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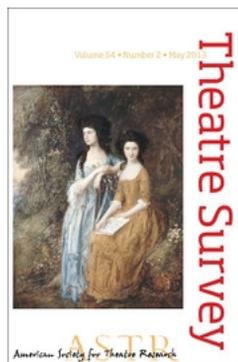
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## The First Quarter Century of ASTR

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## THE FIRST QUARTER CENTURY OF ASTR

In every theatre historian there lurks the shadow of the amateur. For the commitment always begins with a sharing of the theatre-goer's delight in seeing the curtain rise, and a strong sense of being in the presence of history in the making. To record this moment is the instinct of the enthusiast; to recapture it from the past is the function of the historian.

In the United States, the scholarly study of theatre began in English departments, and our use of the words "theatre historian" is of relatively recent date. In Europe, on the other hand, the term has been in meaningful circulation for most of the century. Hence, it is not surprising that the movement toward organizing those devoted to theatre matters should have begun there. In 1955, the Cini Foundation in Venice, at the urging of the director Geffredo Bellonci, invited interested parties to attend an International Congress on the History of the Theatre. Preliminary plans envisioned the formation of national societies, which would, two years hence, establish a permanent organization. In response to this, Alois H. Nagler (Yale University) and Alan S. Downer (Princeton University) took the initiative in promoting an American society. They were joined, early in 1956, by a working committee consisting of Harry William Pedicord (Pittsburgh, Penna.), Henry W. Wells (Columbia University) and Edwin Pettet (Brandeis University). It was this small group which proceeded to establish such an organization by writing a set of simple by-laws, and by drawing up plans for an initial meeting to be held the following Fall. Rather informally, Downer and Nagler acted as chairmen, Nagler and Pedicord were in charge of the program, and Wells and Pettet were delegated to

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identify those who would be interested. Others, including Paul Kozelka (Columbia), Gerald E. Bentley (Princeton), William Van Lennep (Harvard) and Arthur Colby Sprague (Bryn Mawr) were immediately co-opted. It is because of the combined efforts of these scholars that ASTR came into being.

The first programmed meeting took place in the theatre of the Drama Workshop of Columbia University on November 24, 1956, with about fifty people in attendance. Edward Langhans (University of Texas) led off with a discussion of "Restoration Prompt-Books," Thomas F. Marshall (Kent State University) followed with a paper on "American Provincial Theatres of the Nineteenth Century," and Lee Simonson, the celebrated stage designer and writer, talked about "Theatre Research and Theatre Practice." Nagler and Downer were authorized to attend the projected 1957 international congress as American representatives, and to urge the establishment of a multinational organization devoted to scholarly research in theatre. Paul Kozelka became the Secretary-Treasurer of the American Society for Theatre Research, Harry Pedicord took over the job of membership chairman, Gerald E. Bentley became chairman of a projected publications committee, and an Executive Committee was elected.

In July of the following year, representatives from sixteen countries met in Venice to hear papers and organize a federation. The United States delegation consisted of Alois Nagler, Alan Downer, and Virginia Heinlein (Vassar), all of whom delivered papers—Nagler on methodology, Downer on Mack Sennett, and Heinlein on American musical comedy. Bellonci again hosted the meeting, which quickly formalized an agreement to combine the constituent national societies into an International Federation for Theatre Research. Ifor Fletcher of Great Britain was elected President, Bellonci the Vice-President and Giorgio Brunacci the Secretary. Nagler became a member of the directing Executive Committee, and Downer was made a Plenary Delegate and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Theatre Research/Recherches Théâtrales*, which was to begin publication in 1958.

Since this date, American participation in the activities of the group has been both consistent and prominent. Nagler, Marshall, Bernard Beckerman and Kalman Burnim have served terms on the Executive Committee, and, most significantly, Professor Nagler had the honor of being President of the Federation from 1961 to 1965. Through the years, ASTR has been represented on the Plenary Committee by Downer, Nagler, Pedicord and Joseph Donohue (University of Massachusetts); William Green (Queens College) has served in a similar capacity as the representative of associated organizations. In succession to Downer, members of the *Theatre Research*

editorial board have been Arthur Saxon, Malcolm Goldstein, and Thomas F. Marshall. Pedicord has been a member of the IFTR-sponsored Venice Institute since its inception in 1971, and Green has been heavily involved in the ongoing work of the University Commission. The list of speakers from ASTR has been a long one, not only for Congress and the Plenary meetings, but also for the Venice Institute and the sessions of the University Commission. In a very real sense, then, ASTR has been both a father and a child of IFTR.

That the interests of the American society ranged far and wide is illustrated by the papers read over the next several years. George Kernodle spoke on medieval theatres, Richard Moody on the Astor Place riots, and Malcolm Goldstein on the Leftist Theatre at the 1957 meeting; in the following year, Benjamin Hunningher gave a paper on the Schouwburg, Burnim one on Theatrical Prints and Garrick's Prompt Books, and Marvin Rosenberg discussed Othello in the theatre; for 1959, Henry Knepler lectured on the international actress, Donald Keene on Japanese medieval farces, and A. C. Sprague on Richard III and Cibber. The program in 1960 included Esther Sheldon on Thomas Sheridan, Orville Larson on Sebastiano Serlio, and Horst Frenz's discussion of the Kamery group on tour; and, in 1961, the speakers were Martin Meisel on Political Plays in 19th Century Britain, Lucyle Hook on Turkish peasant drama, and John Gassner on avant-garde in the nineteen-thirties. Since the object was to address the divergent interests of members, variety was stressed in these formative years; it was not until the late sixties that the thematic approach was adopted, a practice better suited to two-day meetings.

By 1961, then, the purposes and the organization had been firmly established, and the membership had grown to one hundred and seventy-one, including a number of institutional memberships. Chairmen, selected then as now from the Executive Committee, had been elected annually, with Downer and Nagler alternating in the office. The annual term was extended to two years in 1959, and to the present three-year term in 1961. In 1972, the title was changed to that of President. It was in 1961 that Harry W. Pedicord began the first of his three successive terms, lasting through the International meetings held in New York in 1969. This was a period in which growth and activity on many fronts rapidly accelerated. Further alterations of publication practices and by-law revision continued through the term of Thomas F. Marshall, who was elected by the Executive Committee in 1970. He was succeeded, in 1973, by Bernard Beckerman, who saw the society through another rapid cycle of expansion in the services to members. In 1979, Joseph Donohue became the President.

Since its inception, the Society has relied heavily upon the unpaid services

of an executive secretary, under various names. It has also drawn upon the resources and generosity of universities in the New York area; Columbia, and in recent years Queens College and C. W. Post College, have been most helpful. Indeed, the first two Secretary-Treasurers were members of the Columbia faculty, and, until the Library of the Performing Arts became available, our meetings took place in the Drama Workshop in Teacher's College and in the Low Library Dramatic Museum. At the beginning, Paul Kozelka oversaw the arrangements, kept the minutes, produced a newsletter, and conserved what little money there was. Henry W. Wells managed this busy office with his customary efficiency from 1961 to 1966, and William Green (Queens) took on the ever expanding duties from 1966 to 1973. A growing membership and an abundance of activities necessitated the establishment, at the end of Green's long tenure, of separate offices and duties for a Secretary and a Treasurer. In that year, Selma Jeanne Cohen took over the financial end, and Robert Dierlam (Queens) became the Secretary for a four-year period. The present executive tandem of Margaret Loftus Ranald (Queens) and David Keller (Kingsborough Community College) was appointed by the Executive Committee in 1976.

As might be expected, the all-important Program Chairmen, working closely with the President and Secretary, have been uncommonly active in planning meetings, settling themes and securing the speakers who have made the annual gatherings memorable. Since 1958, the following have served terms which have run from two to four years: Robert W. Ball, Kalman Burnim, Francis Hodge, Thomas F. Marshall, Helen Krich Chinoy, Oscar Brockett, Julian Mates, and David Keller.

One by one, new projects have developed, and new activities have come into being. Very early, the pressing need for a yearly report on meetings and membership was handed on to Harry Pedicord. Kozelka somehow found time and money to circulate fact-sheets, and Gerald Bentley assumed responsibility for future scholarly and organizational publications. In 1960, Marguerite McAneny of the Princeton University Library began editing and printing a sizeable mimeographed Newsletter, which contained articles, notices and the membership roll. Mary Ann Jensen succeeded Mrs. McAneny in 1969, and, at the same time, became our legal representative in New Jersey, where we had been incorporated as a tax-exempt organization in 1967. Three years later, with the generous help of C. W. Post College and its Dean, Julian Mates, the format was altered, the type-face changed to letterpress, and the frequency of publication increased to two times a year. Blossom Feinstein guided us through the first issues of this expanded journal, and Phyllis T. Dircks (Post) has been the editor since 1973.

Publications, indeed, were, from the start, a significant concern of the

Society, and Gerald E. Bentley directed this work from 1957 to 1974. Chief among our earliest accomplishments was the launching of a scholarly journal, *Theatre Survey*. This annual magazine first appeared in November, 1960, and became a semi-annual publication in 1964. The Society has always devoted a large portion of its funds to supporting it, but has never been able to bear the complete cost. Fortunately, strong assistance has come to hand through the services and money provided by universities which offered theatre history in their curriculum. In its first stages, this support was provided by Brandeis University, where Edwin Pettet was a faculty member. It was Pettet who saw the initial issue through the press, and it was Pettet who became the managing editor, together with Alan Downer as Editor, in the following and succeeding years. In 1964, three things happened: the University of Pittsburgh became the sponsoring institution, Ralph E. Allen took over the managing editorship, and *Theatre Survey* began to appear twice a year. This arrangement persisted through 1970, when Downer assumed the chairmanship of an editorial board, and Attilio Favorini and George Bogusch were appointed joint managing editors. Favorini became the Executive Editor in 1972, backed by a Board which initially consisted of Nagler, Horst Frenz, Marshall and Pedicord. During the next eight exciting years, Raymond Pentzell (Toledo) served a term as Associate Editor, and, at various times, Robert W. Ball, Kalman Burnim, Marvin Carlson, Richard Moody and Norman Philbrick have been consultants and readers. Beginning with May 1980, the State University of New York at Albany assumed the sponsorship. Roger W. Herzel assumed the editorship, with Judith E. Barlow as Associate Editor and an Editorial Board consisting of Douglas McDermott, Stephen Orgel, Norman Philbrick and Charles Shattuck. Robert K. Sarlós joined the Board in 1980.

In addition to the journal, there have been other significant ventures into the publishing field. In keeping with its goals, the Society has, from time to time, issued specialized monographs, either by itself or in conjunction with university presses. The first such volume, appearing in a bound mimeographed format, was the *Index to the Portraits in Odell's Annals of the New York Stage* (ASTR, N. Y., iv, 179 pp.). This useful tool was the work of the Theatre Collection staff at Princeton, spurred on by Downer, Bentley and McAneny. A second publication was *The Memoirs of John Durang: American Actor 1785-1816*, edited by Alan S. Downer (Pittsburgh University Press, xix, 176 pp., illustrations, 1966). This marked the first joint sponsorship with a university press. Unfortunately, returns from specialized books are seldom high, and the slow sales, the continuing necessity for subsidy, and the uncertain financial position of the Society discouraged further publications for a time. So, it was as an experiment that

Attilio Favorini suggested that suitable long manuscripts might become a part of *Theatre Survey* or otherwise issued at Pittsburgh under separate cover. This was done with separate printings of Walther R. Volbach's *Memoirs of Max Reinhardt's Theatres, 1920-1922*, appearing in the Fall of 1972, and with the prompt edition by Samuel Bogorad and Robert Gale Noyes of *Samuel Foote's Primitive Puppet Show* in the following year (this with support from the University of Vermont). In May, 1976, an entire issue of the journal was devoted to papers on "The British Theatre 1800-1900: Essays on the Nineteenth Century Stage," edited by Joseph Donohue and James Ellis.

Kalman Burnim was the replacement for Bentley in 1974. In the year following, a committee composed of Burnim, Marshall and Mates recommended, among other things, a separation of responsibility for occasional and on-going publications, and the establishment of a full-scale Research Committee responsible for encouraging new projects. Subsequently, Oscar Brockett became chairman of a Special Issues committee composed of George Winchester Stone, Jr., Norman Philbrick, and Richard Lorenzen; at the same time, a Research Committee, first headed by Helen Chinoy and including Benito Ortolani (the present head), Leonard Conolly and Dorothy Swerdlow, was appointed. The first fruit of this has been the appearance of Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker's *Edward Gordon Craig and The Pretenders: A Production Revisited*. This volume marks the beginning of a cooperative arrangement with the Southern Illinois University Press. The Society's plan is to publish a second volume shortly—Bernard Dukore's composite edition of Shaw's promptbooks for *Arms and the Man*—supported by our subsidy (which is, in reality, a revolving fund).

Two other publications are noteworthy, and both stem from ASTR sponsored and organized meetings of a special kind. The first of these was the book edited by Francis Hodge containing the papers read at the Sixth Congress of IFTR, held in New York in October, 1969. Entitled *Innovations in Stage and Theatre Design*, and sponsored jointly by ASTR and the Theatre Library Association, it appeared in 1972 (New York, x, 165 pp.). The second was *American Popular Entertainment* (Westport, Conn., xiv, 338 pp.), comprising the papers read at the successful Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment of November, 1977. This volume, edited by Myron Matlaw, appeared in 1979, as the first of Greenwood Press's Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies series.

Both of these special meetings point up the cooperation which has long existed between the Society and the Theatre Library Association. Joint meetings and members serving on both boards have somewhat blurred the

distinctions between the groups, but each has managed to retain its separate identity. And both meetings illustrate the moral and financial support provided by such agencies as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of International Education, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Library of the Performing Arts, and a number of theatre organizations. Indeed, the Institute of International Education and the ACLS have, over the years, been the source of much needed travel funds for members travelling abroad.

The International Theatre Congress of 1969 was a prime example of this kind of assistance. Ali Nagler and Harry Pedicord were the co-chairmen for this conference, Mrs. John F. (Betty) Wharton the Secretary, and Robert MacGregor (of Theatre Arts) the overworked Treasurer. Robert Ball, Louis A. Rachow (the Archivist), Thor E. Wood, Bernard Grossman, Alan Downer, William Green, Mrs. Robin Craven, Norman Philbrick and Selma Jeanne Cohen served as very active members of the supervising and organizing committee. Sessions and receptions continued for over a week, and included side-trips to the Harvard Theatre Collection and to the Folger Library. A National Endowment grant permitted the payment of travel expenses for European members of the Federation, and also covered publication costs of the proceedings. But ultimately, it was the unending leg-work of the American hosts which made the real difference.

Equally hard work went into the Conference on American Popular Entertainment, held in 1977. William Green, as chairman, assembled a large cast of helpers, anchored by Margaret Loftus Ranald as Secretary and Julian Mates as Treasurer. Bernard Beckerman, Ralph Allen, Richard M. Buck, Brooks McNamara, Louis Rachow, Paul Myers, Betty Wharton, Vera Mowry Roberts, Helen Armstead-Johnson, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Robert M. Henderson and Estelle Thaler were all involved in producing both an entertaining and an illuminating three-day conference. This also had the support of outside agencies.

A further example of cooperation with other professional organizations may be seen in the Conference on American Musical Theatre of 1981, in which we joined with the Sonneck Society, The Music Library Association and the Theatre Library Association. And there has been, of course, the ASTR/TLA Lecture Series held in New York City from 1979 to 1981.

It was not until 1975 that the Society ventured to hold meetings outside New York. In that year, a two-day session took place at the Folger Library in Washington under the chairmanship of Beckerman and the direction of Helen Chinoy. The following year ASTR met in Cambridge, Massachusetts through the combined efforts of Jeanne Newlin and Kalman Burnim. In 1978, a program devoted to Theatre West was presented at San Francisco

under the co-chairmanship of Robert Sarlós and Dunbar Ogden, while in 1980 the Society's annual meeting took place at the University of Texas, with John Brokaw and Oscar Brockett responsible for the proceedings. It is by now customary to meet in New York City every other year, and to draw more fully upon regional members for other programs.

The extent to which the Society has achieved recognition as the premier scholarly organization devoted to theatre matters is indicated by its admission as a constituent member of the American Council of Learned Societies in 1975. George Winchester Stone, Jr. and Bernard Beckerman led the drive for this coveted membership, and Helen Chinoy and Kalman Burnim have been our representatives since that time. Margaret Ranald has served as a committee member of the ACLS Conference of Secretaries. If anyone wonders about our progress since 1956, these facts alone should provide sufficient answer.

No account of ASTR can include the names of all the members and well-wishers who have contributed to its inception and its growth. As the membership has expanded and changed character, and as long-standing and temporary measures have been effected, one thing only has remained constant: the willing cooperation and labor of countless scholars, theatre technicians, and enthusiastic amateurs. It is chiefly because of them that the Society has been faithful to its principal reasons for existence—the fostering of knowledge about theatre, and the creation of a climate and a framework for service to the needs of American theatre historians in the practice of their profession.