

Introduction

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Representing a vast array of voices and practices that developed in American theatre over the past seventy-five years is almost an impossible task. As we embarked on the journey of creating this companion, our goal was to consider key social and political touchpoints of each era, while staying conscious of changing contemporary perspectives that define the ways in which we revisit past theatre developments. Furthermore, in assembling ten original contributions, we felt an urgency to disrupt traditional historiography that perpetuates hierarchies of power and privileges overwhelmingly white male voices in post-1945 American theatre.

This volume discusses transformative artistic practices across racial and gender representation, which often resulted from rising social and political consciousness, and highlights multiple dialogues and disparate voices woven into the complex tapestry of American theatre. We craft our companion not around individual playwrights and influential theatre makers such as directors, actors, or designers; instead, we focus on collective practices and collaborative models in different artistic communities. The collaborative effort has become progressively more visible in American theatre of the last decades, and scholars and practitioners have begun to develop a vocabulary for describing how artistic teams operate, what choices have worked, and how they have transformed theatre. Discussing how these models work in a variety of markets and communities, the contributions provide a framework to reflect the multivocal and collaborative nature of theatre production and put into context the works of the renowned artists of the time.

In a volume that covers such a long period, there is always a question of what voices to include and how to best represent intersecting trends, overlapping narratives, and artistic dialogues across mainstream, regional, and experimental theatre. Examining voices and practices that were left outside standard theatre historiography, we are challenged to decenter what has been held up as seminal work. Our contributors recognize the

significance of iconic plays of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams and acknowledge the groundbreaking contributions of artistic visionaries such as Elia Kazan and Jo Mielziner. Rather than survey the best-known luminaries, though, the contributors select artists whose work exemplifies changes that have led to contemporary production and collaboration standards. The examples they consider often complement the better-known histories and give voice to the figures who have been largely neglected. Thus the volume focuses on the increasing presence of women and artists of color in theatre and drama since the mid-twentieth century, pointing to a paradigm shift toward diversity that has brought about a richly textured theatrical landscape in the twenty-first century. As the contributing writers engage with the historiographic task to reassess and reframe past theatre's legacy and its influence on contemporary theatrical developments, the volume considers the ways in which this growing diversity in theatre practice has inspired changing dramaturgical expressions and theatrical idioms.

In the seventy-five years after World War II, American theatre transformed significantly. Besides major shifts in Broadway and Off-Broadway theatres, Broadway itself progressively decentralized, and powerful movements such as Off-Off-Broadway and regional theatre emerged, giving voice to playwrights of color and experimenting with forms. Experimental theatre companies such as the Caffé Cino, the Living Theatre, the Open Theater, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and La MaMa fostered diverse communities of theatre artists dedicated to debunking the aesthetic and political status quo. Fringe festivals, found spaces, and interdisciplinary performance events proliferated, often combining theatre innovation with popular entertainment. New technologies influenced theatre in unexpected ways, creating new possibilities for playwrights, directors, designers, and actors to tell stories, and transforming performance experiences for the audience. Driven by financial availability, technological innovation in design often took place in popular entertainments – concerts and Las Vegas extravaganzas – and, once popularized, influenced theatrical production. Grand lightshows and projected imagery led the way in touring mega-concerts, then slowly worked their way onto Broadway stages and regional and university theatres.

We organize our discussion of post-1945 theatre by employing three categories: commercial/mainstream theatre, regional theatre, and experimental theatre and other forms of entertainment. This structure anchors contributors' critical engagement with each category and gives them an opportunity to resist fixed categorization, defy binary framing, and explore

practices at the intersections of the mainstream and the experimental. In recent scholarship, efforts to legitimize community theatres, street performances, and popular touring theatrics have coincided with a stronger recognition of mutual influences between the popular and Broadway or the mainstream and experimental. This volume explores the ways in which different artistic trajectories intersect, blurring the borders that separate commercial enterprises from noncommercial theatre practices.

In conceiving this volume, we consulted with previously published companions on American theatre. Gerald Bordman and Thomas Hischak's *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*¹ and Don B. Wilmeth's *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre*² provide a detailed discussion of theatre terms, plays, playwrights, and practitioners. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby's *Cambridge History of American Theatre: Volume III*³ offers an insightful analysis of theatrical contexts from the end of World War II through the 1990s. Theresa Saxon's *American Theatre: History, Context, Form*⁴ broadly addresses developments from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, offering a series of snapshots of a diverse American theatre. A more focused overview of the twentieth-century American drama, David Krasner's *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*,⁵ looks at the development of literary themes in relation to major political underpinnings and theatrical contexts.

Our approach to this companion, however, has been closely guided by recent publications on American theatre that radically rethink the significance of collective creation, erase dichotomies of periphery and center, and reveal how theatres often maintain as well as challenge systems of power. Although not looking exclusively at American theatre, the trilogy on collective creation by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (*A History of Collective Creation; Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance; and Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance*)⁶ affirms the central role of collective theatre practices and traces the journey of ensemble creation from margin to center. Mike Vanden Heuvel's two volumes on American ensemble theatres⁷ reassess theatre process as a collaborative creation, challenging the notion of ensemble theatre as a linearly developed, somewhat homogenous practice, and disrupt the delineation between radical, politically driven collectives and "apolitical" ensembles. James Harding and Cindy Rosenthal, considering a transformative era in *The Sixties, Center Stage*, offer compelling case studies that demonstrate how "experimentation and anticconsumerism moved throughout [the decade] with great fluidity, traveling back and forth between the margins and mainstream."⁸ Through her nuanced

examination of the Arena Stage, a prominent regional theatre, Donatella Galella in *America in the Round: Capital, Race, and Nation at Washington DC's Arena Stage*⁹ inspires a rigorous reevaluation of the regional theatre movement, particularly its engagement with both political forces and economic structures. Seminal histories of the avant-garde in America such as Theodore Shank's *Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre*¹⁰ and histories contextualizing American practice in relation to international practice such as Steve Dixon's *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*¹¹ lay a foundation for analyzing avant-garde experimentation, its relationship to commercial theatre practice, and its influence on contemporary markets. Like this recent scholarship, our companion challenges the long-established binaries that separate center from periphery, popular from experimental, political from apolitical, and profit from nonprofit.

In Part I, "Commercial and Mainstream Theatre," this companion outlines developments in Broadway and Off-Broadway theatre markets and observes how shifts in economics, politics, and demographics have influenced changes in aesthetics and collaborative methods. The four chapters describe how varied collaborative models fostered more inclusive theatrical practices and more diverse dramaturgies and theatrical style, representing the voices and histories of various American communities at the intersections of mainstream and experimental theatre. Placing theatre in dialogue with social movements, this section depicts a wealth of mainstream American theatre over the seventy-five years when Broadway maintained its vital role by continuing to redefine itself. As Broadway was compelled to respond to a shifting national narrative and socioeconomic pressures, it often found itself engaging innovative artistic voices, diversifying its repertoire, and expanding its audience to include multigenerational and racially diverse patrons. The four scholars in this section identify pivotal moments in the trajectories of Broadway and Off-Broadway that defined key developments in mainstream theatre. They describe troubling labor practices and point to the increasing role of corporations in economic and artistic decisions in mainstream theatre. Also, they provide multiple perspectives on theatrical expressions, organizational and artistic hierarchies, and collaborative methodologies, revealing a complicated history in which commercial and innovative patterns frequently converge on Broadway and Off-Broadway.

As Susan C. W. Abbotson argues in "Broadway Post-1945 to 1960: Shifting Perspectives," the period can be characterized as a Golden Age for American theatre, when Broadway emerged as a major force in

Introduction

5

developing themes and theatrical styles that explored what it meant to be distinctly American, but also challenged American exceptionalism and rising xenophobia. Her chapter establishes a historical framework for post-1945 developments in theatre and drama, offers an overview of theatrical and dramaturgical innovations amid social and economic anxieties, and highlights Broadway's expansion of topics and styles. The chapter strikes a delicate balance between paying tribute to mid-century figures such as Williams, Miller, and William Inge and revising the canon to include women and artists of color. Arguing that Williams, Miller, and Inge "collectively created a distinctively American theatre that traversed and reflected the entire nation," Abbotson demonstrates how these playwrights offered ways to rethink the genre of family drama and address the themes of individual conscience and collective responsibility during the McCarthy era. But she also directs attention to the rise of women's voices in American playwriting. Lillian Hellman's progressive politics pushed the boundaries of American narrative to address homophobia, greed, and inequality. Black playwrights Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry exposed the country's systemic racism, shattered racial stereotypes that dominated mainstream American culture, and paved the ground for many playwrights of color to define a multivocal theatre.

Abbotson identifies significant moments in the development of musical and nonmusical theatre on Broadway, underscoring the powerful contributions of women artists who worked alongside their male counterparts to experiment with new artistic techniques and methodologies. The list of legendary theatre innovators and collaborative teams of the period often includes Kazan, designers Mielziner and Boris Aronson, and visionary musical theatre producers, directors, and choreographers such as George Abbott, Hal Prince, and Bob Fosse. The chapter examines their contributions but also emphasizes the compelling legacies of Cheryl Crawford, Margaret Webster, Mary Hunter, and Dorothy Fields, among others, in reinventing American theatre.

The dialogue between mainstream and experimental stages is at the heart of Cindy Rosenthal's "Bridging the Gap: Broadway and the Experimental from the 1960s to 2020," in which she identifies key theatre developments in each decade and positions them in relation to social and economic characteristics. Her chapter engages with the critical term "the mainstream experimental" that she and Harding introduced in *The Sixties, Center Stage* to demonstrate how in the 1960s "Broadway musicals, mainstream dramas, and experimental performances all participated in a complex dialogue about politics, society, and culture."¹² In this chapter,

6 JULIA LISTENGARTEN AND STEPHEN DI BENEDETTO

Rosenthal extends this reexamination of a complicated dynamic between commercial and noncommercial theatre beyond the decade of the 1960s into the present time. She traces the dynamic to the artistically and commercially successful rock musical *Hair*. First produced at the Public Theater in 1967 and moved to Broadway in 1968, *Hair* triggered the transfer of productions from the Public Theater to Broadway, under the leadership of Joseph Papp and, later, George C. Wolfe and Oskar Eustis, who championed artistic innovation and pushed for bold, uncompromising representations of diverse voices. As Rosenthal examines major transfers from nonmainstream stages to Broadway, she reflects on how socially minded and artistically innovative musicals and plays such as *Bring in 'da Noise*, *Bring in 'da Funk*; *Angels in America*; *Topdog/Underdog*; *Caroline, or Change*; *Hamilton*; *Fun Home*; and *Eclipsed* “moved identity politics and the energies and explorations of diverse makers center-stage on Broadway, and into the mainstream.”

The chapter traces how theatre has responded to the pivotal moments in post-1960 American history: the 1960s civil rights protests, the impact of the AIDS epidemic, the rise of Third Wave feminism, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the recent Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ movements. Rosenthal pays particular attention to Black and LGBTQ+ theatre artists – Ntozake Shange, August Wilson, George C. Wolfe, Anna Deavere Smith, Danai Gurira, Jeremy O. Harris, Larry Kramer, Tony Kushner, and Lisa Kron – whose work exemplifies productive crossovers between innovative theatre practices and commercial theatre developments. A long-standing commitment by innovative theatre makers and activists to diversify the Broadway audience has led to many bold artistic and financial decisions to strengthen multiracial and multigenerational audience engagement. Rosenthal contemplates the shifting demographics of the mainstream theatre audience and describes the Broadway productions of *Bring in 'da Noise* (1996) and *Rent* (1996) as the “mainstream experimental” examples of the 1990s theatre, signaling “a new wave of ‘street’ musicals that spoke to and of the energies, spirit, passions, and desires of Generation X.” The Broadway productions of *Hamilton* (2015), *Eclipsed* (2016), and *Slave Play* (2019), which deeply engaged with issues of racial and gender inequality, are more recent attempts to confront Broadway’s economic stratification and reach out to young people and communities of color who otherwise would not afford the prohibitive cost of tickets. Arguing that “mainstream/commercial theatre today continues to push the culture forward as it did in the 1960s, often in ways that sometimes the experimental realm cannot,” Rosenthal remarks that in the case of *Slave Play*, “more folks had a voice in

the conversation, and . . . a wider and more diverse and younger-skewing demographic took a seat at the discussion table.”

The development of artistic practices in post-1945 American theatre is directly connected to the changing principles of creative collaboration informed by theatrical innovations, economic considerations, and social contexts. How do new theatrical forms and funding structures inform collaboration in theatre? How do unique collaborative models foster and activate different kinds of socially relevant theatrical practices? These questions figure prominently in the chapters by Laura MacDonald and Jessica Silsby Brater, who examine how various collaborative relationships reflected major shifts in developing theatrical material. MacDonald’s “What’s Inside? Collaborative Relationships at the Heart of the American Musical” looks at the evolution of American musical theatre through transforming creative collaboration. Beginning with *Oklahoma!* (1943), “a watershed in musical theatre history,” and ending with the groundbreaking *Hamilton*, MacDonald illustrates how “practitioners assembled creative teams in response to shifting economics, audience demographics, and the rise of mediated popular culture on television and the internet.” Hierarchies shifted to favor musical theatre directors and choreographers such as Prince and Jerome Robbins; to include performers’ voices, stories, and perspectives during the developmental workshop phases of *A Chorus Line* (1975) or *Hamilton* (2015) at the Public Theater; and to diversify themes, styles, and demographics through women directors (Julie Taymor and Diane Paulus, to name two) and artists of color, such as Lin-Manuel Miranda. Broadway musical theatre investors and producers, however, often usurp power over directors and choreographers, and Disney and other international corporations play an increasingly bigger role in musical theatre development.

MacDonald also draws attention to inequitable labor practices that continue to affect musical theatre creation, as they did when Agnes de Mille, the first woman choreographer on Broadway, worked on the original production of *Oklahoma!* “Conscious of innovators such as de Mille being undervalued and underrecognized as the legacy of their musicals extended,” MacDonald writes, “their successors would become more mindful of contracts, royalties, and billing.” Disputes over appropriate financial remuneration still pervade complicated contract negotiations when musicals transfer from Off-Broadway or regional theatres to Broadway stages. Drawing parallels between *A Chorus Line* and *Hamilton*, MacDonald shows how original performers who developed these productions felt neglected and underpaid when the shows moved

uptown and became commercial hits. For *Hamilton*, though, an agreement was reached to grant actors and stage managers in the Public Theater run “a retroactive share of 1 percent of net profits” from the Broadway production and a smaller share of future shows.

Brater, in “Shaping Broadway and Off-Broadway Plays through Collaborations: Playwrights, Directors, Designers, and Companies,” focuses on diverse dramaturgical voices and styles that arose after 1960 from playwrights’ interactions with other theatre makers and organizations. She investigates six collaborative models that reveal multiple negotiations, disruptions, and tensions that permeate creative process but also offer ways to consider the relationship between artistic practices and new work. Putting the playwright at center of the creative process, Brater investigates how this center continues to shift, enforcing or eroding traditional hierarchies. Examples range from more conventional collaborative practices, which maintain the boundaries of the playwright-director-designer involvement, to collectively conceived and guided creative interactions in which the roles of theatre makers intersect and the boundaries blur. The relationship among playwright Edward Albee, director Alan Schneider, and set designer William Ritman, who worked on Broadway and Off-Broadway on a handful of Albee’s plays, including *The American Dream* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, represents a more traditional artistic hierarchy, maintaining the primacy of the dramatic text and supporting the playwright’s vision. A decade-long collaboration between playwright Sam Shepard and director Robert Woodruff at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco and the Public Theater in New York in the 1970s and 1980s advanced a workshop setting in regional and Off-Broadway theatres, in which work was conceived and fostered under less stringent pressures for commercial success. The collaboration of August Wilson and Lloyd Richards at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut, inspired the tremendous growth of African American theatre. Wilson’s early writing – his work on *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* and *Fences* – is closely connected to the O’Neill Center, where Richards served as artistic director from 1968 to 1999 and cultivated many playwrights.

Moving chronologically and across commercial and experimental venues, Brater’s discussion of artistic practices shifts to examination of collaborative dynamics between women artists. A leading voice in experimental theatre and a revered mentor of Latinx playwrights, dramatist, director, and visual artist Maria Irene Fornes disrupted traditional hierarchies by blurring the director-playwright distinction and elevating the role of

Introduction

9

theatre designers in play/production development; she encouraged them to “shape the space and the language of her plays.” Rooted in a more traditional practice in which the director sees herself “outside of the writing process,” an enduring partnership between playwright Suzan-Lori Parks and director Liz Diamond at the Yale Repertory Theatre and Public Theater led to innovations in playwriting and staging, largely driven by Parks’s commitment to explore Black history and reexamine Black identity through nonlinear storytelling and poetic language. The Yale Repertory productions of *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1992) and *The America Play* (1994) are among their works that created transformative experiences for the audience and laid the groundwork for experimentation across race and gender. Playwright Paula Vogel and director Rebecca Taichman brought to Broadway an acclaimed production, *Indecent* (2017), a riveting love story between two women. The product of five years of “workshopping and collaboration,” their work is a compelling example of “a highly inclusive development process.”

Part II, “Regional Theatre Movement,” examines the pivotal role of regional theatres in supporting playwrights’ development of work that serves diverse audiences in local regions, considers the impact of economic, social, and artistic factors on regional theatre, and questions the narrative that characterizes regional theatres in opposition to commercial Broadway. Offering a nuanced reading of the regional theatre movement, the three chapters in this section highlight the centrality of regional theatres in American theatre history, reveal challenges and tensions that have accompanied their development, and envision ways to strengthen their place in local and national theatre communities.

Elizabeth A. Osborne’s “Money Matters: Dismantling the Narrative of the Rise of Regional Theatre” challenges the view that regional companies are “financially stable sellouts or artistically brilliant destitutes.” Through case studies of Theatre ’47 in Dallas, the Alley Theatre in Houston, Arena Stage in Washington, DC, and the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Osborne shows how these regional theatres navigated various artistic and economic circumstances, “offer[ing] different financial approaches and structures, based on leadership styles, ideological goals, and community needs.” Drawing on the contributions of Margo Jones, Nina Vance, Zelda Fichandler, and Tyrone Guthrie, artistic directors who led the development of regional theatres in the mid-twentieth century, Osborne illustrates how the movement played a major role in decentering Broadway, engaging with local communities, and cementing the core of American national theatre. She argues, however, that these artists created regional theatre

companies not solely because of a desire to break from commercially driven theatre to produce socially minded work or experiment with new forms. Their motives ranged from a commitment to foster a network of regional theatres, to respond to community needs, and to build a highly professional nonprofit theatre. While leading regional theatre companies, these directors often continued to stay in dialogue with Broadway, directing Broadway shows, hiring company members from Broadway, or transferring their productions to Broadway stages. As Osborne considers how regional theatres constantly negotiate between the creative and the economic, she builds on the concept of the “mainstream experimental,” showing how artistic practices that produced pioneering work often converged with the companies’ goals of commercial success.

Major national foundations, such as Ford, Rockefeller, and Mellon, and local funders have always played a key role in supporting regional theatre. But “lack of control over the markets and culture wars that decimate public funding” imperil regional theatres, especially as funding structures often privilege rich companies that produce work for white upper-middle-class audiences over “community-centered, culturally specific groups [which] remain chronically underfunded,” Osborne observes. As theatres nationwide closed in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, more questions emerged about regional theatres’ sustainability and the necessity to reimagine their funding models in a postpandemic landscape.

Diverse voices – Black, Latinx, Asian American, LGBTQ+ among them – proliferated in post-1960 American theatre, primarily in regional communities. Responding to the rise of social consciousness and engaging with social activism and political unrest in the 1960s and beyond, playwrights such as August Wilson, Parks, Kushner, Wendy Wasserstein, Henry David Hwang, and José Rivera, whose work often originated in regional theatres, grappled with racism, colonialism, homophobia, religious intolerance, and gender discrimination. Faedra Chatard Carpenter’s “When and Where They Enter: Black and Brown Voices in American Theatre” highlights regional theatres’ promotion of diverse representations of American cultures and identities. Positioning Amiri Baraka and Luis Valdez at the forefront of Black and Chicano theatre movements, she notes the invaluable contributions of women of color who “have tilled, labored, and harvested just like their male counterparts, thereby creating further avenues for those – of various identificatory categories – to follow.” But Carpenter, cautioning against the oversimplification of diversity and inclusion, and the assertion of “monolithic paradigms of identity,” encourages discussion of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, disability, religion,