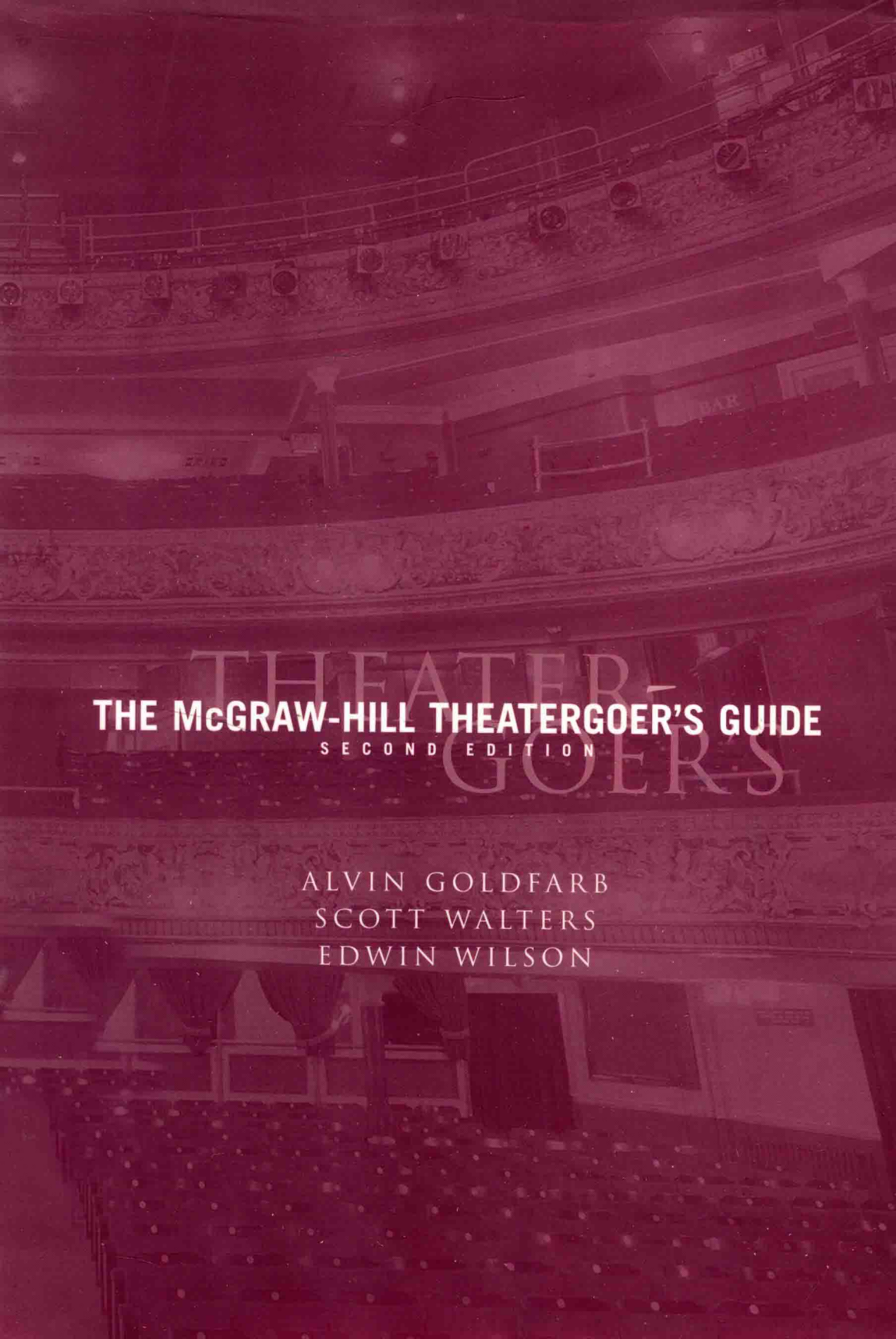

THE McGRAW-HILL THEATERGOER'S GUIDE

SECOND EDITION

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The McGraw-Hill Theatergoer's Guide

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THE THEATER EXPERIENCE
Edwin Wilson
and
THEATER: THE LIVELY ART
Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb

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P R E F A C E

To the Student

A very effective way to learn about theater is to attend and report on a performance: to see a play brought to life in a production complete with actors, sets, costumes, lights, sound, and audience—and then to describe your experience in the form of a written report. This *Theatergoer's Guide* (which accompanies *The Theater Experience* by Edwin Wilson and *Theater: The Lively Art* by Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb) has been designed to help you enjoy your experience at the theater, appreciate it, and then write effectively about it.

To the Instructor

McGraw-Hill Primis Custom Publishing offers you the opportunity to customize this *Theatergoer's Guide* to make it more relevant for your students. Add details about scheduled campus performances; insert a syllabus; include a summary, list of characters, and questions for discussion for a play you require your students to attend. For details on making this happen for you, talk to your local McGraw-Hill representative or call one of our custom representa-tives at 800-446-8979.

C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER 1

Theatergoing

Why Go to the Theater?

Why go to the theater at all? What is so special about a theater performance? In a theatrical performance, there are live performers in the presence of a live audience, and the electricity generated between actors and spectators is the most exciting aspect of attending a theater production. In theater—unlike film or television—each performance is unique because each audience responds differently and brings different expectations and sensibilities to the event. For example, think about a comedy onstage and a comedy in the movies. During the staged performance, the audience's response or lack of response will clearly affect the way the actors and actresses shape their performances; but during the running of the film, the reaction of the audience in the movie house can obviously have no impact on the performers. A theater event exists in the present and changes over time; a film exists on celluloid in the past and does not change. Remember, then, that although a theater performance has many components—including playing space, scenery, costumes, lighting, sound, and text—its primary elements are always the performers and the audience.

When people think about why they go to the theater, there are usually three basic reasons: entertainment, communal interaction, and personal growth. To begin with, for most audience members the desire to go to the theater is connected with their desire to be *entertained.* For these people, theater is a way to relax, a source of enjoyment and fun, an escape from daily existence. Slapstick comedies, farces, some musicals, and melodramas are examples of theatrical works that are meant primarily to entertain. Second, a theatrical performance is a *communal experience*: it brings

audience members together for a period of time. (In fact, the origins of theater are closely related to religious ceremonies and rituals, which are also communal experiences.) Third, theater can *enrich* individual audience members intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually; it can help us to see and understand the complexities and crosscurrents of everyday life and can also expand our horizons far beyond everyday life. Indeed, some theater artists believe that the function of theater is to "teach."

When you yourself attend the theater, try to determine your own reasons—keeping in mind that many theater pieces are both entertaining and enriching. From reading plays, watching television, and attending movies, you have probably formed a good idea of what kind of live theater you will enjoy. You know that comedies and farces can make you laugh and feel carefree. Dramas and tragedies can introduce you to new ways of looking at the world, and perhaps can lead you to think about parallels between your own experience and the universal human condition.

Preparing for Theatergoing

Before you attend a theater performance, you can do some preparation that will help you get the most out of it. Reading about the play you are going to see can add to your enjoyment and understanding. If the play is a classic, you might find some useful information about it in your textbook or a theater history book. In addition, there may be books or articles about the life and work of the playwright, or about drama and theater in the period when the play was written. Often theaters will have a web site where you can find information about the play as well. You may also want to read the play itself. All this can provide background for you as a theatergoer.

Another effective way to prepare for a theater event is to read a review of the production. (A sample review is shown on the opposite page.) Often, you will find that a local newspaper has printed an article by a critic describing and evaluating the performance and giving background information about the play and playwright. A word of warning, however: do not be unduly swayed by the opinions expressed by the reviewer, since what you like may be completely different from what he or she prefers. Use the review only as a source of information, and go to the theater with an open mind.

A theater review

Greek Tragedy That Works

By Edwin Wilson

New York

Despite the fact that Greek tragedy is the fountainhead from which Western theater springs, it remains the most difficult form of drama to recreate in our own day. Greek plays employ a chorus for which we have no modern equivalent; they invariably contain long speeches describing events that take place offstage; and then there is all that raw emotion which can easily become too melodramatic. When, therefore, someone finds a way to transmit the power of a Greek play to a modern audience, it is a major accomplishment.

Director Jonathan Kent's new production of Euripides's "Medea" not only achieves that goal, it is exciting theater on its own terms. "Medea" is one of the most awesome and frightening tragedies ever

Theater

Jonathan Kent's "Medea"

written. In her native land, Medea betrayed her own family and killed her brother in order to save Jason, her husband. When Jason, having brought her to his home in Corinth, abandons her to marry the king's daughter. Medea, furious and hellbent on revenge, is ordered into exile with her two young sons.

She sends a magical robe to Jason's new bride which engulfs her in flames, and then, to plunge the knife of retribution deeper into the heart of Jason, she kills their sons. Along the way she makes impassioned speeches about the plight of women and their mistreatment in male-dominated societies.

The current production began at the small Almeida Theatre in North London, moved to the West End, and has now opened at the Longacre Theatre. In mounting the play, Mr. Kent made several key decisions, all of them inspired. The setting created by scene designer Peter J. Davison and lighting designer Wayne Dowdeswell is the corner of a courtyard: a three-story structure of huge, metal panels. When sections open and close, or characters strike the panels, they reverberate with a frightening, ear-splitting clang. The message is clear: Fearsome events are being hammered out within these walls.

Mr. Kent uses the set to excellent effect. Traditionally the primal screams and first words of Medea are uttered offstage: she is heard but not seen. Here, Medea is revealed in a panel on an upper level, seated in a chair, her face turned from the audience as she speaks. In other words, her physical presence is felt from the beginning.

In the scene where Medea is agonizing over whether or not to carry through her infanticide, a harsh, triangular beam of light slashes across the stage, pinning her in a corner. At the climax of the play, after Medea has murdered her sons inside her palace, three enormous metal panels break loose, falling with a clangor that lifts spectators from their seats.

Mr. Kent has also extracted maximum impact from his chorus, three ladies of Corinth (Judith Paris, Jane Loretta Lowe, and Nuala Willis) dressed in black Greek peasant outfits who chant and speak Jonathan Dove's score, sometimes in harmony, sometimes with a single voice. Their admonitions to Medea are counterpoint, relief, and agonizing prophecy of the black deeds to come. It is the most impressive use of a Greek chorus I can remember.

None of this would work, though, without a transcendent actress in the role of Medea, and here Mr. Kent has triumphed with Diana Rigg. She has an incredible vocal range, moving from the rich deep resonance of a cello or viola, to the insistent high peal of an oboe. One moment she unleashes fearsome cries and the next she colors a humorous exchange with deadly irony. Along with her vocal prowess is her presence and bearing. Always marked by dignity, intelligence and style, Ms. Rigg moves like quicksilver from one emotion to another but always with an unmistakable resolve. Her Medea is not a mindless barbarian but rather someone who knows exactly what she is doing. She agonizes over her course of action, but once she has made her decision, moves relentlessly toward her goal. This makes the outcome that much more awesome and appalling.

The new translation by Alistair Elliot is modern and accessible without being colloquial. The excellent cast performing with Ms. Rigg has been imported in toto from London. For 85 minutes without break, this is one of those rare experiences when a work of art from the past becomes a painful reminder of the fearful forces swirling around us today.

Buying Tickets

Buying tickets for a theater event can be done in many ways, depending on the type of theater you are attending. For example, if you want to see a large-scale commercial production on Broadway or in a major touring house, you can buy tickets through the box office, by telephone, on the Internet, or through a ticket agency. The best seats at such a production can cost as much as $90 each, but reduced-price tickets are often available: in many cities, there are special booths selling tickets at half price; student "rush" tickets are usually available on the day of the performance (sometimes just before the performance starts); and reduced-rate coupons may be offered (in New York these coupons are called *twofers*—originally, "two for" the price of one).

If you are going to a small theater or a noncommercial theater, you may find that tickets can be bought only at the box office, and sometimes only on the day of the performance. (This is true, for example, at some off-off-Broadway theaters in New York.)

It is difficult to generalize about regional theaters, since there is a wide variety of such theaters across the United States, each with its own method of selling tickets. To buy tickets for a performance at a regional theater, the best thing to do is to call the box office for information, or look at a local newspaper to find an advertisement for the play. The theater also may have a Web site with this type of information.

Traditional pasteboard theater tickets still exist, though today tickets are often generated and printed out by computer. If seating is reserved, your ticket will tell you where you are seated. "General admission" tickets, on the other hand, do not entitle you to a specific seat, so you might want to arrive at the theater early to be sure of getting a good location. (If you have a reserved seat, you should be sure to arrive on time, since many theaters will not seat latecomers until there is an appropriate break in the performance.)

The Lobby

The lobby of a theater space is a "holding area" for the audience members before they enter the auditorium. Usually, a lobby tells you something about what kind of theater experience you can expect to have. For example, commercial Broadway theaters, well-established regional theaters, and touring houses often have lavish lobbies; off-Broadway, off-off-Broadway, and alternative theaters frequently have small lobbies that are modestly

decorated or even undecorated. In some small theaters, there may be no lobby at all: the audience members simply congregate out on the street.

You may find considerable information in the lobby which can help you better understand and appreciate a theater event. For example, there may be photographs of the performers and other artistic personnel (these photos are known as *head shots*), photos of the current production or past productions, posters reflecting the point of view of the production, historical information about the theater or the company, or awards won by the company. In addition, you might be able to pick up brochures for season tickets or future productions.

From the moment you enter the lobby area, you should begin to assess your feelings about the experience.

Programs

As you enter the auditorium, you will probably receive a program from an usher who may also escort you to your seat. The program will contain much useful information that can help you enjoy and understand the theater event.

In the program, you will find the title of the play, the author, the cast of characters, the actors and actresses, the designers, the director, and various other people involved in mounting the production. In some playbills, you will also find brief biographies of these people. In addition, you will find information about the setting of the play (place and time), its division into acts or scenes, and the number of intermissions. (Examples from programs for a Broadway production and a university production are shown on the following pages.)

Some playbills also include notes about the play; such notes may be written by the playwright, the director, or the dramaturg—the literary advisor to the production. (An example of such a note is shown on page 10.) Notes like these can make you aware of the historical relevance of a play and the director's approach to the text.

Be sure to read the program and any notes in it, but don't read this material during the actual course of the performance. The best time to read the program is either before the performance starts or during intermissions.

A New York production

OPENING NIGHT: JANUARY 14, 1993

CRITERION CENTER STAGE RIGHT

Roundabout Theatre Company

TODD HAIMES, Artistic Director
presents

LIAM NEESON **NATASHA RICHARDSON** **RIP TORN**

in

ANNA CHRISTIE

by

EUGENE O'NEILL

Also Starring
ANNE MEARA

with

BARTON TINAPP **CHRISTOPHER WYNKOOP**

Directed by
DAVID LEVEAUX

Set Design by **JOHN LEE BEATTY**
Costume Design by **MARTIN PAKLEDINAZ**
Lighting Design by **MARC B. WEISS**
Composer & Sound Designer **DOUGLAS J. CUOMO**
Fight Director **STEVE RANKIN**
Production Stage Manager **KATHY J. FAUL**
Casting by **PAT McCORKLE/ RICHARD COLE, C.S.A.**
General Manager **ELLEN RICHARD**

Founding Director
GENE FEIST

Roundabout Theatre Company productions are made possible, in part, with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, Natural Heritage Trust, the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.
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Roundabout Theatre Company is a member of the League of American Theatres and Producers, Inc.

WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

LIAM NEESON (*Mat Burke*). Stage credits include seasons at Belfast's Lyric Theatre; *Dr. Fell, Death of Humpty Dumpty* and *Of Mice and Men* at Dublin's Abbey Theatre; *The Informer, Streamers* and *Says I, Says He* at the Dublin Theatre Festival; *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre; *Translations* at Britain's National Theatre; and *The Plough and the Stars* at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester. Neeson's numerous film roles include the current *Leap of Faith* and *Husbands and Wives*, as well as *Excalibur, The Bounty, Lamb, Duet for One, A Prayer for the Dying, The Mission, Suspect, High Spirits, The Good Mother, The Dead Pool, Darkman, Crossing the Line, Shining Through* and *Under Suspicion*. He will also star in the title role of "Ethan Frome" for American Playhouse. His television work includes "If Tomorrow Comes," "A Woman of Substance," "Hold the Dream," "Sworn to Silence," "Ellis Island" and "Sweet As You Are." This marks Liam Neeson's Broadway debut.

NATASHA RICHARDSON (*Anna Christopherson*) trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama in England. Her professional acting career began in regional theatre. She then appeared in London in a number of productions, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which she played Helena, and in *Hamlet* as Ophelia. Her performance as Nina in *The Seagull* won her the London Drama Critics Poll for Most Promising Newcomer of 1986. Her other stage performances include Tracy Lord in *High Society* and Anna Christie in the Young Vic Theatre production. Richardson's feature films include *Gothic; Patty Hearst; A Month in the Country; Fat Man and Little Boy; The Favour, the Watch, and the Very Big Fish; The Handmaid's Tale;* and *The Comfort of Strangers* (for which she won the *London Evening Standard* Award for Best Actress of 1990). Richardson most recently completed the BBC motion picture of the Tennessee Williams play *Suddenly Last Summer*, also starring Maggie Smith and Rob Lowe, directed by Richard Eyre. Miss Richardson, who lives in NYC, is making her Broadway debut in this production.

RIP TORN (*Chris Christopherson*). Conceived in Manhattan, born in Texas, he was named after his late father, Elmore Torn, from whom he received the family moniker "Rip," which he shares with his Uncle Roland and his cousin, Sam (this vouched for by his mother, Thelma). His six children and two grandchildren were born in this city. He now lives in Connecticut. Plays: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Sweet Bird of Youth* (Theatre World Award), *The Glass Menagerie, Strange Interlude, Desire Under*

A university production

SWEENEY TODD
The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
A Musical Thriller

Music and Lyrics by STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Book by HUGH WHEELER

From an Adaptation by CHRISTOPHER BOND

Originally Directed by HAROLD PRINCE

Originally Produced on Broadway by Richard Barr, Charles Woodward, Robert Fryer, Mary Lea Johnson, Martin Richards in Association with Dean and Judy Manos

Director . . . . . Calvin MacLean
Music Director and Conductor . . . . . Glenn Block
Co-Conductor . . . . . Julian Dawson
Choreographer . . . . . Connie de Veer
Scenic Designer . . . . . John C. Stark, U.S.A.A.
Lighting Designer . . . . . Shawn Malott *
Costume Designer . . . . . Susan L. Hayes
Sound Designer . . . . . Jon Kusner
Technical Director . . . . . Dan Browder
Stage Manager . . . . . Christina Saylor

*MFA Candidate

SETTING

1850's London

—There will be one 15-minute intermission—

Cast

in order of appearance

Sweeney Todd ..... Brian Herriott
Anthony Hope ..... Dave Vish
Beggar Woman ..... Carolyn Brady
Mrs. Lovett ..... Anita B. Deely
The Birdseller ..... Aaron M. Shelton
Johanna ..... Susan Lewis
Judge Turpin ..... Joe Greene
Beadle Bamford ..... David Zarbock
Tobias Ragg ..... Dwight Powell
Adolfo Pirelli ..... Andrew Kott
A Young Girl ..... Anna Adams Stark
Jonas Fogg ..... John W. Davis

Ensemble:

Rebecca Cooper	Aldo LaPietra	Richard Repp
John W. Davis	Kevin MacLean	Rob Scharlow
Gwendolyn Druyor	Sarah Manley	Aaron M. Shelton
Cindy Hinners	Katie Maringer	Regina Siciliani
	Jerry Myers	Kathy Taylor

ISU Opera Orchestra

Glenn Block, Music Director & Conductor
Julian Dawson, Co-Conductor
Kevin Medows, Assistant Conductor

VIOLIN
Rebecca Mertz, concertmaster
Carlene Easley
Andrew Guinzio
Deborah Paulsen
Melissa Shilling

VIOLA
Jon Feller, principal
Amy Govert

CELLO
Bo Li, principal
Maria Cooper
Jenny Holtman
Rebecca Pokarney

BASS
Joshua Harms, co-principal
Clifford Hunt, co-principal

FLUTE
Colleen McCoy, co-principal
Kristie Skinner, co-principal

OBOE/ENGLISH HORN
Andrea Imre, principal
Jeannie Ohnemus, english horn

CLARINET
Jamian Green, principal
Traci Typlin
Karl Kalis, bass clarinet

BASSOON
Douglas Milliken
Christopher Harrison

REEDS
Jeffery Womack

HORN
Brandon Sinnock, co-principal
Kent Baker, co-principal

TRUMPET
Troy McKay, principal
Dan Forster
Deborah Whitfield
Modena Paulsen

TROMBONE
Charlie Plummer, principal
Steven A. Fox
Dawn Trotter, bass trombone

TIMPANI
Nancy Rogers

PERCUSSION
Timothy Ryan, principal
Michael Mercer

KEYBOARD
Kevin Medows

STAFF
Kevin Medows, Assistant Conductor
Carlene Easley, Manager/Librarian

CHORAL DIRECTOR
Alejandro Rutty

REHEARSAL PIANISTS
Mária Horvath
Kevin Medows
Nancy Porter

A director's note

THE MACBETH PROJECT

The Macbeth Project was conceived as an experiment in terms of both process and product. In principle, the rehearsal process was to include the collaborative efforts of all the participants, moving freely across lines of specialization and responsibility. William Shakespeare's Macbeth was chosen as the source of inspiration, both to focus experimentation and to stimulate the individual voices of the group. During the course of the rehearsal period, the company explored many dimensions of Shakespeare's play and experimented with ways to express aspects of the play which engaged the group's sensibilities. There was not, however, a self-imposed obligation placed upon the group to present a production of Macbeth. The group had the option to remain as close to Shakespeare's play or range as far from it as was necessary to allow their point of view to evolve and take shape. The final "product" of the project was not envisioned at the beginning of the process.

The Theater Environment

The *environment* of a theater event has several aspects, and these will affect your experience.

One of the most important elements you will encounter when you enter a theater is the performance *space*. The presentation may be taking place in a traditional theater building with an arena, thrust, or proscenium stage; in a converted space; or in a "found" space.

Another aspect of the environment is the *locale* of the theater. Theater spaces are found in many different locales. For example, New York has theaters in the Broadway district, off-Broadway, and off-off-Broadway. For the most part, Broadway theaters are large proscenium-arch spaces; off-Broadway theaters (as the term implies) are outside the Broadway district, are much smaller, and usually seat about 300 in a proscenium, thrust, or arena configuration; off-off-Broadway theaters house experimental groups in small found spaces and seat only about 100.

Across the United States, the many regional theaters have a variety of shapes and sizes. Larger cities often have alternative theaters, which are like the off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway theaters in New York. Commercial road-show houses are modeled after Broadway theaters. Some theater spaces outside of New York are much larger than Broadway theaters: there are municipal auditoriums and opera houses seating as many as 3,000 to 4,000.

Other types of theater environments include dinner theaters, which combine theatrical entertainment with dining and are very popular in many cities—for example, Orlando, Florida. Many communities have popular amateur community theaters, housed in traditional theater spaces or found spaces. High schools, colleges, and universities also produce many theatrical events for their own students and their communities.

Each theater environment creates a specific ambience and unique expectations on the part of the audience. As you enter a theater and its playing space, you might want to think about what the atmosphere is like and what impact it has on you. After you are seated, but before the performance actually begins, you may also want to think about, and assess, certain other elements. Is there a curtain, for example? If so, is it raised or lowered? What effect does a raised or lowered curtain suggest? If the curtain is up, is scenery visible? If so, what does the scenery seem to suggest about the production?

Audience Etiquette

Western theater, particularly since the nineteenth century, has developed certain rules of behavior for audience members—expectations about what audiences do and don't do. However, you should keep in mind that any given theater event might have some unique expectations about the audience's behavior.

At a traditional theater performance, the audience is expected to remain silent for the most part, and not to interrupt the performers. Audience members should not talk to each other as if they were at home watching television; they should not hum or sing along with music, unwrap candy or other food, eat loudly, search through a purse or backpack, or take notes in a distracting way; they should also shut off wristwatch alarms and beepers. Remember that the actors can hear the audience: noises and distracting behavior will have an impact on their concentration and performance. Noise and distractions also affect the experience of other spectators.

Students may be concerned about note-taking, since they often will need to make notes in order to remember key elements of the production. An unobtrusive way of taking notes is to jot down only brief phrases or terms which will jog your memory later. Then, you can embellish your notes during the intermission or intermissions, or after the last curtain.

Of course, traditional audiences are not always absolutely quiet: audiences at comedies can laugh, for instance. Audiences at musicals can applaud after a song (in fact, they're expected to). On the other hand, audiences at serious plays might not applaud until the end of the performance—and even then, an audience may be so stunned or so deeply moved that there will be a moment of silence before the applause begins.

As noted above, not all of these traditional expectations may apply at every theater event. Dinner theaters are one example, since the audience may be eating during the presentation. (We might also note that audiences eat during the performance in many traditional Asian theaters, and they may speak back to the stage.) Audiences at some productions are expected to interact with the performers: in some comic presentations, for instance, actors may enter the audience space or actually speak to individual audience members; and in some nontraditional productions, audience members may even be expected to participate in the performance. (We should mention, however, that because this kind of interaction or participation departs from the usual behavior of theater audiences, it makes some theatergoers feel uncomfortable.)