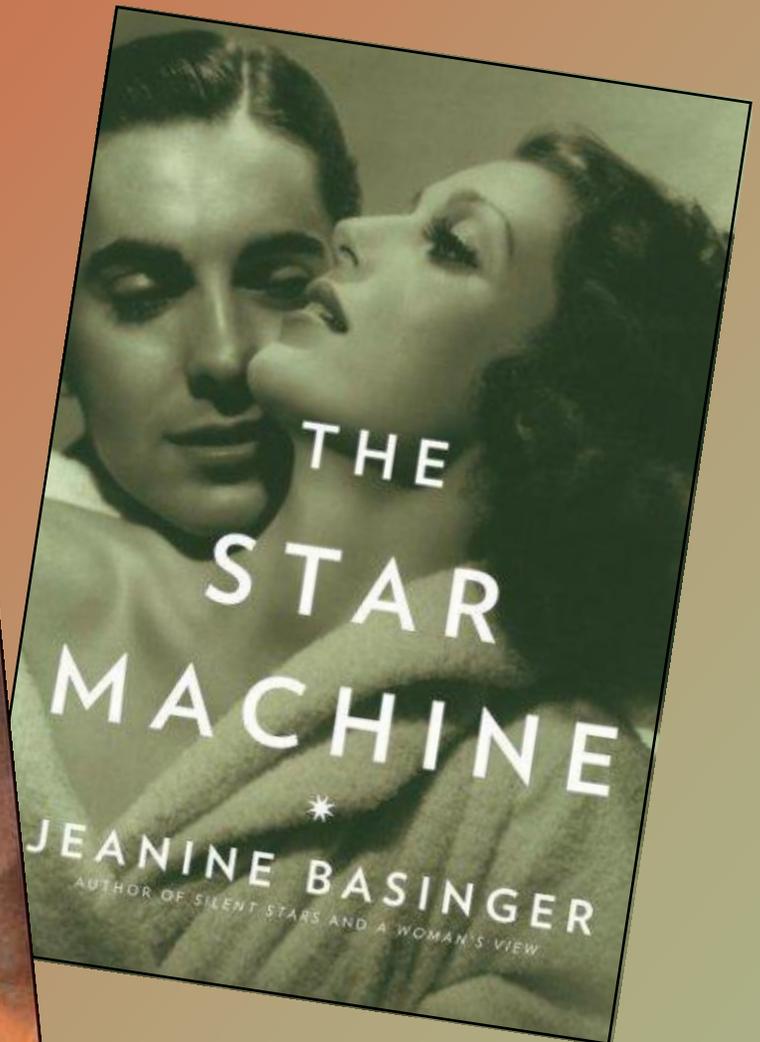
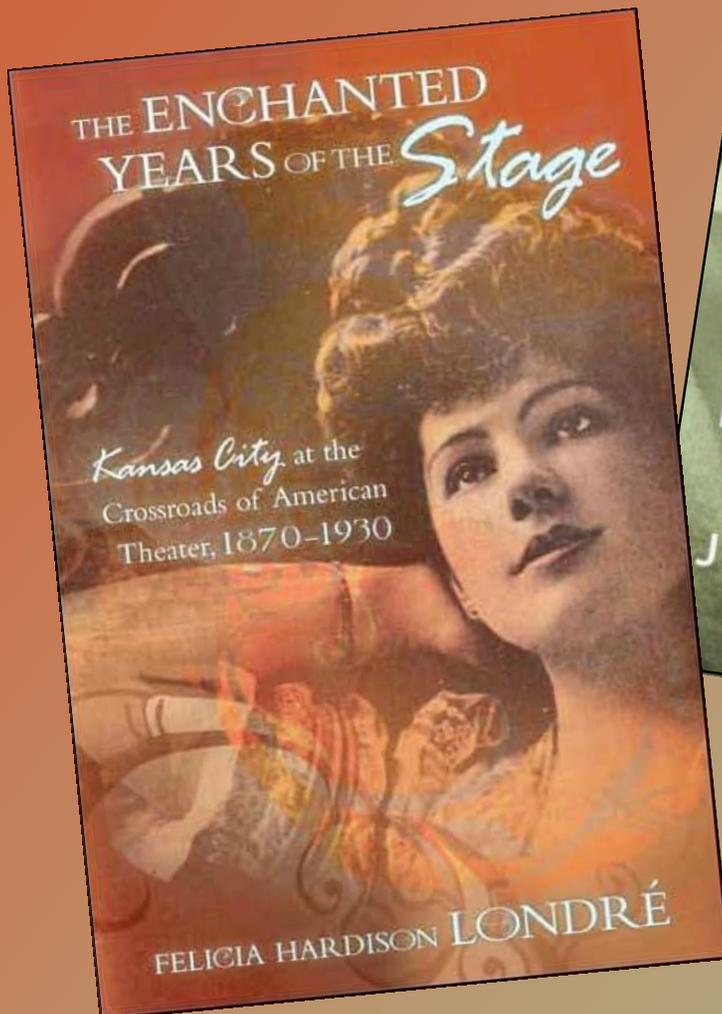


# BROADSIDE

36/1 Fall 2008

Newsletter of the Theatre Library Association



40th Annual TLA Book Awards **8**

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**BROADSIDE PUBLICATION GUIDELINES**

*BROADSIDE* is the principal medium through which the Theatre Library Association communicates news, activities, policies, and procedures. Collectively, past issues also provide historical information about the organization and the profession of performing arts librarianship. *BROADSIDE* has no ambition to serve as a scholarly journal. Scholarly and other articles or monographs may be considered for TLA's other principal publication, *Performing Arts Resources*.

In addition, *BROADSIDE* serves as a means for the exchange among members of information that advances the mission of the organization. Examples of this include short news items about recent activities of both individual and institutional members; short reviews of relevant books and other resources; news of relevant exhibits, conferences, and other developments in performing arts librarianship, collections, and scholarship.

In keeping with the aims of a newsletter, and to help the Editor and the TLA Publications Committee to maintain fair and consistent editorial policies, the Publications Committee has developed the following guidelines.

1. Priority in the publication of articles will be given to the Association's officers, members of the Board, and chairs of committees. These articles provide the most important means by which the leadership of the Association communicates recent Board decisions, upcoming TLA-sponsored events, appeals for member involvement, etc.
2. TLA members in good standing are encouraged to submit news items that are in keeping with the statement above. All submissions are subject to editing for length, clarity, and factual confirmation.
3. Letters to the Editor are encouraged, but must be limited to 200 words, due to space considerations.
4. Reviews of books or other resources are an excellent way for members to contribute to TLA and the profession. Reviews should be limited to 500 words and should include a concise summary of the resource, a comparison of it to similar resources, and a brief evaluation. Suggestions and unsolicited reviews should be sent to the Book Review Editor.
5. The copyright of all articles published in *BROADSIDE* will be owned by TLA. Permission to republish an article may be requested from the Editor.
6. Ideas for articles – other than brief news items, book reviews, or submissions from officers and committee chairs – should be submitted to the Editor in advance in order to allow sufficient time to plan layout, provide constructive suggestions, and occasionally seek guidance from the Publications Committee. Articles should relate to performing arts libraries, library resources, or related topics in performing arts scholarship, rather than to general performing arts topics.



PHOTO CREDITS:

Front cover; book jackets for *The Enchanted Stage* and *The Star Machine*

Page 3, *Mephisto*, University of Washington School of Drama production, Frank Rosenthein, photographer.

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- 1) Send email (nothing in the subject) to: [LISTSERV@listserv.uiuc.edu](mailto:LISTSERV@listserv.uiuc.edu)
- 2) in the body of the email message type the following line:  
 SUBSCRIBE TLA-L your name

**TLA MISSION STATEMENT**

Founded in 1937, the Theatre Library Association supports librarians and archivists affiliated with theatre, dance, performance studies, popular entertainment, motion picture and broadcasting collections. TLA promotes professional best practices in acquisition, organization, access and preservation of performing arts resources in libraries, archives, museums, private collections, and the digital environment. By producing publications, conferences, panels, and public events, TLA fosters creative and ethical use of performing arts materials to enhance research, live performance, and scholarly communication.



**JOIN US!**

**TLA Membership**

(Annual dues: \$30 personal, \$40 institutional; \$20 student/non-salaried members) includes *Performing Arts Resources*, published occasionally. For availability and prices of past issues of *PAR* and *BROADSIDE*, contact the Executive Secretary ([dnochimson100@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:dnochimson100@qc.cuny.edu))



This is my final report as President of the Theatre Library Association. I have been honored and pleased to serve you these past four years, and I look forward to a continuing active involvement (old Presidents don't die, they just serve on committees). I wish my excellent successors, Kenneth Schlesinger and Vice President, Susan Brady (who, I might add, is a former TLA President!), and continuing stalwarts Secretary David Nochimson and Treasurer Angela Weaver, all the best in leading us into the future. TLA has a healthy, active membership, a vibrant agenda for future conferences, publications, and special events, and a continuing leadership position in preserving our international performing arts heritage. I am confident that I am leaving you in extremely capable hands.

### Election Results

Kenneth Schlesinger has been elected President and Susan Brady Vice President; both shall serve two-year terms. New Board members, each serving three-year terms, are John Frick, Nancy Friedland, Stephen Johnson, and Francesca Marini. Angela Weaver will continue to serve as Treasurer for one more year and will continue on the board through 2010, replacing Susan Brady who was elected to a three-year Board term in 2007. Congratulations to all!

### Book Awards 2008

As promised, we tried out our new model for the annual TLA Book Awards at this year's ceremony, held directly following the TLA Annual Business Meeting on Friday, October 10, in the Bruno Walter Auditorium at the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Although the post-mortem discussion of the event has yet to occur, we can safely deem this year's Awards a stellar success. Felicia Hardison Londré, who won the Freedley

Award for *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theatre, 1870-1930* (University of Missouri, 2007), was unable to attend because her only daughter was getting married. In lieu of a personal appearance, Londré sent an enthralling DVD that showed us where and how she researched and wrote the book, replete with three stunning costume changes and intimate views of her offices, personal library and archives, and lovely home. It was a clever, witty, informative, and wildly entertaining performance that literally had audience members rolling in the aisles with delight. One particularly memorable moment was when she stood in front of an overloaded bookcase in her home, containing exclusively her own publications, and told us that of all these volumes, the only previous award winner is *The Enchanted Years*, thus underscoring the significance of the Freedley to her life and work. Karen Vorst, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Missouri—Kansas City, where Londré has been a professor since 1978, accepted the Award on her behalf.

Although it was a proverbial "tough act to follow," TLA Award winner Jeanine Basinger kept the magic alive with an animated discussion of her work on *The Star Machine* (Knopf 2007) and a gracious nod to Londré, about whom she quipped "I am very confident in the health of this nation with people like Professor Londré around!" She then answered questions from her many fans in the audience, who had read this as well as her many earlier titles. Basinger was a delight, full of stories of her Midwestern childhood when she would escape into town to go to the movies, her current twice-a-day habit of watching films, and her personal relationships with many of her star subjects. Both Londré and Basinger were clearly thrilled to receive their Awards and provided illuminating insights into their research and writing, acknowledging with gratitude all of the assistance they received from librarians and archivists along the way.

Prior to celebrating the authors, we celebrated longtime TLA Book Awards Chair, Dick Wall, with the posthumous presentation of the

Distinguished Achievement Award. Kevin Winkler delivered a beautiful tribute to Dick highlighting his years of dedication and service to TLA. Several colleagues of Dick's from Queen's College Library came to help us honor the memory of our much-missed associate and friend.

If you were with us for this year's awards and have any recommendations for the future, please get in touch with me soon, since our meeting to discuss the future of the awards will be held December 19th. Brook Stowe is taking over as the new Book Awards Chair and we are looking for a new juror for the TLA Award committee. If you are interested, please contact Brook directly: [Brook.Stowe@liu.edu](mailto:Brook.Stowe@liu.edu).

## October Board Meeting Highlights

### Secretary's Report

David Nochimson announced that as of September 30, there were 153 personal members, 37 non-salaried members, and 139 institutional members in good standing, for a grand total of 329 members, matching the total at the end of 2007. Renewal notices for 2009 were sent out at the end of August (this is a new model so that TLA can save postage by reducing member mailings to one per annum) and to date 58 personal, 9 non-salaried, and 31 institutional members renewed.

### Treasurer's Report

Angela Weaver reported that as of October 10th, TLA had a bank

balance of \$45,525.11, including encumbrances and a savings certificate, which is a healthy financial situation for the Association.

### ASTR-TLA Conferences

Kenneth Schlesinger and Susan Brady reported on plans for the 2008 conference and the 2009 conference, which will be held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Next year's conference theme is "Theatre, Performance, and DestiNation," and Colleen Reilly will be chairing TLA's Plenary, "Playing the Pilgrim: Scholars, Collections, and Archival DestiNations." Colleen has also agreed to serve on the ASTR Program Committee. Kenneth reported that the 2010 Conference in Seattle, which will be co-sponsored with the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD), is in the planning stages.

This year's conference in Boston went very well, with excellent TLA Plenary, Brown Bag (a trip to the Harvard Theatre Collection), and Hospitality sessions. We had a great turnout for the Hospitality Suite, where we hosted 30 to 35 people over the course of the evening. We thrust membership brochures into the hands of non-members who attended--perhaps our wine, nibbles, and conviviality will convince them to join. I also am pleased to report that following my annual three-minute Presidential talk at the awards luncheon Tracy Davis, ASTR President and former Freedley Book Award winner, commented that the ASTR-TLA relationship is the strongest it has been in years.

### TLA Symposium III

Although the proposed theme and date for this Symposium has been abandoned ("Deconstructing the Classics," May 2009), a lively discussion at the board meeting reinvigorated the Symposium with plans to reorient the day towards the challenge of interpreting Shakespeare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If you are interested in being involved, contact Kenneth Schlesinger.

### Publications

Committee Chair Rob Melton joined us at the meeting to discuss future *PARs*, *BROADSIDE*, revising licensing agreements with EBSCO and ProQuest, and website redesign. He and his hardworking committee drafted a *PAR* Author/Publisher agreement form (which was subsequently revised, distributed, and approved by the Board in November 2008) as well as a statement of guidelines for streamlining communication between the Publications Committee and the Board. He also reported on the progress of *PAR 27* on Costume Design, edited by Nancy Friedland, which is slated to be published before the end of 2009, and suggested possible themes for future volumes including information literacy in theatre education, interviews with recent Freedley/TLA Book Award winners regarding their use of libraries and archives, a TLA History volume for TLA's 75th anniversary in 2012, and a continuation of the Documenting: Design series with a volume on

scenic design. Rob is anxious to hear your ideas for future *PARs* and whether you are interested in serving as Editor. Contact him at: [rmelton@library.ucsd.edu](mailto:rmelton@library.ucsd.edu)

### Website

The website redesign has gone more slowly than anticipated, but we hope to launch it at a new URL early in 2009. Tobin Nellhaus has established the new site for us at [www.tla-online.org](http://www.tla-online.org), which will allow us to maintain our own site unencumbered by the constraints of a host institution. We will send a *Promptbook* to announce the launch when it happens.

### SIBMAS

I attended the bi-annual SIBMAS Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, in August and delivered an illustrated paper on TLA's second symposium, "Performance Reclamation: Rediscovering, Researching and Reinterpreting Drama, Dance, and Musical Theatre," which will be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings. My intent was two-fold: to share with international colleagues the kind of work TLA promotes and supports and to provide a potential model for sessions at the 2012 conference, which we will be co-hosting with SIBMAS in Austin, Texas, at the Harry Ransom Center. It was determined by the SIBMAS Executive Committee that this conference, initially slated for San Francisco, will now be held in Texas since the new building for the Museum of Performance and Design in San Francisco

(formerly SFPALM), which would have been the meeting site, is still in the planning stages. Harry Ransom Center Associate Curator Helen Adair, a longtime TLA member, looks forward to working with us on planning and shaping the program.

This year's SIBMAS conference, held at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD), was a lively affair hosted by RSAMD archivist Alan Jones, which included a Gala Ceilidh at the Glasgow City Chambers, featuring several international archivists garbed in Scottish ceremonial dress and doing the Highland fling into the wee hours of the night; a fieldtrip to the Britannia Panopticon Music Hall where we were hosted by Judith Bowers, the entertaining historian/archivist/performer who reclaimed it virtually single-handedly; a fabulous performance of excerpts from four shows presented by RSAMD students at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; and a day-long excursion to Edinburgh. In Edinburgh, SIBMAS delegates were honored by "Footlights," an exhibition of theatre prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Scotland, which was created expressly for the conference but open to the general public through November; an illustrated talk by Neil Murray, Executive Producer of the National Theatre of Scotland, on its highly-touted production of *Black Watch*; and a performance of Matthew Bourne's new ballet, *Dorian Gray*, at the Edinburgh Festival.

The conference proper was equally engaging with papers and four separate keynotes, all addressing the conference theme of "capturing

the essence of performance: the challenge of intangible heritage." "Intangible cultural heritage" is a special category devised by UNESCO to cover the things that do not fit easily into existing concepts of heritage that can otherwise be preserved or recorded and stored in archives and museums. As Kate Rumbold in her paper, "Shakespeare, authenticity, and intangible heritage," explained, "UNESCO's concern is with traditional theatre performances that combined acting, singing, dance and music, dialogue, narration or recitation, as well as puppetry and pantomime; and even practices that are not performed for an external audience." She noted that "the fact that performance is elevated as an intangible heritage practice in its own right holds out hope for theatre historians and practitioners," adding that we should be encouraged "that the challenges of capturing intangible performance are being taken seriously on a worldwide scale." Rumbold has a broad interpretation of the term and her argument that the wide range and diversity of audience responses to Shakespeare performances are an essential component of their cultural heritage encouraged us think about the scope of intangible heritage and how it can be open to multifarious elements and interpretations. Hence, papers dealing with lighting and costume design, theatre photography, digital representations of performance, portraits of performers, the vocal performance text, documenting non-verbal actions, and audio and video documentations and their limitations, all focused on

widening the purview of performance heritage as well as the challenges of reading and interpreting its documentary artifacts. As such, this conference was quite different—and a welcome change—from my experiences at SIBMAS 2006 in Vienna where most of the papers were reports on the holdings and bibliographic methods of cataloguing various international collections. In Glasgow, presenters were wrestling with the critical issues that make our work as archivists, librarians, and historians so challenging. Since we rely heavily on the shards of tangible evidence that can be preserved to help illuminate what performances might have been like, it is prudent to critically explore what these documents ultimately can tell us. How do we truly “capture the essence of performance”? SIBMAS delegates presented a myriad of recommendations and much food for thought.

The next SIBMAS conference will be held in tandem with IFTR in Munich, Germany, in late July 2010. SIBMAS is anxious to attract more members from the U.S. and would welcome your paper submissions. Check the SIBMAS website for details on this as well as a useful and frequently updated list of worldwide conferences, exhibitions, and news on performing arts libraries and archives.

### **TLA Annual Business Meeting**

This meeting, which is mandated by our constitution, affords

members an opportunity to address issues critical to TLA and to engage in dialogue directly with officers and members of the Board. I reported on the information provided here and entertained members' questions and comments. Although many of you are not in New York, you can join this dialogue by contacting us in advance of the meeting and having your statements and suggestions conveyed to fellow members. Contact our new President, Kenneth Schlesinger, or Secretary David Nochimson, to share your thoughts for next year's meeting. Remember, TLA is *your* organization.

### **In Gratitude**

I would like to thank my fellow officers, board members, and members for their constant support of my presidency and for helping to advance the work of the association through their generous donation of time and talent. Please continue to give your energy and skills to my worthy successors in helping to make TLA grow and prosper.

Respectfully submitted,

**Marti LoMonaco,  
Outgoing TLA President**

## 40<sup>TH</sup> Annual TLA Book Awards: A Memorable Evening!

The 40<sup>th</sup> Annual TLA Book Awards sported both a new format and a lively pair of honorees at the October 10, 2008 presentation. Celebrity presenters were eliminated in favor of providing the winning authors an opportunity to address the audience and discuss the passion that brought them to their subjects, their research process, and the significance of libraries to their work. The audience got all that and much more from Felicia Hardison Londré, winner of the George Freedley Memorial Award for *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theatre, 1870-1930* (University of Missouri Press), and Jeanine Basinger, who won the Theatre Library Association Award for *The Star Machine* (Alfred A. Knopf).

As it happened, the October 10<sup>th</sup> awards event was held on the eve of her daughter's wedding in Kansas City, making it impossible for Professor Londré to be in New York. However, she created an entertaining and informative DVD "acceptance speech" just for TLA (including numerous locations and costume changes). The DVD presentation took the viewers through her personal library and work spaces, and allowed her to share some of the ephemera and artifacts she amassed in her research on theatrical performance in and around Kansas City. Professor Londré's charming manner and excitement about her work made

the presentation truly memorable. As the awards' host, TLA President Marti LoMonaco remarked, "This is a first for TLA," and a delightful one at that.

Jeanine Basinger was very much present and spoke with wry humor about her writing process (which includes chocolate donuts among other necessities) and her interest in writing about the films and stars of Hollywood. She also shared her own personal secret for contentment: always watch two movies a day. Her quota that day had been a Ma and Pa Kettle

double feature, in preparation for her next book, a study of marriage as portrayed in Hollywood films. She enthusiastically took questions from the audience and provided lively and highly informed reflections on Hollywood's star-making "machine," both yesterday and today. She also paid tribute to Professor Londré, noting that "as long as there are teachers like her who are so passionate about their work, the world is OK."

**Jeanine Basinger, Theatre Library Association Award winner, and Marti LoMonaco, TLA president**





**Dick Wall's Queens College colleagues with his award for Distinguished Achievement**

The event was also an opportunity for TLA to pay tribute to our late colleague and friend, Professor Richard Wall. TLA's award for Distinguished Achievement in Service and Support of Performing Arts Libraries was presented posthumously to Dick for his outstanding work on behalf of TLA, most particularly as Chair of the Book Award Committee for over a decade. Dick was Assistant Professor and Humanities Librarian at Queens College Libraries, and several of his Queens College colleagues were present to see him honored by the organization to which he gave so much.

**Kevin Winkler**  
**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts**

## Mapping the Body: Methodologies for Reconstructing Lost and Disappearing Dance

The theme of this year's joint conference of the American Society for Theatre Research and the Theatre Library Association was "Un-Settling Theatre: Migration, Map, and Memory." Participants were invited to challenge conventional "mappings" of theatre within national and cultural boundaries by exploring the effects of migration and movements of peoples on theatre and its practice. The TLA Plenary, in placing its focus on dance, traced revealing parallels between the creation of cartographic records of journeys across the world and across the dance floor. Susan Brady, the session chair, opened the proceedings with a summary of the diverse practices currently in play in dance preservation. The panel itself presented a distinct diversity of professional backgrounds, with all on hand playing multiple roles in activities related to performance, research, education, journalism, documentation, and preservation.

The first paper, entitled, "Dance and Language: Capturing the Choreographic Process," was given by Emily Coates, a faculty member in Theater Studies and the Artistic Director of the World Performance Project at Yale University. Counter to perceived notions concerning the nature of dance, Coates promoted efforts to map dance in verbal terms, arguing for an integral role for poetic language, such as metaphor, simile, and imagery, in



**Emily Coates steps away from the podium for a Balanchine demonstration**

the creative process of many choreographers. She drew upon her own experience as a dancer, first with the New York City Ballet, and more recently with Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, Twyla Tharp Dance, and Yvonne Rainer, choosing three examples to make her case: a novel experiment in which a restaging of Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* using Labanotation was contrasted with one involving longtime Rainer associates under Rainer's supervision; a restaging of Twyla Tharp's *The Fugue* aided not only by videotape of earlier stagings, but also by the written notes of three of the original participants and

Tharp's own recollections of its creation; and George Balanchine's use of metaphor in the teaching of ballet technique. All three examples illustrated an essential role verbal imagery can play in reconstructing the physical intentions of a choreographer. Coates concluded that the cause of dance preservation will be furthered through increased documentation of rehearsals, on video and in written accounts.

Jeff Friedman's "Madame Kong The'ap: From the Cambodian Royal Palace School to America, A Life History, Bead by Bead" followed. Like Coates, Friedman, Professor of Dance at Rutgers University, has a background in the world of dance as a dancer and choreographer. He is also the founder of and senior advisor to Legacy, an oral history project dedicated to documenting the San Francisco dance community. Through his work with Legacy, Friedman is a long time proponent of oral history as a tool for documenting dance and the lives and cultural backgrounds of its practitioners. Defining orality as "the physical production of speech within an embodied performance," he argued that oral history offers the possibility of conveying semantic content within a performative container, thus revealing aesthetic practice contextualized by social and historical factors. At the heart of Friedman's paper was the story of Madame Kong, recorded for Legacy in 1994. Madame Kong is a Cambodian dancer who

narrowly escaped the Khmer Rouge regime's brutal genocide of the country's cultural intelligentsia. She eventually arrived in America and settled in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, where she teaches classical Cambodian dance to the children of other immigrants. Friedman found Madame Kong's oral history to be a particularly rich example of a cultural and historical odyssey told in dance terms, which he ascribed to the tension between the low value placed on individuality by her traditional Buddhist beliefs and the focus on the individual subject central to oral history methodology.

The next paper in the session also concerned the documentation of the survival of cultural heritage in the wake of geographic displacement. Rita Kohn's "Step by Step: How the Current Generation of Delawares/Lenape of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Reclaimed Their Distinctive Dance Heritage" describes her involvement in the reclamation of traditional Native American dances that were a generation away from being lost forever. According to Kohn, Lenape culture was eroded primarily by two factors: a series of forced westward resettlings beginning after the Revolutionary War on the Atlantic seaboard and ending after the Civil War in what would become Oklahoma; and conscious efforts to assimilate the grandparents and parents of the current generation into white society through schools and other social institutions. The reclamation project was able to proceed thanks to the fortuitous

timing of the release of Delaware trust funds by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1980s. These monies funded the efforts to reconstruct the Lenape dances along with the social and cultural traditions associated with them in painstaking detail through interviews with surviving tribal elders and other research methods, as well as documentation of the process on paper and film. It was for this documentation component of the project that Kohn, an author, playwright, and journalist, was invited to provide aid, adding documentarian to her collection of job titles in the process. A portion of her video of the revived Lenape stomp dance was shown at the conclusion of her paper.

In the final paper of the session, "The Dance Heritage Coalition and its Collaborative Efforts in Documenting and Preserving Dance," Norton Owen presented a map not of cultures in motion, but of the forging of cooperative cultural bonds on a national scale. Owen, Head of Preservation for Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, is also the Chairman of the Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC), which was created in 1992 in response to the need for a network of dance repositories, as identified by a far-reaching study of the state of documentation and preservation of American dance. Its constituent members include institutions involved in the documentation and preservation of dance across the country. DHC is dedicated to facilitating collaborative projects that link archival, scholarly, and performance-oriented institutions in the ongoing cycle of dance documentation, access to documentary materials, educational

use, and long-term preservation. Owen enumerated some of the projects the DHC has overseen: preservation funds for dance companies; fellowships for young professionals in the field; a variety of video reformatting initiatives; continuing efforts to make dance images freely accessible on the Internet; and, most recently, a Fair Use Project, which they hope will eliminate some of the hurdles that have limited the scope of their digital initiatives.

The session concluded with a lively Q&A. A question about individual interpretation of the spatial and dynamic elements in the restaging of dance works led Coates to point out the inherent differences between dance and theatre regarding these elements, although Friedman noted the range of openness to individual performer's idiosyncrasies in the dance world. The use of emerging technologies for dance preservation was also discussed. Owen mentioned motion capture as an alternative currently being explored, as well as Paul Taylor's use of color-coded costumes as a visual aid for reconstruction from videotape. It was agreed that different strategies are appropriate for different choreographers and works. Kohn provided the concluding sentiment of the session, commenting that, while recording technologies are very useful, dances reside in the bones of the dancers, and some degree of in-person communication is essential for accurate transmission.

**David Nochimson**  
The New York Public Library

## ASTR-TLA at the Harvard Theatre Collection

TLA's "Brown Bag" session at this year's ASTR-TLA Conference provided food for the eyes and ears, thanks to curator Frederic Woodbridge "Ric" Wilson's presentation of delectable treasures of the Harvard Theatre Collection (HTC). Ric hosted a group of twelve conference attendees who were packed into a tiny conference room at the HTC to behold a delicious array of scenic and costume designs (many of which will be featured in the forthcoming exhibition and symposium on Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes), promptbooks, manuscripts, letters, photographs, and fascinating one-of-a-kind items, such as a collection of Japanese netsuke Noh masks, miniature versions of the actors' masks handcrafted by the mask carvers themselves, and a sterling silver set of the complete repertory of wayang kulit puppets and gamelan instruments created to showcase Indonesian silvermaking for an exhibition in Jakarta. Although the items elicited oohs and aahs from the appreciative crowd, it was Ric's lively, informative commentary that made the event so memorable. He obviously enjoyed the details of history that enrich our understanding of how and why these artifacts are so important to the study of cultural heritage. At the same time, he singled out items that have never been thoroughly researched and are ripe for scholarly inquiry. For instance, Edward Gordon Craig's personal copy of *Macbeth*, containing sixty years of unedited ruminations and sketches of

characters and scenes, has never been thoroughly researched, Ric lamented. He pointed out the fascination in reading Craig's evolving perspectives on the play and how he changed his design concepts over time. Ric also



**ASTR-TLA members posed in front of the entrance to Harvard's Pusey Library which houses the Harvard Theatre Collection.**

shared a delightful, hand-drawn Christmas card from Craig to his mother, actress Ellen Terry, which is inscribed "To Mother, Love Ted." This choice item was purchased from John Gielgud's estate sale and added to the HTC Collection.

Not all the objects displayed bore such famous names, but some, such as an exquisitely illustrated libretto and score for the ballet *Maimouna* produced in Brussels in 1906, are small wonders that the typical researcher at the collection might never come across. Others, such as a ledger book from Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, covering about four years of production details including casts, box office receipts,

and expenditures from the mid-1720s, could be a dream discovery for the right scholar. Ric waxed rhapsodic on the delight of actually handling these materials and poring through them, thus encouraging us all to return at leisure to conduct our own investigations in the adjacent reading room. At the end of his talk, he presented us all with a lovely box of HTC notecards depicting some of the collection's most beautiful pieces. On the subway ride back to the conference hotel in Boston, everyone extolled the wonders of the collection and expressed their gratitude to TLA for this great opportunity. We all vowed to return to the archive very soon.

**Marti LoMonaco  
Fairfield University**



**HTC Curator Ric Wilson displays the promptbook for the premiere production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest***

## THE BROADSIDE NEWS NETWORK

Please send your brief news item to one of the following *BROADSIDE* News Network stringers:

Stephen Kuehler (Northeast, [skuehler@comcast.net](mailto:skuehler@comcast.net))

Phyllis Dircks (Mid-Atlantic, [dircks@liu.edu](mailto:dircks@liu.edu))

Catherine Ritchie (South & Southwest, [catherine.ritchie@dallaslibrary.org](mailto:catherine.ritchie@dallaslibrary.org))

Sarah Zimmerman (Midwest & Plains, [welshman@chipublib.org](mailto:welshman@chipublib.org))

Rob Melton (West Coast & Rockies, [rmelton@ucsd.edu](mailto:rmelton@ucsd.edu))

### California: Irvine

**Erin Conner** is the new Research Librarian for the Performing Arts at the University of California, Irvine. Before she arrived at UCI in July, she was the Graduate Student Assistant in the University of Washington Music Library. She has MLIS and MA in Music History degrees from UW and a BM in Music History from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. She may be contacted at [econor@uci.edu](mailto:econor@uci.edu)

### California: Los Angeles

The Arts Library Special Collections and the Music Library Special Collections at the University of California, Los Angeles have joined together into the new **UCLA Performing Arts**

### Special Collections.

Located in the Charles E. Young Library, it is one of four Special Collections units within UCLA Library. Its holdings include over 400 collections of historical records and personal papers in the area of performing arts with a concentration in film, television, theatre, and music. Electronic versions of selected Arts and Music Special Collections finding aids can be found via the Online Archive of California (OAC). Also, Performing Arts Special Collections is currently renovating its facilities, during which portions of the collections of antiquarian books, jazz books, folios, and sheet music may be unavailable. For more information and for assistance, contact the Public Service Desk by phone at 310-825-7253 or by email at [pasc@library.ucla.edu](mailto:pasc@library.ucla.edu)

### Massachusetts: Cambridge

TLA Board member **Stephen Kuehler**, Reference Librarian at Lamont Library of Harvard University, successfully defended his MA thesis in theatre history from Tufts University on November 13<sup>th</sup>. The thesis is entitled "Concealing God: The *Everyman* Revival, 1901-1903," and Stephen promises to do a dramatic reading from it at a future TLA meeting.

### New York: New York

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has acquired the **papers of Uta Hagen and Herbert Berghof**. The collection, which spans nearly 100 years of theater history, consists of thousands of

pages of unpublished correspondence, diaries, scripts, manuscripts, photographs, clippings and other documents relating to the careers of Hagen and Berghof, who were married for nearly 40 years. Hagen, a teacher and actress who originated the role of Martha in the Broadway production of Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" in 1962, died in 2004 at 84. Berghof, a well-known teacher, actor and director, died in 1990 at 81. The Library is planning free programs featuring friends and colleagues of the couple, including Harold Prince, Edward Albee and Eli Wallach.

### Texas: Dallas

From September through November 2008, the Dallas Public Library's Fine Arts Division hosted an exhibit commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dallas' nationally-renowned Undermain Theatre, led by Artistic Director Katherine Owens. "**Beneath the Surface: 25 Years of Design at Undermain Theatre,**" designed by Linda Noland, featured props, costumes, and special effects scenery from a quarter century of the organization's avant-garde creative efforts. From November 2008 through January 2009, DPL is presenting "**Dallas Theater Center: 50 Years of Dreams Realized,**" observing the golden anniversary of the legendary regional company, currently headed by Artistic Director Kevin Moriarty. The exhibit includes costumes, photographs, posters, and documentary memorabilia. DPL is located at 1515 Young Street.

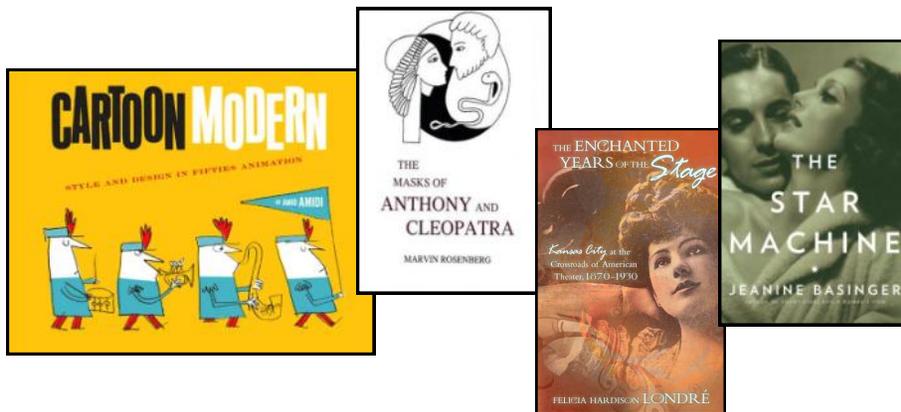
## TLA Goes to Disneyland!

TLA's morning program at the 2008 American Library Association annual conference was held in the shadow of Mickey and Minnie Mouse—surely a TLA first! Anaheim's Disney Grand Hotel was the setting for TLA's June 28<sup>th</sup> session, *Federated Searching in Theatre and Film Databases*, which focused on federated search strategies across a wide variety of electronic resources. Chaired by Nancy Friedland, from Columbia University, the event took participants through the mechanics of searching across a range of databases that provide surprisingly relevant content on theatre and film studies.

Kevin Winkler, from The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, started the session with a review of search strategies for a core group of theatre and film databases. Judy Markowitz, from University of Maryland, demonstrated how to extract unexpected results on theatre topics from databases like *America: History and Life*, *Historical Abstracts*, and *Ethnic Newswatch*. Finally, Nancy took participants through theatre and film searches in *ATLA Index to Religion Journals*, *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, *Index Islamicus*, and others. Nancy ended the program with a lively discussion about currently-available federated search tools and the future of federated searching. The attendees stayed through all presentations and the entire Q&A portion—surely another first for a conference—with many lingering to ask further questions. A good and informative time was had by all!

**Kevin Winkler**

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts**



## TLA Needs You

### To Serve as a Freedley and TLA Juror

The TLA Book Awards Committee is seeking one additional Juror to serve a six-year term beginning in January 2009. The position involves assessing new publications in theatre, performance and cinema-related topics for one of two TLA Awards presented in New York City each October. Candidates should have a solid grounding in current theater and cinema publications and scholarship and are strongly advised that the position can be quite labor-intensive, especially in the spring. For more information, please contact TLA Book Awards Chair Brook Stowe at [brook.stowe@liu.edu](mailto:brook.stowe@liu.edu) or 718.780.4067 by Dec. 31st.

## Election Results

Four new Board members were elected at TLA's Annual Business meeting on October 10<sup>th</sup>. John Frick, Nancy Friedland, Stephen Johnson and Francesca Marini will serve three-year terms from 2009-2011. Their bios appear below.

Interim Treasurer Angela Weaver generously agreed to stay on one additional year, through the end of 2009.

TLA President Marti LoMonaco welcomes our new Board members, and gives special thanks for the service and contributions of departing members James Fisher, Mark Maniak and Catherine Ritchie.

JOHN FRICK is Professor of Theatre and American Studies at University of Virginia. He is the author of *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge University Press, 2003; paperback, 2008) and *New York's First Theatrical Center: The Rialto at Union Square*; co-editor of *The Directory of Historic American Theatres* and *Theatrical Directors: A Biographical Dictionary*. Dr. Frick has served as Chair of the Theatre History Focus Group, ATHE; on the Publications Committees of the Southeastern Theatre Conference and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, and as ASTR representative to the British Society for Theatre Research. He is past Editor of *Theatre Symposium*; former Stanley J. Kahrl Fellow at Harvard University; and is current President of the American Theatre and Drama Society.

NANCY E. FRIEDLAND has worked in academic libraries, and since 1995 at Columbia University she has had the opportunity to define the position of Media, Film Studies and Performing Arts Librarian. She helped plan and develop the Media Center and related services, built a videotape/DVD collection of nearly 13,000 titles and established strong ties with students and faculty at the School of the Arts. In addition, she teaches several courses including "Film and Media Collections" in the School of Information and Library Science at Pratt Institute, Queens College and Long Island University's Palmer School. Nancy is the Editor of the upcoming PAR on costume design collections.

STEPHEN JOHNSON is Director of the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama at the University of Toronto. He is author of *The Roof Gardens of Broadway Theatres*, and articles in a variety of journals, including *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research*, *Drama Review*, *Theatre Topics*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, and *Theatre Research in Canada*, which he edited for ten years. He is completing an online database, website and study detailing blackface minstrelsy and performance in Britain from 1842 to 1852, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (<http://link.library.utoronto.ca/minstrels/>), and recently organized a symposium on the traditions and legacies of blackface performance (<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/~w3minstr/conference.html>). He is an alumnus of NYU's Performance Studies Department, a former intern at the Shubert Archive, and longtime habitué of research archives across the U.S., Canada and the UK.

FRANCESCA MARINI is Assistant Professor of Archival Studies in the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at University of British Columbia. She has a Ph.D. in Library and Information Science from University of California, Los Angeles, and has been trained as an archivist in Italy. Francesca holds a bachelor's degree in Theatre Studies from University of Bologna, Italy. Her main research interests focus on performing arts archives and digital preservation. She is engaged in several research projects, including "Present Memory: Knowledge Requirements for Archivists Preserving Live Theatre" (University of British Columbia Hampton Research Fund), and "Ethical and Artistic Considerations in Documenting and Preserving Performances."

**Kenneth Schlesinger**  
Lehman College

## TLA Plenary at ASTR-TLA

### Call for Proposals: Deadline February 1, 2009

Annual Conference of the American Society for Theatre Research ([www.astr.org](http://www.astr.org))  
and the Theatre Library Association (<http://tla.library.unt.edu/>)  
San Juan, Puerto Rico • 11-15 November, 2009 - Condado Plaza Hotel and Casino

### Call for Papers

#### “PLAYING” THE PILGRIM: SCHOLARS, COLLECTIONS, AND ARCHIVAL DESTINATIONS

Performing arts archives and special collections are a destination for artifacts and ephemera – as well as for the artists and scholars who experience them. The research process is a journey undertaken for diverse purposes and outcomes. This panel poses an investigation of the kind of “play” that occurs between archive and destination, research and journey, and the scholar-pilgrim-voyeur.

Proposals may consider the following questions:

- How does a performance undertake the journey from ephemeral cultural expression to tangible archival evidence? How do archives and special collections serve as destinations for performances?
- What is involved when a performing arts archive or collection travels from its place of origin to a new repository, or across repositories in different geopolitical regions? What does it mean for a collection to come “home?”
- What challenges are presented to archives and special collections when theatre itself “travels” (as when it tours), becoming, in effect, a moveable destination?
- How does research travel to archives and special collections negotiate the tension between pilgrimage and voyeuristic consumption? In what ways does research travel become performative?
- How do libraries and archives participate as sites of privileged viewing and local experience? How do special collections engage issues of privacy or stage themselves to an audience?
- Are theatre archives and special collections themselves an “island?” How do they reflect or reinvent “island culture?” Are they tied to the mainland of performance practices or archival methodologies? How do theatre archives and performing arts collections “travel” across these boundaries?

Please submit one-page Proposal by February 1, 2009 to:

Colleen Reilly  
Chair, TLA Plenary  
Arts Library, Yale University  
[Colleen.Reilly@yale.edu](mailto:Colleen.Reilly@yale.edu)

Sonja Kuftinec  
ASTR Conference Co-Chair  
University of Minnesota  
[SKuftinec@aol.com](mailto:SKuftinec@aol.com)

Tamara Underiner  
ASTR Conference Co-Chair  
Arizona State University  
[underiner@gmail.com](mailto:underiner@gmail.com)

Legacy Oral History Program  
Museum of Performance & Design

## Be Part of History

### Oral History Training Workshop San Francisco: June 11-13, 2009

led by Jeff Friedman, Ph.D. and Basya Petnick

This stimulating and informative three-day workshop will provide the training necessary for participants to launch their own oral history projects. While drawing on references and examples in the performing arts, the workshop is designed to be equally appropriate for those involved in anthropology, cultural studies, institutional history, social history, regional history, family history, master's or doctoral studies, or other projects.

The **14<sup>th</sup> Annual Oral History Training Workshop** will be carefully designed to match the experience levels of *all* participants—beginning, intermediate, or advanced. The lecture/discussion format will include opportunities to apply the material presented. The workshop will cover:

- **Project Design**
- **Legal/Ethical Issues**
- **Technology and Funding**
- **Interviewing**
- **Transcription and Editing: producing research-quality documents or other final products**

**Fee:** \$300 (Early registration: register by May 1, 2009)  
\$350 (After May 1) Pre-registration required. Major credit cards accepted.

Fee includes a 200-page syllabus/guidebook containing all the material taught in the workshop, special readings, and other vital information. In order to give personal attention to each participant and project, the workshop is *strictly limited to 22 participants*.

**Contact:** [legacyoralhistory@gmail.com](mailto:legacyoralhistory@gmail.com); or call 415-255-4800, ext. \*823 for information & registration.

#### Workshop Leaders:

**Jeff Friedman, Ph.D.** founded Legacy in 1988 and continues as senior advisor to the program. He is a member of the faculty of Rutgers University and contributes to scholarly conferences and publications on oral history theory, method, and design.

**Basya Petnick** is Legacy program manager, seasoned interviewer, and published journalist. She is also experienced in the technology and funding of oral history projects.

## Changes at NYPL

The membership should be made aware of important and long-lasting changes which have been instituted by the NYPL administration. Apparently believing that all knowledge can be found via the internet, the administration has severely cut back on the acquisition of ephemeral materials in the Research Collections. At the present in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, programs, scripts, and photographs are still being processed, but ephemera such as reviews and clippings are in danger of discontinuation. Only one librarian remains to clip magazines and newspapers and I, as a volunteer, am the only worker to supply and process (from my extensive mailing) such items as announcements, letters, flyers, and a new phenomenon, the colorful postcards which now publicize theatrical events and films. When Dr. Rod Bladel and I can no longer function, there is little assurance that we will be replaced and no one will be in a position to do what I do.

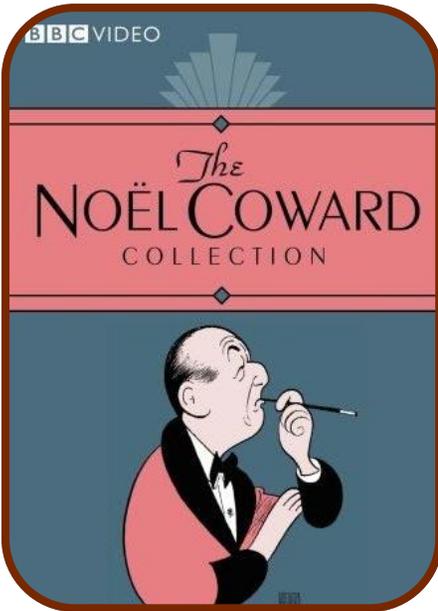
All this I am reporting so that the membership should not come to the collection expecting to find much ephemeral material dating beyond the year 2000 unless it arrives within an archival gift.

**Donald Fowle, Retired**  
**Billy Rose Theatre Division**  
**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts**

**Editor's Note:** Look for a response from the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in the next issue of *BROADSIDE*.



**The Noël Coward Collection. 7 discs (1183 mins.; DVD widescreen); BBC Warner, 2007.**



**T**he producers of this nicely packaged box set have mined the archives of the BBC and have brought out an enlightening and entertaining potpourri of gems from broadcasts of Coward material aired from 1966 to 1991. The programs show the usual BBC production values and are generally very well acted. The set includes seven plays, six short story adaptations, radio versions of some of the plays here in video (but with different casts), and two long, revealing TV interviews with Coward.

Although the plays seem to be complete, these are TV versions that may not be definitive. Only *Present Laughter*, filmed before a live audience in 1981 starring

Donald Sinden, can be presumed to be the way the play is supposed to look. Studio productions of the other plays begin with *The Vortex* (1969; Margaret Leighton, Richard Warwick), and end with *Suite in Two Keys* (1982; Paul Scofield, Geraldine McEwan, Deborah Kerr), which had been Coward's last produced play (1966) in his lifetime. Completing the playlist is a 1984 *Hay Fever* (Penelope Keith, Paul Eddington); *Private Lives* (1976, Keith, Alec McCowen); *Design for Living* (1979, Rula Lenska, Dandy Nichols); and *Tonight at 8:30* (1991, eight of the nine one-acts,

only version is a 1985 *Blithe Spirit*, with Anna Massey and Paul Eddington, in an edited version.

One can find full critical reviews of many of these BBC broadcasts by searching the web for individual titles, preferably by date of broadcast, which is included in the descriptive material on each title in a nice, concise little leaflet included, although it is short on details. Also, at the entry for this collection on Amazon.com there are a couple of well-written

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*The programs show the usual BBC production values and are generally very well acted.*

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by the "Joan Collins Repertory Company;" she is in all of them and is amazingly versatile).

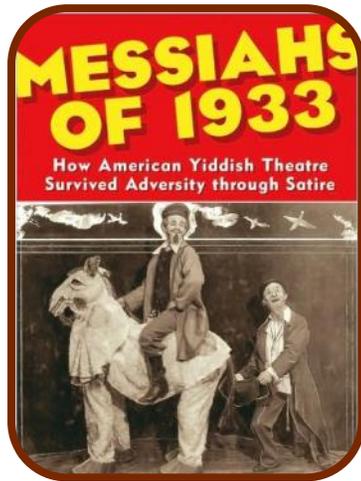
Five of the six adaptations seem to have been originally aired under the overall series title *Star Quality* (1985). [For full credits go to the Internet Movie Database Coward listing; by scrolling down one can find titles and dates and open them to a full entry.] All five have stellar casts: The title work stars Ian Richardson and Susannah York; *Me and the Girls* (Tom Courtenay); *Bon Voyage* (Nigel Havers); *Mr. and Mrs. Edgehill* (Judi Dench, Ian Holm); *Mrs. Capper's Birthday* (Patricia Hayes, Hugh Laurie). Of the radio plays, one of which is not an audio version of one of the videos is *South Sea Bubble* (1980). This fascinating failure from 1951 has an interesting history, including an eight-performance Westport, CT run (as *Island Fling*) starring Claudette Colbert. Another radio

editorial reviews and nearly a dozen customer reviews, most of which are exuberantly glowing.

This set is recommended as an important addition to drama libraries, especially for the writing and the acting. However, versions here may not be as originally produced, but are probably more true to the originals than the films made of some of them.

**Richard M. Buck**  
**The New York Public Library**  
**for the Performing Arts**  
 (retired)

**Joel Schechter. *Messiahs of 1933: How American Yiddish Theatre Survived Adversity Through Satire*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008. 295 pp + illus. ISBN 978-1-59213-872-2.**



After decades of comparative neglect by scholars of the mainstream American stage, the extraordinary history of Yiddish theatre in the United States, not to mention the diverse contributions of Jews to popular culture, has begun to receive its due in several recent excellent studies, including such standout tomes as Joel Berkowitz's *Shakespeare on the American Yiddish Stage* (2002) and *Yiddish Theatre: New Approaches* (2007), Paul Buhle's *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood* (2004) and his titanic three-volume encyclopedia *Jews and American Popular Culture* (2006), Vincent Brook's *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture* (2006), and Henry Bial's *Acting Jewish* (2005), among others. The most recent addition, Joel Schechter's *Messiahs of 1933*,

impresses on several counts, not least in its author's stylish and witty writing, which enlivens an otherwise informative, well-researched study.

Schechter chooses to focus on the seeming decline of Yiddish theatre during the Great Depression, at the precise moment Jewish-Americans attained unprecedented success (and assimilation) on Broadway

individual writers and performers, captures the spirit of the Yiddish stage in its last burst of creativity. Set against the fierce political ferment of the Depression, the Yiddish theatre's increasing political radicalism manifested itself in pointed satire of politics and culture, including the rise of unions and other economic concerns, the impact of Communism, and anti-war

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*...Schechter recovers a lost theatrical era rich in Old World cultural traditions and galvanized by Jewish-American commitment to social justice.*

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and in Hollywood. Emphasizing satire, the Yiddish stage, which had entertained Eastern European Jewish immigrants on New York's Lower East Side beginning in the 1880s, adapted to rapid changes in American culture. As the children of the first generation of Jewish immigrants became more assimilated, Yiddish theatre strove to survive with topical and political satire by writers and actors including Moishe Nadir, David Pinski, Yosel Cutler, Leo Fuchs, Menasha Skulnik, Yetta Zwerling, and others. Focusing on their artistry and struggles, and the impact of the Yiddish unit of the Federal Theatre Project, as well as the work of diverse groups like the Artef collective and the Modicut puppeteers, Schechter recovers a lost theatrical era rich in Old World cultural traditions and galvanized by Jewish-American commitment to social justice.

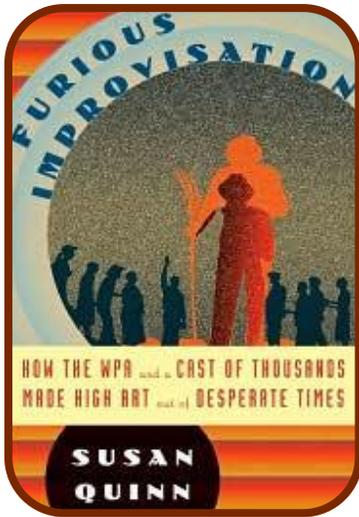
The quality of Schechter's writing, along with his keen sense of the humor and awareness of the soul inherent in the imaginative verve and political foundations of the Yiddish stage, and its highly

attitudes, utilizing a range of theatrical devices, from puppetry and vaudeville to music and dance. Despite this experimentation, Yiddish theatre inevitably died away, and Schechter makes it all too clear that its loss was a tragedy even though its impact on American culture was profound and lasting.

This handsome volume is enhanced by two dozen evocative illustrations, including production and film stills and comic strips (a device employed by Yiddish theatre to illuminate its themes). Schechter's copious notes amplify the detail-packed thirteen chapters which, despite the thoroughness of his scholarship, provide readers with the pleasure to be expected reading a novel. Unearthing this unique corner of American theatre history, Schechter brings the last years of the lively Yiddish stage to vivid life, as well as the mainstream American culture it

**James Fisher**  
The University of North  
Carolina at Greensboro

**Susan Quinn. *Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and a Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times*. New York: Walker & Company, 2008. 325 pp + illus. ISBN 978-0-8027-1698-9.**



This delightfully idiosyncratic study of the Federal Theatre Project reconstructs a unique era in American theatre history, a time when the U.S. government briefly supported the making and widespread dissemination of theatre during the Great Depression. An exhilarating era of optimistic theatre about a progressive future, the FTP experiment, part of the Works Progress Administration, sought, as its director Hallie Flanagan famously proposed, to educate a “vast new audience to know more about government and politics and such vital issues of the day as housing, power, agriculture and labor.”

In a prologue and first chapter,

Quinn briefly outlines the history and hardships of the era and the rise of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, after which she devotes a single chapter each to the backgrounds of two seminal figures in the creation of the FTP: Roosevelt’s close aide, Harry Hopkins, who oversaw the WPA, and Flanagan, who is presented as a visionary figure. The subsequent eighteen similarly brief chapters focus on flashes of the era, including glimpses of various

moments or events as they illuminate a broader theme. It is a device that works with this chapter, but less effectively with others (the Welles chapter, for example, seems merely to revisit well-worn legends about this mercurial figure).

The book’s central strength and weakness is one in the same: its division into so many short underdeveloped chapters. Although this permits Quinn to

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*The book’s central strength and weakness is one in the same: its division into so many short underdeveloped chapters.*

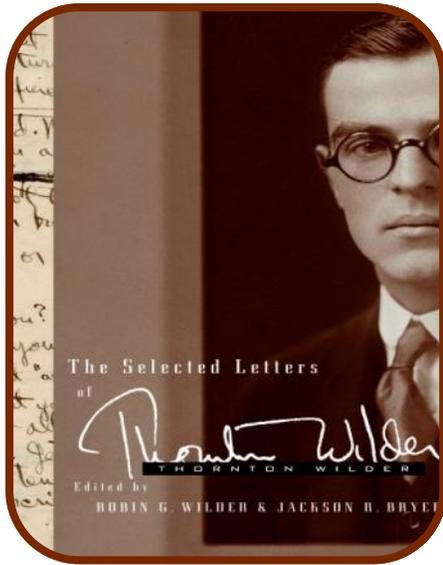
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personages (Orson Welles, John Houseman) centrally involved in the FTP, and significant productions (*Ethiopia, Triple-A Plowed Under, The CCC Murder Mystery, It Can’t Happen Here, The Cradle Will Rock*), particularly those viewed as either uniquely representative of the FTP’s output or controversial by critics of the FTP experiment. Quinn also includes an account of the demise of the FTP (with excerpts of House Un-American Activities transcripts) and a chapter on the Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart musical, *I’d Rather Be Right*, with a book by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, satirizing Roosevelt and the New Deal. Legendary star George M. Cohan played Roosevelt in this musical (despite his disdain for FDR’s politics – or, perhaps, because of his disdain) and the show’s pithy satire seemed, inadvertently, to point to the coming demise of many New Deal initiatives, including the FTP. This chapter is something of a sidebar, but typical of Quinn’s approach, which tends to focus on particular

focus on a single individual or production in a chapter, too many chapters seem a rehashing of familiar factoids, leaving the reader hungering for more detail and analysis. In fairness, it should be noted that no single study could do justice to the vastness of the extraordinary FTP years. Quinn has done a fairly thorough job of culling together reminiscences from participants and observers of the work of the FTP. In addition, a handful of excellent production photographs are sprinkled throughout the text, making this reader long for an elaborate art-sized history of FTP emphasizing productions photographs, posters, and other ephemera. In the meantime, this handsomely bound volume will go some distance in satisfying readers interested in this remarkable experiment in an American national theatre.

**James Fisher**  
The University of North  
Carolina at Greensboro

**Robin G. Wilder and Jackson R. Bryer, eds. *The Selected Letters of Thornton Wilder*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. 705 pp + illus. ISBN 978-0-06-076507-1.**



As the years roll by, celebrated playwrights fall in and out of fashion, but few have risen and fallen so radically in cultural favor as Thornton Wilder (1897-1975). For a brief period as the United States approached entry into World War II, Wilder was among the most celebrated American dramatists for his Pulitzer Prize-winning plays, *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), following the extraordinary success of his debut novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927). As an eminent figure in American theatre and letters, Wilder was a presence throughout the rest of his life, despite the fact that his later plays could not match the critical and popular success of his two classic works. *Our Town*, particularly, has remained one of

the most produced American plays and seems to have a permanent position on critics' lists of "best plays." For a time since the 1960s, Wilder fell out of the first rank of literary and theatrical figures, before a revival of interest in the last decade. This has sparked revivals of his plays, a three-volume series of his one-acts published by the Theatre Communications Group, and more scholarly attention than in any decade since World War II.

carefully guarded private life, although intimate thoughts occasionally emerge. Wilder was clearly generous in encouraging the development of peers and younger talents (Albee, for example, continues to acknowledge Wilder's influence), and a detailed chronicle of Wilder's World War II military service which, it would seem, drew his attentions away from his literary work – especially for the theatre – and he never seemed

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*Uncommonly informative in revealing Wilder's responses to his own work and that of his contemporaries, the letters tend to be less revealing of Wilder's carefully guarded private life, although intimate thoughts occasionally emerge.*

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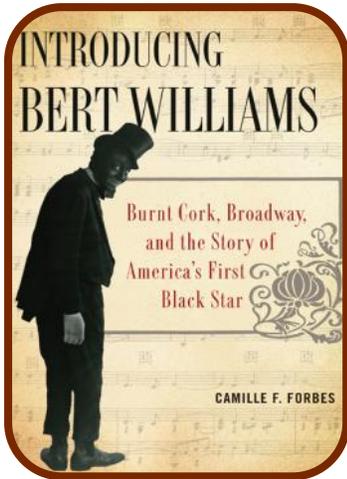
Including thirty-eight black-and-white illustrations, *The Selected Letters of Thornton Wilder*, co-edited by Wilder's niece, Robin G. Wilder, and distinguished American theatre scholar, Jackson R. Bryer, will be an essential addition to libraries and the shelves of theatre and literary scholars. It presents in a consistently fascinating collection of three-hundred Wilder letters (stretching from 1909 until the year of his death), a diverse group of recipients including the likes of Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Alexander Woollcott, Max Reinhardt, Jed Harris, Ruth Gordon, Albert Einstein, Noël Coward, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier, Montgomery Clift, Edward Albee, Henry Luce, Ned Rorem, Mia Farrow, and numerous Wilder family members. Uncommonly informative in revealing Wilder's responses to his own work and that of his contemporaries, the letters tend to be less revealing of Wilder's

able to recover the command of the American audience he had in the late 1930s. His letters reveal that he paid comparatively little attention to the ebb and flow of his own reputation and remained thoroughly engaged in a life of the mind, particularly within the literary and theatrical realms.

This essential collection features context-setting essays for what the editors consider the major periods of Wilder's life, a thorough index, and copious notes that identify major and obscure references. In every way, this is a major contribution to Wilder scholarship and, by extension, the twentieth century American theatre.

**James Fisher**  
The University of North  
Carolina at Greensboro

**Camille F. Forbes. *Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. 404 pp + illus. ISBN 978-0-465-02479-7.**



Faces of color in chorus lines or in photographs under theatre marquees no longer cause us shock and awe, since minority presence on stage now approaches cliché status. Camille F. Forbes, Assistant Professor of Literature at the University of California, San Diego, brings us a worthy portrait of arguably the most seminal African-American trailblazer in Broadway history – Ziegfeld *Follies* star Bert Williams, who W.C. Fields famously declared to be “the funniest man I ever saw, and the saddest man I ever knew.”

In her scholarly yet readable biography, Forbes does indeed “introduce” readers to the man who truly brought black performing sensibility to a mass audience, albeit shadowed by lingering controversy among his own people. Egbert Williams was

born in 1875 in Antigua. His family later settled in California where Bert joined a minstrel company touring mining camps, eventually teaming with George Walker in 1893 as vaudeville’s “Williams and Walker.” They specialized in musical numbers and humorous skits, initially with Williams as the slick con man and Walker as his “dumb coon” victim. However, they later reversed personas, after which, ironically, the sartorially

his *Follies* as its first African-American performer. Spotting a black man in an all-white show was a potential shock to 1910 sensibilities, but Williams soon became indispensable to the troupe, despite ongoing off-stage racial tensions. He also became one of the world’s top recording artists, thanks to affiliation with Columbia Records. But after leaving the *Follies* in 1917, Williams’ career soon lagged and

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*While she details his fluctuating career fortunes, she also examines his era’s cultural/social issues of minstrelsy and blackface.*

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elegant, intellectual Williams developed his trademark pantomimic character, the shuffling oaf. Significantly, Williams used “blackface,” despite his own naturally dark skin. At that time, his financial survival as a performer for white audiences demanded it. Blackface continued to be artistically questionable for vaudevillians, and Forbes thoroughly discusses its precedents and broader ramifications.

The Williams/Walker duo became increasingly successful as they attempted to eschew stereotypes and embrace more realistic comedy. In 1902, their biggest hit, *In Dahomey*, became the first black musical to open on Broadway, followed in 1906 by *Abyssinia*, in which Williams debuted his signature song, “Nobody,” a doleful lament spiced with dry wit, which he would perform for the rest of his life.

When Walker left the act in 1909, Williams languished alone until Florenz Ziegfeld invited him to join

he died in 1922 at age 46.

Forbes’ fine book will inspire new appreciation for Williams the man and artist. While she details his fluctuating career fortunes, she also examines his era’s cultural/social issues of minstrelsy and blackface. Readers will gain keen insight into the milieu in which Williams struggled and ultimately triumphed, all too briefly. This book is extensively footnoted, including a lengthy bibliography and well-placed illustrations. It is especially recommended for students of African-American and/or theatre history.

Thanks to Camille F. Forbes, we know that when Bert Williams told 1910 audiences that he was “Nobody,” he unknowingly guaranteed that countless minority performers nearly 100 years later would indeed be “somebody” on the Broadway stage he loved so much.

**Catherine Ritchie  
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Dallas (TX) Public Library**

(\* = assigned to a reviewer)

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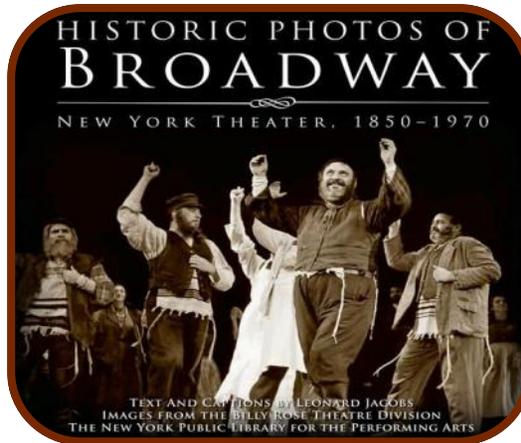
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**February 2009****13th**

TLA Board Meeting  
John Jay College Library  
Conference Room

**28th**

Deadline for *BROADSIDE*  
submissions

**May 2009****22nd [Tentative]**

TLA Board Meeting  
Baruch College

**October 2009****9th**

TLA Board Meeting, Annual  
Business Meeting, and Book  
Awards  
The New York Public Library for  
the Performing Arts

**November 2009****11th-15th**

ASTR-TLA Annual Conference  
Condado Plaza Hotel and Casino  
San Juan, Puerto Rico