

Stage Center Theatre

From the Theatre Archives

Early 20th Century Theatre Companies

The Washington Square Players

Created in 1915 by amateurs, The Washington Square Players began producing oneact plays by Chekhov, Musset, Akins, Moeller and other obscure playwrights of the time in a small theatre seating of only 40 patrons. They moved to a 600 seat theatre and produced O'Neil's *In the Zone*. The group disbanded in 1918, but reformed in 1919 as The Theatre Guild. Some of the actors that performed with The Washington Square Players were Roland Young, Rollo Peters, Frank Conroy, Helen Westley, and Katherine Cornell.

The Theatre Guild

Founded in 1919 by Theresa Helburn, Philip Moeller, and Lawrence Langer (among others), The Theatre Guild was one of the first and most influential "Off Broadway" theatre companies in New York City during the first half of the 20th Century. The Theatre Guild had its heyday between the World Wars (1919-1939). In its first few years the majority of its work was in European expressionism. Later it provided an outlet for the work of such artists as Eugene O'Neil, Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, and Sidney Howard. But perhaps the most significant element of the company was the way in which it was managed. The Board of Directors actually participated in the entire creative process; from the choice of producers and directors to the scripts and the actors. Notably, Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* was originally produced by The Theatre Guild. In the 1920's The Guild was experimental and avantgarde; during the 1930's it felt old and staid to its younger members, who departed and became The Group Theatre. In the 1930's and 40's The Theatre Guild became a producing agent. They organized the first subscription policy, extensive national tours and brought worthwhile, wellproduced plays to the public for almost 30 years.

The Group Theatre

In 1931, Cheryl Crawford, Harold Clurman, and Lee Strasburg formed The Group Theatre. Born of the need to develop a uniquely American style of stage performance based on the teachings of Constantin Stanislavsky, The Group Theatre was named for its ability to work both methods into their performances. It sought to develop a selfless, pure ensemble devoid of "stars," deeply rooted in solid technique. In its ten years of existence, The Group Theatre saw actors like Frances Farmer, Lee J. Cobb, Sanford Meisner, John Garfield, Franchot Tone, Morris Carnovsky, Phoebe Brand and Howard Da Silva grace its produ-

Continued...

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAIN STAGE 7:30PM

Reservations:

(773) 442-4274

Emma's Child

February 17-19, 24-26,
March 3-5

Bleacher Bums

April 14-16, 21-23, 28-30

As You Like It

June 9-11, 16-18, 23-25

You Can't Take It With You

July 21-23, 28-30, August
4-6

STUDIO SERIES 7:30PM F109

Selecting Memory

February 21-23, March 2-4

CHILDREN'S THEATRE MAIN STAGE 10:30AM

The Love for Three Oranges

Monday, Wednesday, Friday
Reservations:

(773) 442-5971

March-April

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tions. Eventually, any of those associated with The Group Theatre would be “blacklisted” by the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). HUAC discriminated against these actors because of their affiliation with Russian dramatist, Constantin Stanislavsky providing grounds for Communist sympathies. In 1947, Elia Kazan joined Crawford in founding The Actor’s Studio. Eventually Strasberg joined, became the director in 1951, and “The Method”—a direct derivation of Stanislavsky’s “System”—was developed there. Along with the acting component, The Group Theatre had a literacy program which within 10 years produced 22 new American plays with contemporary relevance. Some of those playwrights were John Howard Lawson, Clifford Odets, Paul Green, Marc Blizstein, Sidney Kingsley, and William Saroyan. The Group Theatre disbanded in 1941.

Call the
Stage Center
Theatre box
office for
reservations
and ticket sales
773.442.4274



Tickets are
free for all
faculty, staff,
and students
with an
NEIU ID

Coming Newsletters:

- February:** Cast lists, author biographies, and play information for *Emma’s Child* by Kristin Thatcher and *Selecting Memory* by Tania Richard.
- March:** Cast List, author biographies, and information for *Bleacher Bums* by Joe Mantegna and the Organic Theatre Company.
- April:** Summer audition notice, summer class notice, fall class notice.
- May:** Cast list, author biographies, play information for *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare and *You Can’t Take It With You* by Kaufman and Hart.

~THEATRE LINGO~

- Word:** *Off-Loop*
- Part of Speech:** adjective
- Definition:** term used to describe a theatrical production that is put on at a theater outside of the Chicago Loop.
- Origin:** This word stems from the term “OffBroadway.” Broadway acts as the theatrical Mecca in New York City, showcasing many productions that bring in the big bucks while appealing to the masses. Productions that fall on the fringe of the Broadway, away from the main drag, or lack the mass appeal generally associated with Broadway blockbusters are known as “OffBroadway” productions. Broadway is similar to Chicago’s Loop which houses many theatres that present a crowd-pleasing performances and generate a lot of revenue. Chicagoans adapted the term “OffBroadway” and created a parallel by describing productions that run on the fringe of the Loop as “OffLoop” shows. “Off-Loop” shows tend to be localized and presented in smaller spaces, often generating less revenue.
- Example:** Lifeline Theatre, in Rogers Park, offers up a series of “OffLoop” productions in an intimate performance space that allows for upclose and personal storytelling.

* Look to “Theatre Lingo” in each issue to pick up some insider jargon that you can use when discussing the local theatre scene.