

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

APPLICATION FORM
HISTORIC LANDMARK

JOINT COMMITTEE
ON LANDMARKS

Application for
Historic Landmark

Received 6/1/80 REN
Filed 6-4-80 TS

APPLICATION TO:

- ☒ designate
☐ amend

summary of amendments _____

- ☐ rescind

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of Property The Arena Stage

Address 6th and M Street, SW

Square and Lot Number(s) Square 472, lots 123, 126

Present Owner Washington Drama Society, Inc.*

Address 6th and M Street, SW

Original Use Theater

Present Use Theater

Date of Construction 1960

Date of Major Alterations, if any Kreeger Theater, 1969

Architect Harry Weese and Associates

Architectural style/period Humanist Modern

Name of Applicant Washington Drama Society, Inc.

(If applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.)

Address of Applicant 6th and M Streets, SW

Telephone 554-9066

Thomas R. Zihlman

Signature of Applicant or authorized representative
Executive Director, Arena Stage
Vice President, Washington Drama Society, Inc.

June 3, 1980
Date

Title of authorized representative

* Land comprising Lot 126 held under 99 year lease from D.C. R.L.A.

INTRODUCTION

There follows the application of the Arena Stage for designation as an historic landmark and for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Because the Arena Stage is thirty years old, it must demonstrate that it is of "exceptional importance" to comply with the criterion for designation established for landmarks achieving significance within the past fifty years (36 CFR 60.6 (g)). How to Complete National Register Forms, a publication of the Department of the Interior, makes clear that the application must contain therefore an explicit, well-articulated justification or explanation of the property's exceptional value. Consequently, this application sets out with particularity the role the Arena Stage has played in the cultural history of the nation and its capital, as well as the architectural significance of the structure itself.

The application's primary theme documents the cultural significance of Arena Stage, for this is the aspect of the site which establishes it as a part of the nation's cultural heritage and contributes to our understanding of the development of the "American Regional Theater Movement." While the national historic context of the Arena Stage vis a vis the Regional Theater Movement is explored, the application also highlights the process by which it created an institution of continuing community and cultural value and influence in Washington.

The exploration of the historic context of the Arena Stage is extensive, also, to demonstrate that sufficient time has passed to allow for the appropriate professional evaluation of its historic value and role. Historical perspective is generally occasioned by a milestone which makes appropriate a backwards look at a forward moving institution. In Arena's case, the evaluative process crystallized in 1976 when Arena was awarded a "Tony" by the American Theater Wing for its pioneering work in the Regional Theater Movement. Indeed, Arena's Tony was recognition that the Movement itself existed and had come of age. It should also be noted that a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities has just been awarded to the Arena Stage to document this historic role in the American theater and the nation's cultural development.

The Arena Stage Theater as a building worthy of designation is discussed in detail. The significance of the building as the first permanent, professional theater designed in the United States as a theater-in-the-round is explored, as is its pivotal role in the development of the Southwest urban renewal area. An analysis of the building as architecture and as a home for theater productions (many of which were world and American premieres) is also presented through references to both architectural and theater critics.

The references cited in this application are taken from the Arena Stage's thirty-year history, and for the most part evaluate its contribution to American theater and to the Washington community. Reviews of Arena productions are almost entirely excluded, however, as they tend to reflect contemporary interest and values. By focusing on the Arena Stage's cultural and architectural value rather than the specific merit of its productions, the sum total of the material cited, taken over time, represents the perspective necessary to establish Arena's historical context.

Following the application proper are several appendices which provide the essential documentation, which might otherwise be unavailable, for the material contained in the application. Appendix I is an Opinion of Counsel relating to the designation of properties achieving significance within the past 50 years. Appendix II consists of copies of newspaper and magazine articles and other ephemeral sources cited in the application, and which would not be readily available to the Joint Committee. Appendix III consists of materials relating to the forty-seven world and American premieres of plays presented by the Arena Stage through the 1978-79 season. Appendix IV consists of material related to the architectural merit of the structure. Appendix V contains Congressional Record excerpts, District of Columbia Proclamation and Resolutions, and other kudos cited in the application. Appendix VI is a partial listing of theaters listed in the National Register.

- 310.22 If property is proposed for designation principally for its architectural significance, a detailed architectural description of the property, including where possible its original and present appearance.

The first professional, permanent theater-in-the-round to be built in the United States, Arena Stage has an 800-seat, four-sided seating plan around a 30' x 36' stage. The audience enters from above on a perimeter aisle, the actors from below at the four corners. Dressing rooms, work shops, and supporting facilities are at stage level. From the stagehouse hang the lighting catwalks and the grid for flying scenery and props. This central structure is carried on a tension ring at the perimeter. The boxes and stairs to them are expressed on the exterior. Seating is only eight rows deep in the main seating area. One quadrant of seating is removable for modified proscenium staging.

The plan of the house separates the arena from a wing containing all of the supporting facilities. The shape of the auditorium inside is expressed outside. The coupled columns containing the stair to the boxes carry down to the ground, the boxes themselves projecting beyond the line of the building. The roof has a short mansard section covering the perimeter air supply duct, rising to the stagehouse above. The mansard section continues around the office wing and represents the upturned steel joint structure. Smoking balconies and fire exits open at the four corners of the arena.

SIZE AND SHAPE OF STAGE

The auditorium shape is derived from the stage. The shape of the stage is rectangular in preference to square or round. The square or round stage has no axis and the round stage has no orientation. The elliptical might have been considered, but the elliptical seating plan it would have engendered would have baroque connotations as well as acoustical difficulties. The rectangular plan was chosen as the most appropriate to Arena Stage's tradition, as well as having frontal relationships in four directions. The stage size, 30' x 36', is somewhat larger than Arena's earlier stages to allow larger acting areas without undue separation of action and audience. Of importance also is the relation of stage size to room size.

CHARACTER OF HOUSE

The function of the theater is to serve the performance, but the house must have character, the experience being not solely confined to those moments when the house lights are down. While the between-acts experience should not destroy the mood, it must, at times, offer relief. This

interior minimizes decor, relying almost entirely on the materials and the structure and shape of the space. The structure is clearly expressed, the weight of the 42' x 48' stagehouse and surrounding roof being carried down to a surrounding tension ring via struts at the four corners. The beams splayed out from the double columns around the ambulatory are alternately filled in, the covered portion being utilized to house light ports, crawl space, fly lines, and duct enclosures, the uncovered portion showing the roof slab. The lighting bridge hanging below the stagehouse carries the major portion of the lighting instruments expressed as a flying canopy, extending six feet beyond the stage below on all sides.

The volume of the room is determined by the 16½":36" rake of the tiers. The seating was made 36 inches center to center in order to bring the audience closer, a balance between ease of passage and the intimate participation which is the essence of Arena. The rake was increased from the previous Arena Stage, the "Old Vat," to bring the audience forward visually and surround the action in three dimensions without exceeding a vertical sight-line angle.

The basic change from the previous theater was bringing the audience in from the top rather than across the stage and reserving the corners for stage entrances. Around the ambulatory thus created, a leisurely flow between the lounge and the balconies is possible. This contrasts with the cramped quarters of commercial theaters, and provides the opportunity of surrounding the entire room with boxes, reached by stairs between the coupled columns supporting the roof, which along with the boxes finds expression on the exterior smoking balconies opening off the ambulatory as well as the corner boxes.

The volume of the room is established by the ceiling height of the boxes and also by optimum reverberation time, which in this case amounts of 1.2 seconds.

DECOR

The color, style and use of material are an interaction of the client's desires and the requirements of structure and space. The sober, undecorated, almost neutral environment was implied in the program. The building is what it wants to be to fulfill its role as a background for the art and is definitely subdued, that of a permanent building without commercial overtones, yet alive and responsive to its public. The lounge and lobby are carried out in the exterior materials, brick and concrete with black slate and travertine floors. The ceiling cornice repeats the line of the mansard roof. The auditorium is a rectangular space 100' x 106' over all.

SEPARATION OF ACTING AREA

Despite the pleasant informality of actors and audience sharing the stage for access and circulation, there are drawbacks which cannot be condoned in a built-to-purpose non-proscenium theater. If actors are to be able to enter from all sides, there is a conflict in circulation, in handling of late-comers, conflict during set changes at intermission, difficulty in having prop tables accessible to entrances yet unavailable to the audience, backtracking by audience in coming and leaving, the conspicuousness of it, and perhaps an arguable point, a violation by irrelevant traffic of the acting area reserved for the art. In this design the essential contact with the stage is kept, the separation being a 14" railing which continues up and around the stage entrance ramps in the four corners, a thin line of demarcation. This contains removable sections for special situations. The low rail and 9" steps of the first row fence off the sprawl of knees and feet which presents a disorderly fringe to most arena productions.

THE LIGHT AND SOUND BOOTH

Situated above the entrance to the auditorium is the lighting and sound control booth from which the lighting designer and sound technician can control their instruments in full view of the stage. From it access to the stagehouse and lighting canopy is gained through crawl-ways between the beams.

THE KREEGER THEATER

The Kreeger Theater addition fulfilled the need for more room at Arena. The flexible endstage and its 500-seat, fan-shaped house is strikingly different from the Arena. The stage has a back wall and wings. The seats are a lively purple, the carpet a burnished gold, the long, curved auditorium wall richly paneled in a brown velour -- as contrasted to the Arena where a vivid ambiance would distract the audience on the other sides of the stage. The houselights, unlike the muted ones in the Arena, continue the marquee motif used in the Arena and Kreeger entrances.

There are also significant similarities. The steep rake of the Arena seating is approached in the Kreeger, particularly in the low, encircling balcony. The stage is fully trapped and any part of it can be set at any level. A full grid and flyspace over the entire stage permit set pieces, props, even actors to be flown into and out of the playing area. Three exposed lighting catwalks over the audience plus side and onstage lighting positions provide an Arena-like capacity for design by light.

While the Kreeger stage, like the Arena, is conceived as a neutral and flexible space, it is defined chiefly by the back wall which gives to the stage a single focus.

Panels on each side of the stage may be pulled in to shutter the playing space to 30 feet; or they can be rolled out of the way, widening the space to 42 feet. There is no permanent proscenium. When desired, one can be created as part of the particularly scenic design. The same holds for a house curtain, a cyclorama, masking devices, and other traditional theater features. The first two rows of seats are removable and the stage can be thrust further into the audience.

The Rehearsal Room of the Kreeger is a duplicate of the Arena Stage -- the same size, fully trapped, with access aisles angled like the Arena's tunnels. A complete set can be put in here, used throughout the rehearsal period, and then moved overnight into the Arena, following the closing of the previous show. This means that complicated sets can be used for many weeks before the show opens; in the past -- as in most other theaters -- rehearsals took place on drop cloths marked for platforms, steps, elevators, turntables and the like, until two or three days before performances began.

This room was also created for the production of experimental theater, works-in-progress, dramatic readings, panel discussions -- a place where 125 theater people can participate from fold-away theater seats, in the development of new works and new ideas.

A 200-seat restaurant, with adjacent kitchen facilities, was provided in the design, to serve the Arena company, staff and patrons before and after the show. This facility remains uncompleted. There are provisions for a cabaret stage which is called the Old Vat Room.

A floating floor, designed to minimize noise transference, a high ceiling, and imaginative devices for storage and set construction characterize the new shop. Oversize doors lead from the shop to the Kreeger and Arena stages, the Rehearsal Room and the freight elevator which connects the three levels of the new building.

There are workrooms and storage areas throughout the building. One of them is a large triangle of space under the southwest lawn along Maine Avenue. Another is an oddly-shaped room under the auditorium which connects to the pit under the Kreeger Stage; another is the costume storage area, across the corridor from the administrative offices on the second floor.

The offices extend from a reception/switchboard room in two directions; along the north wall of the building are a business office, a design office and a library/conference room, and these are on a corridor leading to the Kreeger balcony; along the Potomac waterfront are a string of brightly lighted rooms for the directors and staff, and a kitchen for staff use. A large file room faces the central secretarial area. The intent in the office design was to eliminate physical separation of as many administrative and production functions as practical.

Dressing rooms, showers and a "green" room form a curved corridor near access stairways to the stage, on the bottom level of the building.

The envelope of the new building and its location on the site was determined by its link to the existing facilities, the architecture of Arena Stage, the fan-shaped auditorium and the restraints of a limited site.

The structure is reinforced concrete, masonry bearing walls and steel framing. Grouted piles are used to support building loads over an existing sewer under the north portion.

The exterior materials are brick, exposed concrete and painted sheet metal roof, all to match the Arena.

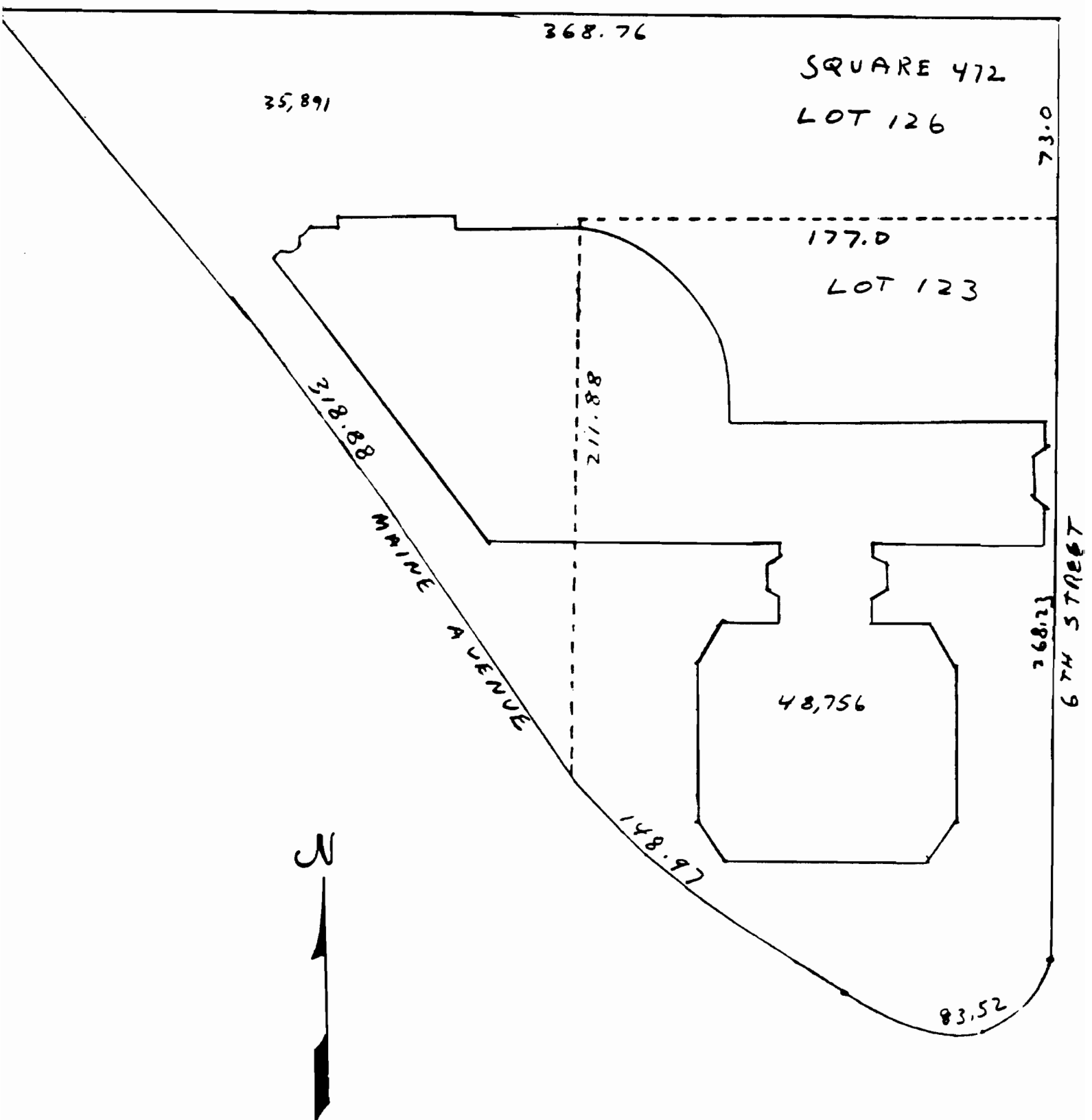
The auditorium materials are smooth painted plaster ceiling, painted plaster and fabric-faced walls and carpeted floors. Other interior finishes are travertine and exposed concrete floors, acoustical tile ceilings, acoustical wall panels and exposed masonry walls.

There is a parking area for 90 cars to be masked by a grove of trees. Trees are also to be used to articulate the relationship of the total building to the site.

310.23 If property is proposed for designation principally for its prehistoric, historic and/or cultural significance, a description of the existing physical condition of the property and its relation to the prehistoric, historic and/or cultural significance of the property.

The property is well kept up, and has not been altered.

310.24 A map showing the exact boundaries of the property proposed for designation; the square and lot number(s) or parcel numbers; square footage of property proposed for designation; north arrow; and contiguous streets.



310.25 Contemporary good quality photograph(s) of the property proposed for designation which provide a clear and accurate visual representation of the property and its setting; specify view, date of photograph and list credits, if any. 8" x 10" glossy photographs are preferred. In addition, applicant may supply slides (Applicant shall submit two copies of each photograph or slide.)

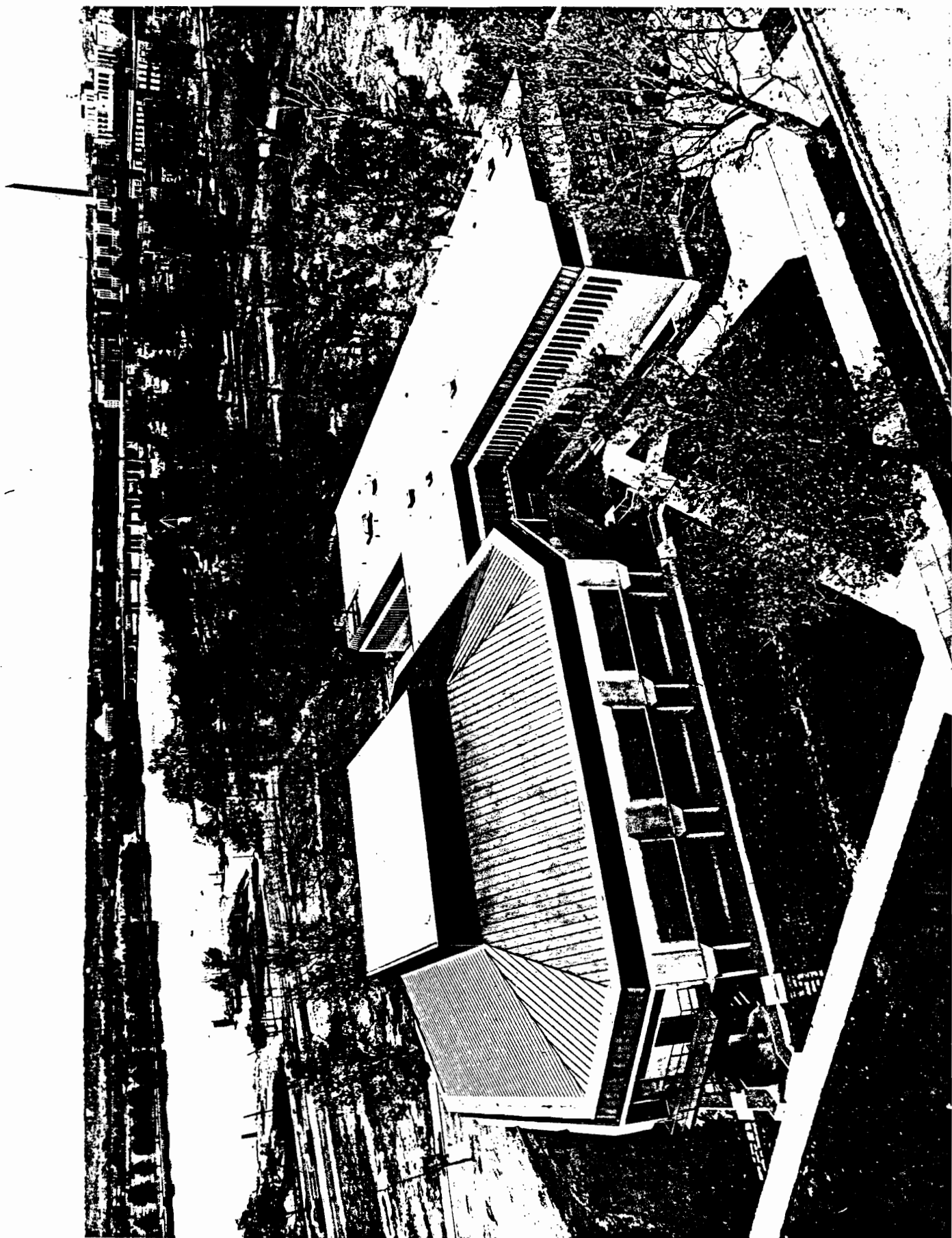
1. Exterior view of the Arena Stage from the northeast, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
2. Exterior View of the Arena Stage from the northeast at night, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
3. Exterior view of the Arena Stage from the southwest, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
4. Aerial view of the Arena Stage from the east, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
5. Exterior view of the Arena Stage from the south, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
6. Interior, Arena Stage Theater, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
7. Interior, Arena Stage Theater during American Premiere of The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Bertolt Brecht, Holmstrom translation, 1961, photo by B. Korab.
8. Interior, Arena Stage Theater during performance of World Premiere of Project Immortality by Loring Mandel, 1966, Arena Stage photo.
9. Aerial view of the Arena Stage from the northeast showing Kreeger addition in foreground, 1972, Arena Stage photo.
10. Interior, Kreeger Theater, 1970, Arena Stage photo.
11. Interior, Kreeger Theater during American Premier of The Ruling Class by Peter Barnes, 1971, photo by F. Drake.

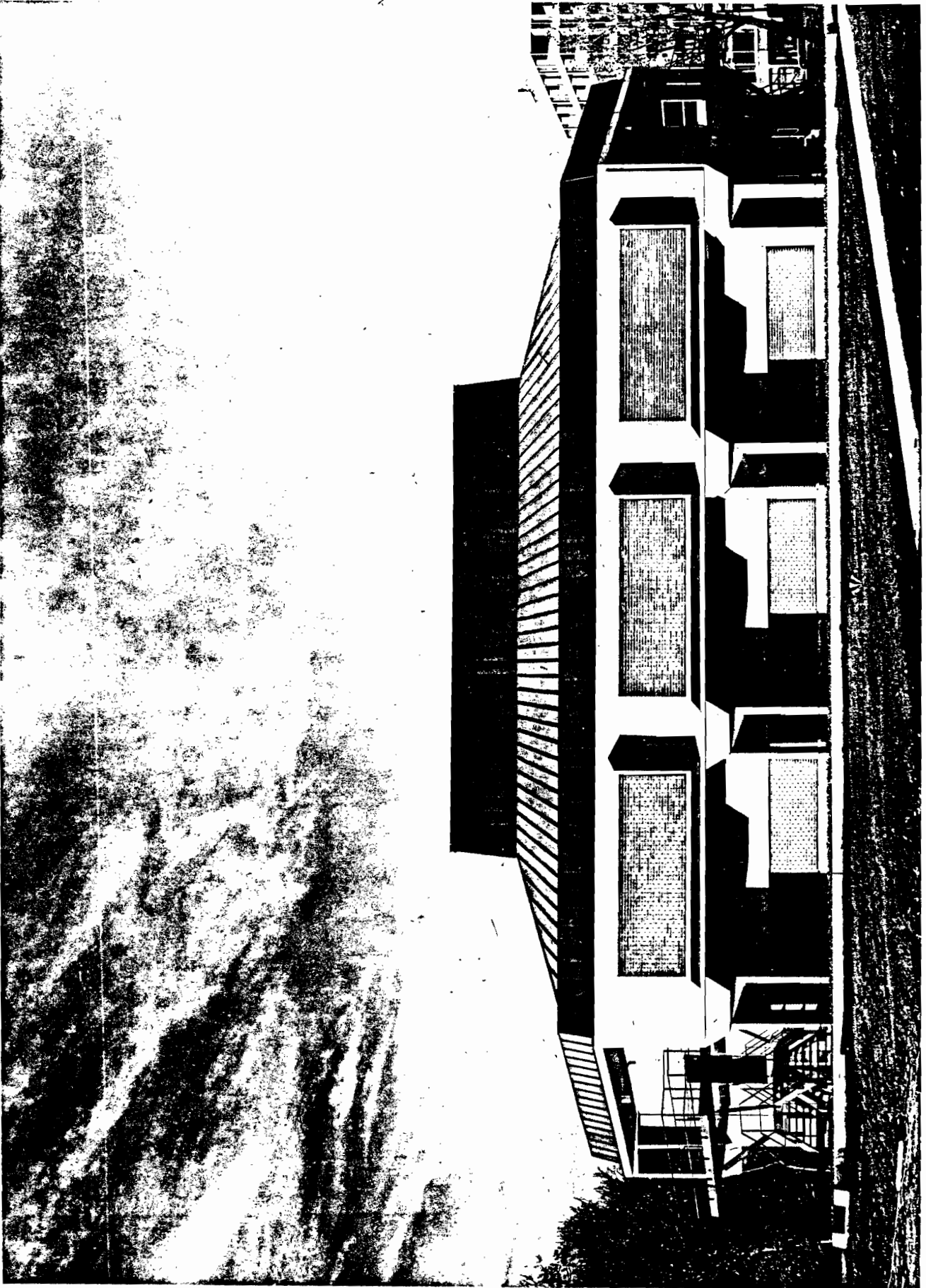
AIR ENGINE
SITE





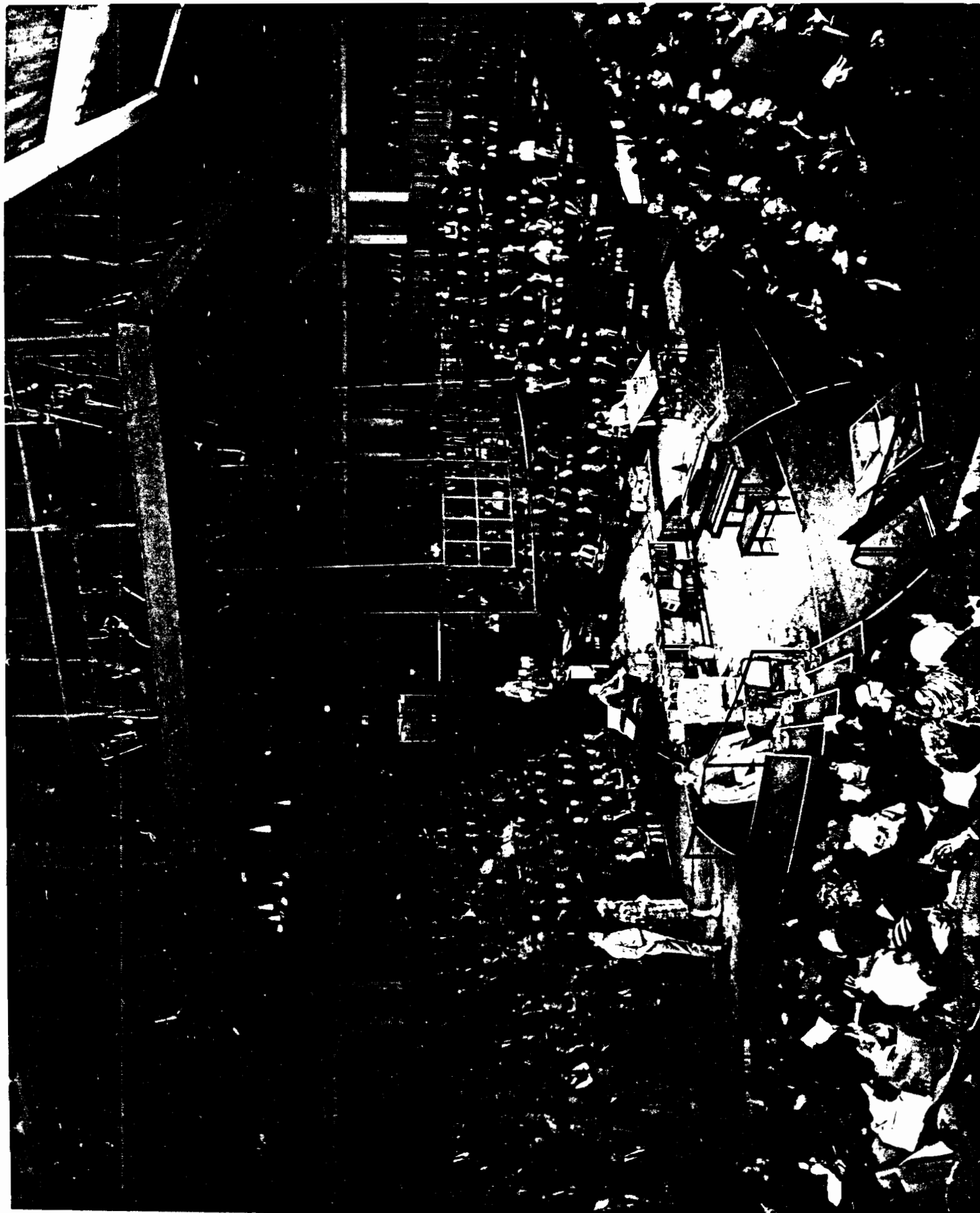






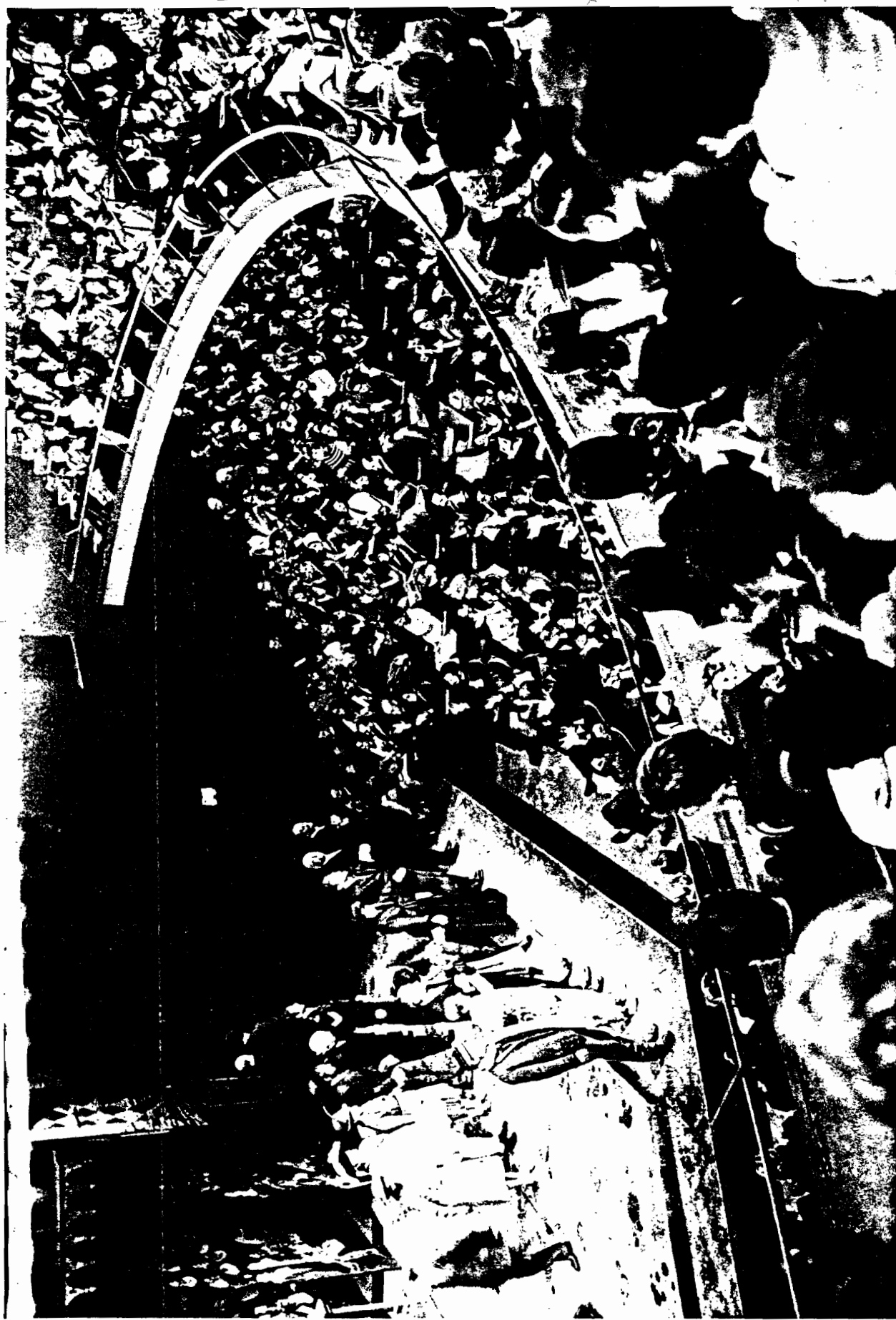












310.26 A LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND OTHER SOURCES USED TO PREPARE
THE APPLICATION; INDICATE WHERE THE REFERENCE MATERIAL IS ACHIEVED.

The newspaper articles and other ephemeral materials cited in the application are reproduced in the Appendix and archived at the Arena Stage, 6th and Maine Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20024. The treatises, books and texts cited below all discuss the role of the Arena Stage in American theater, and are, with one exception, available at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The periodicals cited are also available at the Library of Congress.

Aloi, Roberto, Teatri E Auditori, Milano; U. Hoepli, 1972.

Athanasopoulos, Chrēstos Geōrgiou.

(Problēmata stis exelixeis tou synchronou theatrou)

Προβλήματα στις εξελίξεις του σύγχρονου θεάτρου / υπό
Χρήστου Γ. Αθανασοπούλου. — Αθήνα : (s. n.), 1975.

Bonnichon, Andre (Villiers, pseud.), Le Theatre En Rond, Paris: Librairie
Theatrale, 1958.

Brockett, Oscar Gross, History of the Theatre, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977.

Brockett, Oscar Gross, The Theatre: An Introduction, New York: Holt, Rinehart
& Winston, 1979.

Brockett, Oscar Gross, Century of Innovation: A History of European & American
Theatre and Drama since 1870, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Brustein, Robert Sanford, The Culture Watch, New York: Knopf, 1975

Burris-Meyer, Harold, Theatres and Auditoriums, New York: Reinhold Publishing
Corp., 1964.

Cameron, Kenneth M., A Guide to Theatre Study, New York: Macmillan, 1974.

Cameron, Kenneth M., The Theatrical Response, New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Cheney, Sheldon, The Theatre: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting & Stage-
craft, London: Vision Press, 1972.

Cleaver, James, Theatre through the Ages, New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1967.

Creighton, Thomas H., American Architecture, Washington, D.C.: R. B. Luce, 1964.

Downer, Alan, Ed., The American Theater Today, New York: Basic Books, 1967.

Freedley, George, A History of the Theatre, New York: Crown Publishers, 1968.

Frolich, Petra, Das Nicht - Kommerzielle Amerikansche Theater,
Lampertheim: Schauble Verlag, 1974.

Gard, Robert Edward, Theater in America; Appraisal and Challenge, New York:
Theatre Arts Books, 1968.

Gottfried, Martin, A Theater Divided, Boston: Little, Brown, 1969.

Hartnoll, Phyllis, The Concise History of Theatre, New York: H. N. Abrams, 1968.

- Houghton, Norris, The Exploding Stage, New York: Wegbright & Talley, 1971.
- Izenour, Ledrege C., Theater Design, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977.
- Joseph, Stephen, Theater in the Round, London: Barrie & Rockcliff, 1967.
- Kauffmann, Stanley, Persons of the Drama: Theater Criticism and Comment, New York: Harper & Row, 1976,
- Kernodle, George, Invitation to the Theatre, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978
- Kerr, Walter, God on the Gymnasium Floor and Other Theatrical Adventures, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971.
- Kourilsky, Francoise, Le Theatre Aux Etats-Unis: Bruxelles; La Renaissance du Livre, 1967.
- Lewis, Emory, Stages: The Fifty-year Childhood of the American Theatre, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969.
- Lowry, Wilson McNeil, Ed., The Performing Arts and American Society. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978.
- MacGowan, Kenneth, Golden Ages of the Theater, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979.
- McCaslin, Nellie, Theatre for Children in the United States: A History, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.
- Mielziner, Jo, The Shapes of Our Theatre, New York: C. N. Potter, 1970.
- Netzer, Dick, The Subsidized Muse, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Parker, Wilford Oren, Scene Design and Stage Lighting, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979.
- Pasquier, Marie-Claire, Le Theatre Americain D'Aujourd'Hui, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Possi, Jack, Theater in America, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Roberts, Vera Mowry, On Stage, New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Ruhnau, Werner, Versammlungsstätten, (Guttersloh), Bertelsmann - Fachverlag, 1969.
- Ryan, Owen E., Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.: An Investigation, New Haven: Unpublished Thesis, Yale University Library, 1962.

Shubert, Hannelore, The Modern Theater; Architecture, Stage Design, Lighting, Translated by J. C. Palmes, New York: Praeser, 1971.

Stewart, H. Michael, American Architecture for the Arts, Kallas: Handel, 1978.

Taubman, Hyman Howard, The Making of the American Theatre, London: Longmans, 1967.

Whiting, Frank M., An Introduction to the Theatre, New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Wilson, Garff B., A History of American Acting, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966

Zeigler, Joseph Wesley, Regional Theater, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1973.

Dean, Andrea O. "Harry Weese of Chicago, Winner of AIA's 1978 Firm Award" AIA Journal, May 1978, pp. 56-65.

"Theaters," Progressive Architecture, October 1965, pp. 160-220.

"Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.," Players: The Magazine of the American Theatre, December - January 1972. pp. 54.

"Arena Stage: Interviews with Zelda Fichandler, David Chambers and Thomas Fichandler," Theater, Summer 1979. pp. 21 - 32.

ADDENDUM

Atkinson, Brooks, Broadway, revised edition, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., NY 1974.

Guthrie, Tyrone, A New Theater, Mc Graw Hill, NY 1964.

Gottfried, Martin, Opening Nights: Theater Criticism of the Sixties, G.P. Putman's Sons, NY 1969.

Vaughn, Stuart A Possible Theater Mc Graw Hill, NY 1969.

Stevens, David, ed., Ten Talents in the American Theater, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1975.

312.21 A Statement of the Prehistoric, Historic,
Architectural and/or Cultural Significance of
the Property Proposed for Designation.

The Arena Stage is proposed for designation as an historic landmark on two bases, each of which is significant in and of itself, but which together represent a local and national importance clearly deserving recognition under the National Historic Preservation Act. The Arena Stage is significant for both its cultural and architectural importance. While these aspects of Arena Stage will be discussed and documented separately, it is important to remember that they are inextricably intertwined. The artistic concept of theater in the round, which has brought the Arena Stage its international acclaim, could not exist without an appropriate theater in which to perform. Likewise, the Arena Stage building has achieved its prominence in theater architecture by so successfully meeting the demands of the artistic concept which it houses.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

The Congress, in enacting the National Historic Preservation Act, set forth among its purposes that the "cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development..."¹ To this end, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to maintain and expand a National Register of buildings which were of significance in such areas as American architecture and culture.² A National Register had existed before, but the Congress, when it enacted the Preservation Act, intended something very special and previously unheard of. As articulated in the House report, the Congress recognized:

Many...(historic sites) which are worthy of protection because of their archeological, architectural or cultural significance at the community, state or regional level have little protection given to them against the force of the wrecking ball. Some of them are not even known outside of a small circle of specialists. It is important that they be brought to light and that attention be focused on their significance whenever proposals are made....To help provide the protection which is needed, (the Act) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to maintain a register of areas, structures, and objects which are significant historically, architecturally, archeologically, or

¹16 United States Code 470(b) ²16 United States Code 470a (a)(1)

culturally. This register, which will consist of places of local, state and regional as well as national significance, will serve as a convenient guide to properties which should be preserved for the inspiration and benefit of this and future generations.³

The new legislative mandate was clear. The focus would no longer rest solely on those sites where historic value arose from some momentous if transitory event of the distant past, but also on those sites which form the warp and woof of our cultural heritage. The Congress recognized that the United States had reached a point in its development when it was literally creating its own culture rather than importing culture from abroad. While the fate of the Nation might be determined by the battles it fought, the identity of the nation rested upon a more delicate structure which was to be recognized and preserved.

Listing in the National Register therefore, is more than a ceremonial act. It means not only that the site has significance, but also that it must be protected and preserved by its owners. It establishes, in essence, a trusteeship for the future, preserving the past as an inspiration for the coming generations. Yet, even a place in the National Register can do no more than certify the importance of the structure. Fully half the buildings listed on the National Register have been razed, and it is impossible to estimate the number of structures of cultural significance which have been lost to posterity because they lacked the imprimatur which listing in the National Register represents.

It is both the relative youth of our country and a sophisticated understanding of history which led to the establishment of a special category of historic sites under fifty years of age for listing in the National Register. The importance of an historic event can be immediate, or it can require the judgement of time. The crack of an assassin's gun or the beginning of a voyage to the moon immediately fixes a place and a moment in time, insuring its significance to succeeding generations. The moment of Abraham Lincoln's death, Ford's Theater attained historic significance. A century later, the historic significance of Cape Canaveral could not be denied as man first walked on the moon.

Room 405 at the Jones Laboratory, University of Chicago, where the element plutonium was first isolated, likewise became historic when that event occurred in 1942. Indeed, some sites became historic because they are of such consummate beauty or significance that their importance in our heritage and the necessity of their preservation cannot be denied. Dulles Airport, nominated to the National Register at the age of 16 years, is but one example.

³House Rept. No. 1916, 89th Cong., 2nd Session

Other sites and structures became important not so much in and of themselves, but because they are part of a dying breed. Generally, they are older than fifty years, but more and more often they are younger. The USS Silversides, a World War II submarine constructed in 1941, is an example of this category.

The essence of historic significance, therefore, is the evaluation and fixing of an event within its historic context. Edward Fitzgerald translated this concept, which had bridged eight centuries and two disparate cultures, this way:

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on; Nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line.

The existence of the Arena Stage for the past thirty years cannot be denied. The task, therefore, is to assess its cultural, and architectural impact and significance on Washington and the Nation.

THE ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARENA STAGE THEATER

The assessment of a building erected less than fifty years prior to its nomination to the National Register is admittedly difficult and somewhat subjective. The vagaries of architectural fashion, combined with the popular inclination to consider as monuments all newly constructed buildings of merely monumental scale, demand that the importance of a structure be viewed with the detachment of historical perspective. Further, there is the clear need in the case of living architects not to confuse listing in the National Register with bestowing an award for architectural merit. Consequently, it is important to present a comprehensive discussion of the architectural merit of the building.

The importance of the Arena Stage Theater will be explored in two areas. The first evaluation will relate to the architectural and urban design merit of the physical structure, and will reference architectural critics, books and magazines, and design awards. In this regard, the building as a manifestation of its time and period will be analyzed. The second evaluation will relate to the theatrical merit of the space which the physical structure defines, and will reference theater critics and others whose exposure to theaters as a building type has been extensive. This latter evaluation is particularly important, for architectural merit (as contrasted with historic merit) is determined by more than the creation of a sculpture large enough to contain people. A building of true significance is one that can make peoples' emotions soar while at the same time successfully meeting the needs which gave rise to it.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

If one were to delineate the intrinsic purpose of a theater, it would be as a home for fantasy and the site of communal experience. From its earliest beginnings, the theater was a place for people to congregate and to focus on reality distilled into fantasy or religious experience. The theater-in-the-round structure was essential to the early development of this concept, for it allowed large numbers of spectators to experience the performance at relatively close hand. Indeed, the theater of Dionysus accommodated 17,000 spectators without apparently diminishing the effectiveness of the presentation. As the Greek and then Roman theater developed, the audience was arranged in an extended semicircle. The essential action remained within the traditional circular format, however.

The medieval theater carried on this tradition. The Wakefield and York cycles of mystery plays appear to have been carried out in the round, and this tradition continued in a somewhat modified form through the Elizabethan period when performances took place upon a thrust platform extending into a courtyard. In Italy, the same phenomenon occurred with the *commedia dell'arte*. Even in the Orient, early Chinese and Japanese theater was presented on thrust stages similar to the kind on which Shakespeare's works were performed.

What, then, led in the 18th century to the proscenium arch theater so familiar today? Indeed, what led during this same period to the utilization of elaborate scenery, stage machinery and theater decor, rather than the actor-centered productions of earlier periods?

The answer lies in a changing pattern of society. Theater-in-the-round was essentially democratic. The audience was homogeneous in class and in experience. Slaves and the lower classes did not attend performances during the Greek and Roman periods (except, perhaps, to be eaten by lions), and the feudal hierarchy in urban centers was not elaborate during the Middle Ages and into the 17th century. As society became stratified and then rarefied, particularly in the court-oriented centers such as London and Paris, it became necessary to both separate the levels of society in the theater and limit attendance to the nobility. The number of seats was reduced, therefore, and a series of physical tiers was developed separating the varying grades of gentry. Because the purpose was no longer to communally share an experience, the audience became independent observers of stories framed by the proscenium arch -- literally moving works of art or tableaux. The theater buildings and the productions they housed became elaborate and highly decorative to reflect their now-limited clientele. It should be noted, however, that the popular (i.e., lower class) forms of entertainment, such as circuses and sporting events, retained the arena (theater-in-the-round) format throughout this period, and even today.

It is not surprising that as political and social opposition to that way of life developed at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, there also developed a parallel movement in the theater called "new stagecraft." The supporters of new stagecraft attempted to free themselves from the stylized theater of earlier periods by moving away from the picture frame concept and toward a linear unity of audience and performance space. Max Reinhardt in Germany and other European directors went so far as to return to three-sided productions in the Elizabethan manner. While not presenting theater-in-the-round per se, the new stagecraft movement utilized the same premises, as they eliminated the proscenium arch and even the backdrop and scrim.

Architects also sensed the social implications of theater-in-the-round and began to develop designs for a new generation of arena theaters during the first half of the 20th century. Norman Bel Geddes proposed a theater-in-the-round in his Project #14 created for the Century Progress Exhibit at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Also in 1933, Frederick Kiesler, a New York architect, proposed a community arts center in Woodstock, New York, utilizing an arena format. Through the 1940's and 1950's, there were other proposals by architects for theaters-in-the-round. None of these proposed structures was ever constructed, however. Indeed, except for an experimental 172-seat house at the University of Washington designed by a drama professor and constructed by the building and grounds department, American theater-in-the-round prior to the Arena Stage was restricted to makeshift and made-over facilities.

The turning point for American theater-in-the-round came with the development of the "Regional Theater Movement," of which the Arena Stage was the exemplar. The Regional Theater Movement is comprehensively discussed in terms of its cultural significance later in this application. It had a social aspect as well, however, which fostered the construction of the Arena Stage Theater itself. Much as the Regional Theater Movement rejected New York theater and its values, so it also rejected the physical constraints of New York theaters. It sought both new theater and new theaters. Just as the Regional Theater Movement democratized theater and brought it to the people, it also looked backwards to those theater forms which embodied these democratic principles. Thus, it was almost inevitable that the theater-in-the-round would find itself resurrected and thrust center stage at this point in theater history. The Arena Stage Theater was a product of its times; fifteen years before it would likely have remained a fascinating but unexecuted design concept. In 1960 when construction began, however, it was symbolic of the strength of the Regional Theater Movement and the success it was experiencing throughout the country. Indeed, the resurgence of theater throughout the nation was to a significant degree responsible for the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965.

THE WASHINGTON CONTEXT

Theaters have, of course, always played an important community role. As described above, the theater has from its earliest beginnings been a place for the community to congregate, be it for a religious experience as in earlier times or a dramatic catharsis as it is today.

In either case, the theater was and is a place for people to assemble and share an experience which takes them out of themselves. Thus, the importance of a theater to the community in which it is located is established early on and almost without fail. This explains why American theaters of all periods are well represented in the National Register. They range from the Walnut Street Theater of 1809 to theaters less than 50 years old, such as the Toyo in Honolulu and the Ohio Theater in Columbus.

The Arena Stage Theater was the first to be built in Washington since 1895, a period of 65 years. Several years before its construction, one of the two existing legitimate houses, the Shubert, closed, leaving only the National Theater. The Arena Stage Theater inspired -- perhaps even spawned -- a new generation of Washington theater construction and renovation. Constructed in the years which immediately followed were the Hartke Theater at Catholic University, the Marvin Theater at George Washington University, the Terrace and the Eisenhower Theaters at the Kennedy Center, and the American Theater in L'Enfant Plaza. Renovated and turned into working houses were Ford's Theater, the Folger Theater, the new Washington Theater Club (now the West End Movie Theater), and the original Washington Theater Club, as well as a number of smaller spaces.

A similar effect was seen elsewhere in the country, as regional theater emulated Arena Stage's repertory, subscription season and construction of a modern, efficient theater through public support. New theaters were particularly important to the regional theater movement. Much as the American dream has always been to own one's own home, so the dream of regional theater companies is to own their own theater. While an influence of this nature is usually discovered by a doctoral candidate a number of years after it has occurred, there was an almost instantaneous recognition of Arena's influence in Washington and nationally by the theater community.⁴

A second important point necessary to place the Arena Stage Theater in its historic context is that it was the first permanent, professional theater to be designed specifically in the United States for theater-in-the-round. Previously, theaters-in-the-round had been adapted for the purpose. As a prototypic structure, therefore, it has historic significance along with its architectural significance, as is noted in a large number of the architectural evaluations in this country, as well as abroad.⁵

⁴See, for example, App. 218, 220 ⁵App. 256, 257, 296

Prototypic structures which were either the first or the largest of their type, even when constructed less than fifty years ago, have often been listed in the National Register. Some examples are: Horton Test Sphere (1951), Reber Radio Telescope (1937); and Lighter-than-Air-Ship Hangar (1943).

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

What of architectural beauty I now see, I know has gradually grown from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the indweller....

Henry David Thoreau, Walden

The quotation cited above was chosen by the American Institute of Architects to preface its description of the Arena Stage in A Guide to the Architecture of Washington.⁶ This quotation is particularly apt, for the Arena Stage Theater is a proud statement of its function. Indeed, its form not only follows its function, it declares that function. This is not the recasting of a traditional building type in a new role, but rather a statement of arrival. As such, it is highly expressive in a symbolic as well as a functional way. The architect did not attempt to mask its purpose behind a prosaic facade, but heralded the theater as precisely that. Indeed, for the reasons described above, the Arena Stage Theater was a declaration of independence from the constraints of New York City.

In this respect, it is interesting to contrast the federal response to the same phenomenon, the Kennedy Center, with the Arena Stage Theater. The Kennedy Center is aloof, massive, unexciting in its attempt to be inspiring, and purposely made inaccessible except by automobile. It replicates the design signature of its architect, and could contain anything from the Eisenhower Theater to a warren of Congressional offices. On the other hand, the Arena Stage Theater is gutsy, something of a show-off, and easily accessible. The Kennedy Center dares one to attend; the Arena Stage Theater dares one to pass it by.

The Arena Stage Theater accomplishes this purpose by being expressive of the very complex functions which occur within it, yet unusually simple, forthright and a good neighbor. Paralleling the productions of the Arena Stage company, the Theater is dramatic in the way it presents reality. This is most apparent at night when lighting is used to heighten the theatricality of the building.

A large measure of the architectural significance of the Arena Stage Theater springs from the approach of the architect, Harry Weese, to the unique aspects of the design problem. On one hand, as discussed above, a theater is a gathering place for the community and

⁶App. 290A

must be of an appropriate scale and of architectural excellence. On the other hand, a theater cannot by its very nature interfere with or detract from the suspension of reality which must occur within it.

When the lights go down in a theater, the audience must be transported elsewhere in time and space and emotion. The theater structure must no longer exist. Unlike a proscenium stage with a backdrop or scrim, this architectural sleight of hand is made even more difficult in an arena format where the audience is literally looking across the stage at another part of the audience.

In solving this design problem, Weese employed what may be called a stream of consciousness technique to discover the real needs of his clients. Aside from the traditional architect - client interviews, the actors, directors and technicians of Arena Stage met over two days to interact and create an eight hour tape recording which articulated their needs, desires and fears.⁷ Peter Collins, writing in the Manchester (Eng.) Guardian of November 15, 1962, ties the result to architectural functionalism and the "Theater of Totality" movement.⁸

Since Arena Stage Theater was the first permanent, professional theater to be designed for the theater-in-the-round format, the "problem was to separate the expedient from the valid," as an appreciation in the February 1962 Interbuild put it.⁹ The internal needs of the space were met by creating a particularly large stage, thus also creating a neutral zone which could be absorbed by lighting. While seating occurs on only eight floor tiers and, a box-tier, the theater seats 827.

The theater itself is in neutral tones, yet all mechanical work, such as lighting, is fully exposed.¹⁰ Thus, any spark of curiosity about how some piece of technical business is accomplished is immediately extinguished, allowing the theater-goer to focus on the performance.

Another structural element with psychological overtones is the placement of the seating 36" center to center.¹¹ In this way, the members of the audience are immediately sensitized and then desensitized to each other, becoming part of a collective where individual space cannot be staked out.

The external appearance of the theater is octagonal, reflecting its internal function.¹² The stage and seating area are separated from the business - administrative areas by a land bridge which not only draws the audience in, but severs them spatially and psychologically from the non-theatrical elements of the theater.

⁷App. 354, 260, 267 ⁸App. 274 ⁹App. 267 ¹⁰App. 259
¹¹App. 231 ¹²App. 242

URBAN RENEWAL AREA

Part of the importance of the externalities of the Arena Stage theater is its placement in the Southwest urban renewal area. When constructed, there was no need to mesh with its environs: there were none. The theater was not only creating its own environment, it was also defining the spatial relationship and architectural quality of the surrounding renewal area.

Its catalytic effect is nowhere clearer than with the restaurants and other structures along the waterfront. Each was required by the Fine Arts Commission to adhere to the buff brick and terre roof of the Arena Stage Theater. Likewise, the apartment complexes adjoining the theater were clearly influenced by the design and form of its neighbor, particularly the brick work and strong vertical line. Equally important, the Arena Stage Theater played a major role in the humanizing of the area. It created a nighttime magnet softening the office-business orientation of the southwest and creating a vitality which is so obviously necessary to maintain a cohesive community.

The success of the Arena Stage Theater in the urban renewal context was articulated in The New Southwest: A Walking Guide¹³ and an article in the New York World Telegram.¹⁴

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Architectural critics have also found the theater impressive. Frederick Gutheim in The Washington Post in October 1961 said:

"To make a point of it, the architecture of the new show house is much like the plays its company gives. In the building we have the same kind of illusion-free reality, the same concentration upon essentials, the same winning simplicity and naturalness....With this step forward the Arena Stage has established Washington in the world of our national theater. In this marriage between progressive theater and its appropriate architectural setting developments may be expected that are denied Broadway with its antique show houses, new but static theaters in college art centers and even such efforts as Frank Lloyd Wright's Apron Stage Theater in Dallas."¹⁵

¹³App. 300 ¹⁴App. 69 ¹⁵App. 258

The New York Times called the theater a "new cultural landmark, solidly useful yet architecturally distinctive."¹⁶

An article in The New York Times Magazine in February 1962 entitled "Search for New Stages" cited the Arena Stage Theater as having "won national attention by its effective dedication to unconventional stage techniques and plays..."¹⁷

Plenth, in the Potomac Valley Architect, observed:

Close scrutiny of the Arena Stage, a sharp-edged, strangely modeled yet low-keyed buff brick and concrete walled exponent of a new architecture and a new theater, generates excitement among sensitive viewers and theatergoers. The excitement has a double aspect, one part associated with discovering how the character of the building permeates one's consciousness and the other keyed to witnessing a performance. On this dual nature hinges any evaluation of the building; on the one hand as an example of the means by which raw exposed materials are joined to create a unique spatial experience; on the other, judging the structure as a setting for staging and viewing plays. The special significance of the Arena Stage is that with either critical base one's praise is equally high....The Arena, by echoing one art through another, illustrates the highest purposes of our society, and its success should serve as a beacon."¹⁸

Wolf Van Eckardt, writing in the Washington Post, called the Arena Stage Theater "one of the most outstanding buildings of the past decade...marvelous in its architectural clarity."¹⁹ The building was also of considerable interest to foreign architects.²⁰

Theater critics agreed with their architectural colleagues in evaluating the Arena Stage Theater. Brooks Atkinson in The New York Times called it "a little gem of a building, modestly and beautifully designed by Harry Weese."²¹ Jay Carmody in the Star described it as a "lovely, stunning functional building... a Washington showplace henceforth in the richest sense of the word."²² Norman Nadel in the New York World-Telegram said the theater "manages to achieve both the intimacy of arena theater and the acoustics of proscenium. It treats the 750 people in each audience to comfort, good hearing and sight lines. And it manages to make almost every other theater seem obsolete, so well does it function."²³ Eliot Norton, writing in the Boston Record American called it "a unique brick-and-

¹⁶App. 262 ¹⁷App. 266 ¹⁸App. 278 ¹⁹App. 293
²⁰App. 274, 282, 280, 296 ²¹App. 65 ²²App. 68 ²³App. 69

glass structure....(which) is extraordinary in appearance, and so stimulates curiosity."²⁴ Wayne Johnson in The Seattle Times said:

This....theater is the best arena playhouse I've ever seen...It's a handsome, eminently playable theater, which, unlike most arena stages (they are usually slapped into buildings that were designed for other purposes), was cleverly designed (by Harry Weese of Chicago) to realize the maximum potential of the arena style.²⁵

KREEGER ADDITION

In 1970, the Kreeger Theater was added to the Arena Stage Theater.²⁶ It is essentially a 500 seat, proscenium theater, although with considerable flexibility. In Washington's Urban Renewal Project Areas, the Kreeger was described as a "major contribution to the City's cultural life."²⁷ Wolf Van Echardt in The Washington Post said: "Harry Weese, who designed the Arena Stage a decade ago has now designed for one of the finest repertory companies in the country one of the finest theater buldings in the country."²⁸ Roderick Nordell in The Christian Science Monitor adopted a description of the Kreeger first coined by Zelda Fichandler, calling it "a simple, direct naked space."²⁹

AWARDS

The Arena Stage Theater received the Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade Award for Excellence in Architecture in 1961³⁰ and again in 1965,³¹ the Masonry Institute First Place Award, Public Buildings Category in 1962³² and the Merit Award of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1966. It was the only Washington building to be included in "Architecture USA," a United States Information Agency exhibition sent abroad.³³

THE ARCHITECT

The architect of the Arena Stage Theater was Harry Weese, an architect of particular importance to Washington. Along with the Arena Stage Theater, his work in Washington includes the METRO subway system and the completion of the Federal Triangle. As different as these projects are in size, scope and cost, they demonstrate that Weese

²⁴App. 105 ²⁵App. 105 ²⁶App. 237 ²⁷App. 290 ²⁸App. 293
²⁹App. 298 ³⁰App. 301 ³¹App. 295 ³²App. 302 ³³App. 306

designs first for the client and then for himself. He is an architect's architect whose work is characterized by a deftness in his design solutions. In meeting his clients' needs with imagination and vigor, he continues in the tradition of the Chicago school of architecture where he received his training.

In this regard, it is instructive to compare the Arena Stage Theater and the METRO project. In the Arena Stage Theater, Weese created a building meant to catch the imagination of Washington and the Nation. It was designed to be symbolic of the company which performed within it, and it served that function well. In essence, it succeeds as both theater and monument.

The design for METRO, however, was meant to accomplish precisely the opposite effect. In a city of monuments, it was important to mesh the subway system with the urban fabric. The entrances to the system were to be discernable without being intrusive; the stations were to be impressive without being ornate. Weese accomplished both objectives. METRO exists, but does not distract.

If there is a gestalt theory of architecture, the Arena Stage Theater would exemplify it. The interaction of the building with its total universe of users and non-users, along with aesthetic principles, created the design matrix from which the structure arose. This represented a welcome refinement of the form follows function concept, which in less skilled hands results in a building whose innards are often displayed in a not initially pleasing fashion. The final result in the case of the Arena Stage Theater is a building which works without sacrificing aesthetics to prove the architect's commitment to functionalism. The Arena Stage Theater neither shocks nor seeks cheap thrills, but on the other hand does not seek refuge in the trite or mundane.

Following the Arena Stage Theater project, Weese was commissioned to design a number of other theaters. Information concerning these projects is found in the Appendix,³⁴ as is biographic and related material concerning Weese and his work.³⁵ Weese has received a number of awards for his work. Among his most important projects are the Walton Apartment Complex and Time and Life Building in Chicago, United States Embassy structures in Ghana and Japan, and a number of large scale plans for the Northeast Railroad Corridor, the University of Maryland Baltimore Core Campus, and the Chicago Waterfront (Pro Bono Publico). Harry Weese and Associates won the AIA firm award in 1978.

³⁴App. 329-351 ³⁵App. 311-327

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARENA STAGE

There appears below a discussion of the history of the Arena Stage as a cultural monument, seen almost entirely through the eyes of theater critics and other authorities in the area. One can see the ever increasing importance of the Arena Stage, first to the Nation's Capital, then to the Nation, and finally in an international context. While this history of the Arena Stage is primarily presented through critics of the day, the bibliography cites those treatises, books, and texts which discuss the role of the Arena Stage in American theater.

In the beginning, there were encouraging words but little hope held out for the struggling company. By 1953, however, the Arena Stage had firmly established itself as the principle theatrical resource of Washington.

In 1951, a national recognition began to evolve. Begun by the New York press, Arena Stage was at first singled out for the quality of its productions and then as the paradigm of a new movement in America, the regional theater. Attention soon spread across the nation, as other localities began to emulate what Arena had done in Washington. This interest culminated in the presentation to Arena of a "Tony Award" by the American Theater Wing in 1976.

The Arena Stage began to achieve its international importance almost from the beginning because of Washington's status as an international city, but realized prominence for four basic reasons. First, the Weese theater, as one of the finest examples of theater architecture in this century, as well as the first permanent, professional theater-in-the-round constructed for that purpose, attracted interest from around the world. Secondly, the world and American premieres presented at Arena drew international cultural interest. Third, the designation of the Arena Stage as the first United States theater to travel to Russia on a cultural exchange drew interest from other countries, with such results as the recent (February 1980) invitation to be the first American theater company to participate in the Hong Kong International Arts Festival. Finally, the Arena Stage became a favored stop on the State Department tour for international visitors. Indeed, as early as 1961, a letter from the Director of Cultural Exchange of the Department of State, said:

You have no idea, I am sure, of the favorable impression your unique and brilliant theatrical productions have made on the Department's great many foreign guests who have been privileged to see these plays as guests of Arena Stage. Your new and vital approach in so many theater techniques has added greatly to the estimation of American cultural life in the minds of our foreign guests.³⁶

³⁶App. 353

THE EARLY YEARS

The Arena Stage opened in Washington in August of 1950 in the Hippodrome, a movie house at Ninth and K Streets, NW. Ernie Schier, writing in the Washington Times-Herald praised the concept as one promising "to be a much-needed shot in the arm for Washington theater."³⁷ Noting that the Arena Stage would bring to Washington a permanent, low priced (\$1.90) repertory theater, Mr. Schier was particularly impressed with the fact that at that very moment Broadway was "buzzing with excitement over the new, novel (for New York) arena theater which opened... in the Hotel Edison." It is ironic to note that while the Arena Stage has survived, the much heralded New York Arena Theater, not to mention the Hotel Edison and the Washington Times-Herald, are no longer in existence.

The Arena Stage quickly established itself in Washington. As Jay Carmody put it in the Star of September 3, 1950: "It could be that Arena Stage, now in the third week of its first production, is the long-sought answer to Washington community theater problem."³⁸ Indeed, the Arena Stage was at that time Washington's only legitimate theater. The National Theater had converted itself into a movie theater rather than yield to the Actors' Equity demand that it desegregate.³⁹ National attention, although slight, was also quick in coming with a report in the October 1950 Theater Arts, the premier theater magazine at that time.⁴⁰

During that first season, the Arena presented the world premiere of THE DELECTABLE JUDGE by E. P. Conkle and MR. ARCULARIS by Conrad Aiken and Diana Hamilton.

Within a year, national attention was beginning to focus on the Arena Stage. The New York Times on July 1, 1951, heralded the "Theater success story from Washington" in an article which noted the acceptance of the company in the Washington community and the Washington connection of the actors and actresses.⁴¹ Even Variety, the bible of the trade, felt compelled to note that The New York Times critic, Brooks Atkinson, had broken with tradition and reviewed plays which had opened off-Broadway, in London, and at the Arena Stage in Washington.⁴² (In 1959, Mr. Atkinson would write: "I think I have visited Arena Stage and written about it in The New York Times more frequently than I have visited any theater outside New York City."⁴³)

Washington's theater critics community was no longer measuring the Arena Stage by purely local levels either. Tom Donnelly, in the Washington Daily News, wrote a substantial piece comparing the Broadway production of Clifford Odets THE COUNTRY GIRL to the Arena Stage production, finding the latter far superior.⁴⁴

³⁷App. 1 ³⁸App. 2 ³⁹App. 13 ⁴⁰App. 3 ⁴¹App. 8 ⁴²App. 6
⁴³App. ⁴⁴App. 7

The Arena Stage was also breaking ground technically as well as artistically. In 1952, it became the first theater-in-the-round in the country to use a fly system for set changes.⁴⁵ During the 1951-52 season, the Arena presented the world premiers of LADDER TO THE MOON by Holmes Alexander and ALL SUMMER LONG by Robert Anderson.

By the fall of 1952, the Arena Stage was a fully established fixture in Washington's cultural life. The Washington Board of Trade News, in an article headlined "Arena Stage Becomes D.C. Landmark," pointed to the broad makeup of Arena Stage audiences.⁴⁶ Variety noted that each new Arena Stage production drew the first-string critics from the four major dailies, and that in its first three seasons, the Arena Stage drew over 150,000 persons at a \$2 top to its 247 seat theater.⁴⁷

By early 1953, the Arena Stage had become more than a local theater, and this role which was to echo through the succeeding years. The Arena Stage had become a concept, a paradigm of what could be done by a "resident theater." Reviewing ALL SUMMER LONG in The New York Times Brooks Atkinson said:

The value of a resident theater goes beyond the merits of any single production. In its third season, Arena Stage, with its professional company, supplies Washington theatergoers with a balanced diet that Broadway might well feel wistful about.⁴⁸

The Arena Stage had established its role as the premier local theater by 1953. Writing in Theater Arts in June 1953, Ralph Ginzburg described the Arena Stage as: "solid, warm, honest-to-goodness theater (for Washingtonians) to call their own."⁴⁹ Also impressive was the broad cross-section of Washingtonians who had filled Arena Stage's seats to near capacity during its first three years, particularly the "international segment" which had made Arena "the country's best known 'little' theater abroad."⁵⁰ Articles about Arena appeared in newspapers in Italy, the Philippines, France, and Hong Kong, and visitors from eight countries attended the theater.⁵¹ Another tradition begun during the Arena Stage's third season was the transfer of one of its premieres, ALL SUMMER LONG to Broadway, along with its director and part of its cast.⁵² Several years later, the production was to return to the National Theater.

The 1953-54 season found the Arena Stage producing world premieres of THE BAD ANGEL by Joe Hammil and THE CRETAN WOMAN by Robinson Jeffers. The production of THE CRETAN WOMAN brought general praise from Brooks Atkinson of The New York Times who said that "the production shows that at the end of its fourth continuous season, Zelda Fichandler's Arena Stage has enterprise and taste."⁵³ This sentiment was echoed by Variety, which called the Arena Stage "robust" at the

⁴⁵App. 9 ⁴⁶App. 10 ⁴⁷App. 11 ⁴⁸App. 12 ⁴⁹App. 13
⁵⁰App. 13 ⁵¹App. 14 ⁵²App. 15 ⁵³App. 16

end of its fourth season, and noted the "unusual amount of civic support it had received from this voteless town."⁵⁴ In December 1953, Washington's premier critic, Richard Coe of the Post, offered his annual "columnar greetings" to the Arena Stage as "representative" of Washington's theater world, since its productions and special programs had given Washington something "to be proud of."⁵⁵

Evidently pleased with the savings in postage, Mr. Coe sent the Arena Stage a "birthday card" via the Post when it began its fifth season in August 1954. Said Coe:

Since (Arena)... opened August 16, 1950, the company has mounted 45 productions, played nearly 1,500 performances for over 250,000 people.... In short, four active years have earned Arena Stage the trust of the community. May it continue to flourish....⁵⁶

Arena's national reputation did continue to flourish. The AP moved a story from Washington about "one of the most successful theatrical experiments in recent years, the Arena Stage," and even the Patterson, N.J. Morning Call thought it important enough to print.⁵⁷ During that 1954-55 season, the Arena presented the American premiere of THE MOUSETRAP by Agatha Christie, the London production of which went on to become the longest running legitimate play in history. More important than this premiere, however, was the overall quality of the productions at Arena during a season which saw both the National and Schubert theaters go dark from lack of acceptable road shows. Writing in the Star in February 1955, Jay Carmody attributed the success of the Arena (and a smaller company at Catholic University) to the "caliber and variety of the plays they choose to do in contrast to the ones that the commercial theater tries to sell."⁵⁸ Carmody concluded that Arena's place in the community had been "firmly established."

Echoing this theme, in its inimitable style, Variety in March 1955 reported that Arena Stage was "emerging as a talent springboard to Broadway. Established as part of the capital's show biz scene, and a fave with Embassy Row and official circles, the shoestring operation is becoming a factor in the development of new talent for the big-time."⁵⁹ This theme was echoed by the Washington Post in September 1955.⁶⁰ Presaging Arena's future importance in international relations, the Voice of America broadcasted in May 1955 a feature on Arena, describing it as "an enchanting example of theater-in-the-round at its finest."⁶¹

At the end of the season in June 1955, the Arena Stage dropped a bombshell. It announced it was going dark for its 1955-56 season to

⁵⁴App. 17

⁵⁵App. 18

⁵⁶App. 19

⁵⁷App. 20

⁵⁸App. 21

⁵⁹App. 22

⁶⁰App. 29

⁶¹App. 23

concentrate on efforts to find a larger theater. Writing in the Star, Jay Carmody reported that:

Arena Stage, which in five years earned Washington's affection and admiration and made itself a bright national reputation, will take a sabbatical year during the 1955-6 season.... Its prestige is national, its place in the community is fixed and altogether favorable.⁶²

Variety, which reported the regrouping in detail, observed "Arena makes its temporary bow-out in a blaze of glory."⁶³

In spite of the high praise, few thought the Arena Stage would reappear. Thus, when the Arena Stage took over the old Heurich brewery, The New York Times in September 1956 headlined an article "Promise is Fulfilled to Reopen Arena Stage at New Location in Capital"⁶⁴ Part of the importance of the event to jaded New Yorkers was the list of Arena alumni listed in the story who went on to Broadway: Alan Schneider, Frances Stenhagen, Gerald Hiken, George Grizzard, Sandy Meisner, Pernell Roberts, Jerome Kilty, Michael Higgins, Olive Dunbar, Marian Rearden, Richard Sheppard, Richard Morse, and Clay Hall. Said Richard Coe in the Washington Post:

....no Washingtonian who's been around during Arena's career needs to be told what a splendid organization this has been for the capital city of our Nation.... As a theatergoer....this reporter is frankly thrilled that Arena and its people are making good on the promise of a hot August night in 1955."⁶⁵

In a Washington Post follow-up piece in November 1956 headlined "All Hail the Return of Arena Stage!", Richard Coe summed up the accomplishments of Arena Stage as follows:

The reason I so much admire this group is that it broadens the base of the American Theater...it's reasonable to expect first rate productions. This kind of dramatic perspective, so lacking on our major stages, is a boon to audiences, managers, playwrights, actors and technicians. For by seeing the stage art in some kind of time depth, we are able to understand what is worth while, to encourage leery commercial managements, to inspire writers, performers, and their associates.... May Arena Stage prosper in its high but extremely sensible aim!⁶⁶

This was a theme which Mr. Coe amplified in an article written for Promenade Magazine in February 1957.⁶⁷ After pointing out the importance of Arena Stage to Washington, he focused on several produc-

⁶²App. 27

⁶³App. 28

⁶⁴App. 30

⁶⁵App. 31

⁶⁶App. 33

⁶⁷App. 34

tions where Arena Stage successfully resurrected productions which never got to or which floundered on Broadway. Specifically mentioned were Arthur Miller's A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE and THE CRUCIBLE, as well as THE PRISONER which, although a success in London, was never produced on Broadway. His point was clear. The economics of producing plays in Washington coupled with the loyalty of the Arena's subscription audience allowed plays which otherwise might have disappeared to achieve a second lease on life. This thesis was shared by the other major Washington critic, Jay Carmody, who cited the Arena's production of Terence Rattigan's THE BROWNING VERSION, which he considered, "superior to the original" New York production with Maurice Evans.⁶⁸

Reviewing that 1956-57 season, which included the rewritten and expanded version of Arthur Miller's A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE referred to above, Jay Carmody wrote in the Star

"(The season's) most sustained delight indeed may have been provided by the return of Arena Stage... Arena's repertory included five of the season's most popular attractions, a remarkably high average."⁶⁹

Word of Arena's importance as a showcase for new productions and the savior of others soon spread throughout the acting community. Zelda Fichandler, the Artistic Director of the Arena Stage, began to make casting trips to New York where 150-200 actors would read for her in the hopes of being given a role in an Arena production.⁷⁰ Part of the reason for this new awareness of Arena was that Variety began to cover Arena on a regular basis, referring to it as having "won national attention via almost consistently hep productions."⁷¹

The 1957-58 season saw a continuation of not only critical acclaim, but also critical recognition of the importance of the theatrical role Arena was playing. Headlining a May 1958 Washington Post article "Broadway Bomb is Arena Stage Boon," Richard Coe again focused on a production which had failed on Broadway and yet gone on to become an outstanding success at Arena.⁷² In this case, the play was Ray Lawler's SUMMER OF THE SEVENTH DOLL, but the message was the same as it had been for other Broadway transplants: New York should not and would not be allowed to decide the fate of theater in this country.

The importance of this phenomenon cannot be overemphasized. If the theater is to progress in this country, it cannot be limited to New York productions, the touring shows they spawn, and amateur productions elsewhere. The high cost of production in New York coupled with the fickleness of New York taste, leads to an enormous degree of caution in the productions which reach New York. Part of the importance of the Arena Stage and the resident theaters which have emulated

⁶⁸App. 38 ⁶⁹App. 35 ⁷⁰App. 36 ⁷¹App. 37 ⁷²App. 39 ⁷²App. 39

it is that they take the risks which allow theater to progress in America. As Mr. Coe put it,

"there is something richly encouraging in Arena's production, for it reflects what fruitful a field there is in defying the dictates of Gotham."⁷³

National recognition of Arena's role continued. Brook Atkinson, writing in September 1958 in The New York Times on the congressional authorization of a National Cultural Center (now called the Kennedy Center), took the time to refer to Arena as an already existing cultural center which was "invaluable for theater-goers with taste."⁷⁴ Aside from resurrecting THE SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL, the Arena Stage presented the world premiere of ANSWERED THE FLUTE by Sam Robins during this season.

The 1958-59 season again saw national interest in the Arena Stage. Reviewing a production of A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY in The New York Times, Brooks Atkinson made some general observations. He cited Arena Stage as having done "excellent work for a number of years" and having become a "first-rate cultural institution...operated with skill and imagination." "To 15,000 or 16,000 Washingtonians a month," Mr. Atkinson went on to say, "it is a vital part of the sensation of being alive."⁷⁵ This theme was echoed in a major piece in the Baltimore Sun in May 1959, headlined "There's Hope for American Theater: It Lies In Off-Broadway Style Like That in Washington, Experts Say."⁷⁶

September 1959 found the Arena Stage again displaced, this time by a highway approach ramp. The dilemma of the Arena was of national importance now, however, and Brooks Atkinson, writing in The New York Times, expressed the hope that suitable quarters would be assured.⁷⁷ Such assurance was quick in coming. In October of 1959, the Arena announced it had acquired a site in the Southwest Redevelopment area, and as Jay Carmody put it in the Star, "reorganized as a non-profit, tax-free cultural asset to the Washington Community."⁷⁸ Mr. Carmody went on to describe the Arena as "perhaps the most artistically triumphant community theater in the country" and "Washington's most successful resident theater group." One reason for the community success may have been the great lengths the Arena had gone to in involving the community. For example, as described in The New York Times of November 1959, there was a special \$1 ticket for high-school students and their teachers promoted with the cooperation of all five Boards of Education in the Washington area.⁷⁹

National recognition in a particularly welcomed form was forthcoming in December 1959 when the Ford Foundation announced a \$127,000 grant to Arena Stage.⁸⁰ This was the second Ford grant to Arena that year. Earlier, it was one of ten American theaters awarded a \$10,000

⁷³App. 39

⁷⁴App. 41

⁷⁵App. 43

⁷⁶App. 44

⁷⁷App. 46

⁷⁸App. 47

⁷⁹App. 48

⁸⁰App. 49

grant to "help stimulate their creative development."⁸¹ The Star, in an editorial noting the event, called it "a tribute not only to Arena, but to the capital as a home of the arts."⁸²

Not so, wrote Howard Taubman in The New York Times Magazine during the same month. "No one can dispute the thesis that compared with capitals like London, Paris and Moscow, the American capital is a provincial community in the arts." Mr. Taubman went on: "In the theater the record is poor. If it were not for the Arena Stage, it would be miserable."⁸³

By March 1960, planning for the new theater had progressed far enough that the press was able to announce Arena's new home. Observed The New York Times, "various Government agencies involved, having noted Arena's community acceptance, agreed to allocate the land (for the theater) previously intended for a park area."⁸⁴

During the 1959-60 season, the Arena presented the world premiere of CLANDESTINE ON THE MORNING LINE by Jack Greenfeld. At the end of the year, Brooks Atkinson, writing in The New York Times, said "Arena Stage is acquiring a permanent building after it has become a permanent part of Washington's cultural life."⁸⁵ Editorials in The Washington Post and The Evening Star echoed this sentiment. Said the Star:

"Nothing in recent years has elevated the level of cultural life in Washington more effectively than has the Arena Stage, and it should be a matter of particular pride that this non-profit, entirely homegrown enterprise is being increasingly acclaimed in superlatives throughout the country."⁸⁶

The Post followed suit:

Acclaimed by leading critics - one of whom called the Arena "the best of the residential theaters in the country" - the theater is now in its tenth season and playing to consistently packed houses.... If Washington did not have Arena Stage, it would be notably poorer in its cultural and entertainment opportunities.⁸⁷

Sensing "winds of change," Howard Taubman returned to Washington in February 1961 to reassess what he had previously concluded in The New York Times was a cultural "hick town."⁸⁸ He used the opportunity to cite the Arena Stage as a prime example of the type of institution which should be aided. Said Taubman:

Arena Stage has woven itself into the fabric of Washington... as the only permanent professional theater group in the capital.... As a theatrical

⁸¹App. 42

⁸²App. 50

⁸³App. 51

⁸⁴App. 53

⁸⁵App. 54

⁸⁶App. 55

⁸⁷App. 55

⁸⁸App. 51, 56

enterprise, the Arena Stage deserves respect... (It) does exciting work in an independent spirit Let New York react as it will; the Arena Stage believes Washington has the right to make up its own mind.... Washington should be grateful for the Arena Stage because it is a professional ensemble with continuity and a point of view.

Jay Carmody, writing in the Star in March 1961 agreed with this premise, noting that "even Broadway admits that (Arena) is the outstanding pilot project of what likely will be America's living theater of the future - the resident professional company."⁸⁹

International visitors also continued to seek out the Arena as representative of theater in this country. For example, in March 1961, four Russian professional women visited the Arena as part of an international exchange,⁹⁰ and Sir Laurence Olivier paid a special visit the following month.⁹¹

By May of 1961, excitement was beginning to build for the opening of the new Arena Stage. As Jay Carmody put it in the Star, "the first center of culture on the banks of the Potomac will be ready in October and no one could start life with a firmer assurances of community affection and admiration."⁹² Said Stuart Little in The New York Herald Tribune: "Each city mentioned previously shows some heartening phase of the growth of live theater outside New York in the last decade, but the best proof yet of the strength of this movement lies in the peak construction work in Southwest Washington."⁹³

During the 1960-61 season, the Arena presented the American premiere of THE EGG by Felicien Marceau.

The new Arena Stage opened in October 1961 to critical acclaim. Said Brooks Atkinson in The New York Times, "Everything about the new theater for Arena Stage is admirable except the price."⁹⁴ District of Columbia Commissioner Walter Tobriner called the Arena a "new distillery of the finest in drama," and the Voice of America taped the dedication for rebroadcast.⁹⁵

The Washington Post editorialized:

The lamentation about the death of the theater seems a bit premature. It is a pleasure to note the opening of the Arena Stage.... all the more so since this is the first new playhouse to open locally since 1895. What lends special significance to the Arena's festive first night is that it came about in response to a community demand.... Washingtonians wanted to see serious drama competently performed.⁹⁶

⁸⁹App. 57

⁹⁰App. 60

⁹¹App. 62

⁹²App. 63

⁹³App. 64

⁹⁴App. 65

⁹⁵App. 66

⁹⁶App. 68

The New York Times called the building a "new cultural landmark" in one article,⁹⁷ and followed with a second story the next day saying:

Pounding drums and brass fanfares would not have been out of order to proclaim the official opening.... of the Arena Stage's impressive new home. New York may pride itself on the number and variety of its theatrical fare, but it has no permanent company to compare with the Arena Stage...⁹⁸

The New York World Telegram noted the opening of a "spectacular new theater," but also found "sociological and economic importance... in its strategic part in the biggest urban renewal project in the United States."⁹⁹ Similar praise was found in Newsweek,¹⁰⁰ Saturday Review,¹⁰¹ Promenade,¹⁰² and The Washington Star.¹⁰³ Even a paper published in Thuringia in the Soviet occupied zone of Germany noted the opening of Arena, and said of its first production: "It is some time since New York has seen as great a production of CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE which was presented recently at the new Arena Stage in Washington."¹⁰⁴

The new theater became an immediate draw for the attention of the public and the press. The "First Lady" of the Swedish stage, Inga Tidblad, and the directors of the Swedish Royal Dramatic Theater made a special trip to Washington to see the Arena in May 1962.¹⁰⁵ The same month, Karl Meyer, writing in the British magazine New Statesman, said Washington has two theaters, "The venerable National and the smaller Arena Stage. The Arena is incomparably the more interesting...."¹⁰⁶

During the inaugural season in the new building, the Arena Stage presented the world premiere of THE BURNING OF THE LEPERS by Wallace Hamilton, as well as the American premiere of the John Holmstrom translation of Brecht's THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE, referred to above.

The announcement of a Ford Foundation grant of \$863,000 to the Arena Stage in October 1962 was not only an enormous vote of confidence, but also another opportunity for the local papers to editorialize. The Washington Post called the grant "a recognition of excellence."¹⁰⁷ Noting that the Ford Foundation did not require it to be matched as was generally the case, the Post attributed this to the fact "our resident repertory theater has already received such substantial local support that its place in community esteem needs little further demonstration." The Washington Star took an equally local perspective, writing "in (the grant's) recognition of Arena as a brilliantly successful, firmly established specimen of the very

⁹⁷App. 69 ⁹⁸App. 89 ⁹⁹App. 69 ¹⁰⁰App. 70 ¹⁰¹App. 70 ¹⁰²App. 70
¹⁰³App. 72 ¹⁰⁴App. 71 ¹⁰⁵App. 73 ¹⁰⁶App. 74 ¹⁰⁷App. 75

theater the Foundation seeks to encourage, it constitutes a cheerful rebuttal to the glib charge of Washington's cultural aridity."¹⁰⁸

National and international recognition of Arena's unique role in theater continued. In January of 1963, three Russian writers on a cultural exchange tour visited Arena and described it as "magnificent."¹⁰⁹ In June 1963, the magazine National Business Woman did a major story on Zelda Fichandler, Artistic Director of the Arena Stage. The story started out by describing her as the "probable architect of the future of American theater."¹¹⁰

In October 1963, The New York Times Magazine devoted a major article to the Broadway wunderkind director Alan Schneider, who had begun his career at Arena. Said Schneider of Arena, "Without (Arena), I could not have survived. It gave me a home in the theater."¹¹¹ The next month, while reviewing the American premiere of John Whiting's THE DEVILS, at Arena, Howard Taubman wrote in The New York Times:

....Washington is to be envied for having (Arena), and should be congratulated for its good sense in supporting it. By chancing the American premiere of a play of this caliber the Arena Stage, however, does something more. It proves that decentralization of our theater need not be merely a slogan and a hope, but can be a striking and stimulating reality.¹¹²

Praise for the Arena Stage continued during 1964. In a review of the resident theater movement in America in April 1964, the Hollywood Reporter, a trade paper similar to Variety, wrote:

....the Arena is setting the pace for the burgeoning revival of resident theater in America....(It is) a frontier station of a new movement that is now inevitable in America....¹¹³

In June 1964, while the Danish Prime Minister was visiting with Senator Fulbright on the Hill, his wife chose to visit the Arena Stage.¹¹⁴

Also presented during the 1963-64 season, along with the American premiere of THE DEVILS, was the world premiere of BATTLE DREAM by Herbert Boland.

As Arena began its fifteenth season in October 1964, Richard Coe writing in the Post used the opportunity to reflect on its national importance. "Arena's 15th season also is a reminder of how Mrs. Fichandler's enterprise has sparked like theaters around the country", he said.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸App. 75 ¹⁰⁹App. 76, 77, 78 ¹¹⁰App. 79 ¹¹¹App. 83 ¹¹²App. 88
¹¹³App. 89 ¹¹⁴App. 90 ¹¹⁵App. 91

As the season progressed, this theme was picked up from coast to coast. In a long and not terribly complimentary piece entitled "It's Middletown-On-the-Potomac" in The New York Times Magazine, Russell Baker nonetheless made it a point to say that Washingtonians could go "to the Arena to watch the only original theater company in town."¹¹⁶ Writing in the Boston Record American, Elliot Norton called Zelda Fichandler,

.... a principal pioneer in the movement to decentralize the American theater.... Mrs. Fichandler and those who worked with her made the Arena Stage prestigious not only in Washington but throughout the country and did much to stimulate national interest and confidence in the regional theater.¹¹⁷

The New York Times headlined an article "Washington's Arena Stage Attains Full Stature",¹¹⁸ and the Los Angeles Times called Arena a "success story in pork barrel country."¹¹⁹ The L. A. Times went on to say:

Here are plays not for an idle hour of entertainment, but to quicken the pulses, engage the mind, stir the senses, and to test the mettle of any acting company. That the company meets the test is evident in the solid audiences the theater draws and in its ever increasing subscription list, which this season reached 15,695.

The White House also recognized the importance of Arena in June 1965, and it was asked to perform a long excerpt from Millard Lampell's HARD TRAVELING at the White House Festival of the Arts.¹²⁰ HARD TRAVELING was at the time receiving its world premiere at the Arena. In a validictory to the season, The Washington Post editorialized: "(The Arena) deserves the reputation it has gained as one of the nation's best theater companies."¹²¹

The 1965-66 season found Arena receiving early on a \$106,500 Rockefeller Foundation grant to further develop the concept of an ensemble company of actors in a repertory context.¹²² Wrote Emerson Beauchamp in The Washington Star as the season begun: "At the age of 15, Arena Stage can fairly claim that its growing pains are over. The problems that lie ahead are the problems not of adolescence, but of maturity."¹²³

Mid-season again found Arena receiving national press. The Seattle Times wrote:

"From the vantage point of the Arena Stage here, most of the nation's resident professional theaters - including Seattle's - look a little like Johnny - come-latelys

¹¹⁶App. 92 ¹¹⁷App. 105 ¹¹⁸App. 98 ¹¹⁹App. 99 ¹²⁰App. 101-104
¹²¹App. 106 ¹²²App. 107 ¹²³App. 109

running to climb on the cultural bandwagon....The regional-theater bandwagon may not be stamped 'Made in D.C.', but the Arena Stage surely gave it a couple of wheels - and a vigorous shove to get it rolling."¹²⁴

The Bridgeport (Conn.) Herald put it this way:

"For those who love theater, a visit to the Arena Stage Theater is an exhilarating experience....Zelda Fichandler, who has nursed the group since its inception, should be awarded a Presidential medal of honor for bravery, persistence, and a contribution to national culture."¹²⁵

Starting off a review of the resident theater movement which appeared in Women's Wear Daily, the critic Martin Gottfried said, "it might be well to begin with the Arena Stage, since it is one of the grand-daddies of American resident theater."¹²⁶

During the 1965-66 season, the Arena Stage produced two world premieres: PROJECT IMMORTALITY by Loring Mandel and MR. WELK AND JERSEY JIM by Howard Sackler.

The 1967-68 season continued to find the Arena Stage of interest outside of Washington. The New Haven (Conn.) Register wrote in December 1967 that "the Arena has managed to provide its audience through the years with some outstanding and provocative theater." The focus for the article was the Arena's presentation of the world premiere of Howard Sackler's THE GREAT WHITE HOPE, described as "a play which does both Arena and the entire resident theater movement proud.... 'The Great White Hope' is clearly not a commercial venture and would probably never find a production in a commercial theater because of its immense size and scope. That Arena Stage is bold enough and skilled enough to mount this play is to its great credit."¹²⁷

Having shown the play's merit, however, the Arena production moved to Broadway where it won every important prize including the Pulitzer Prize. The play's impact was so substantial that it received a solid (if propagandistic) review in Warsaw, Poland's Trybuna Ludu.¹²⁸

The Arena Stage also was used during this period as a point of comparison for other concerns. In an article on the future of the still unconstructed Kennedy Center, which was moved by the Newspaper Enterprise Association to its subscribers, the Arena was called "the city's oldest and most successful repertory theater company."¹²⁹

¹²⁴App. 111
¹²⁹App. 119

¹²⁵App. 113

¹²⁶App. 114

¹²⁷App. 116

¹²⁸App. 118

The Baltimore Sun in March 1968 also presented Arena as a model for the nation.¹³⁰

Calling Arena "one of the most successful and oldest resident theaters in the United States," the writer was particularly impressed with Arena's Curriculum Enrichment Program with Washington school teachers and the "Living Stage" which brought theater to children and others.

The 1968-69 season saw a major advancement in Arena's efforts to incorporate blacks into the theater. From its beginning, the Arena was the first Washington theater to have integrated audiences, and it often presented plays about blacks such as HARD TRAVELIN and THE GREAT WHITE HOPE. For the 1968-69 season, the Ford Foundation awarded Arena a \$250,000 grant to incorporate a "significant number" of black actors into the company.¹³¹ The season also saw what was becoming a traditional New York Times piece deprecating Washington as a cultural center, except for the Arena Stage. As Clive Barnes put it: "Apart from the Arena Stage (which I trust God will protect and keep)... Washington is not precisely a cultural paradise."¹³² The season also saw the American premiere of INDIANS by Arthur Kopit, which went on to Broadway. Said Clive Barnes in The New York Times writing of the Washington production: "When a regional theater makes national news with a major premiere, it deserves national attention,"¹³³ calling the Arena "one of the liveliest companies in the country". Mr. Barnes went on to say that Arena's staging was "a vast improvement" over the London staging where INDIANS received its world premiere.

It is interesting to note that while Mr. Barnes evidently felt his comments to be generous, The Washington Post considered them gratuitous, editorializing: "(Mr. Barnes) apparently journeyed here by stagecoach for the occasion."¹³⁴ Soon, the Arena became enmeshed in a controversy between Walter Kerr of The New York Times who wasn't too keen on resident theaters, and Martin Gottfried of Women's Wear Daily who, as reported above, considered them the salvation of American theater. Making what he hoped would be his coup de grace in a searing Letter to the Editor printed in The New York Times, Gottfried pointed to "The Great White Hope" which won every Broadway prize this year and which, in nearly every production, acting and directing aspect is as it was presented originally at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C."¹³⁵

A year later in May 1970, in a U.S. News and World Report interview, David Merrick, perhaps the most successful Broadway producer of the period, sided with Mr. Kerr calling regional theater "a bunch of amateurs." With a bow to the Gottfried thesis, however, he went on to say that "the Arena Stage in Washington is the best of the regional theaters."¹³⁶

¹³⁰App. 121 ¹³¹App. 124 ¹³²App. 126 ¹³³App. 127 ¹³⁴App. 128
¹³⁵App. 129 ¹³⁶App. 134

The Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts apparently agreed upon the Merrick assessment of Arena's worth, for they announced that month grants to Arena totaling \$900,000. The grants were of sufficient importance to be reported in detail in the Arizona Republic.¹³⁷

Even Warsaw, Poland's Trybuna Ludu agreed, saying "Washington's foremost theater, the Arena Stage, has an understandable ambition of presenting European classic and contemporary plays...(and) certainly helps spreading the cultural environment and caters to audience's demands."¹³⁸ Perhaps part of Trybuna Ludu's interest came from the presentation during that season of the American premieres of ENCHANTED NIGHT and THE POLICE by Slawomir Mrozek, as well as the world premiere of EDITH STEIN by Arthur Giron.

As it finished its second year, the Living Stage company, a component of Arena Stage, received major praise in The Washington Post. Alan Kriegsman describes the company in this way:

Led with fiery dynamism...they have brought their special brand of improvisational theater to schools, churches, playgrounds, hospitals, recreation centers and even prisons, throughout Washington's inner city and surrounding suburban areas.¹³⁹

A year later, in May 1971, Richard Coe wrote a piece in The Washington Post headlined "Emerging From the Cultural Boondocks." He used the occasion to herald "Arena Stage, now recognized as the country's most successful resident theater..."¹⁴⁰ A month later, Mr. Coe compared New York's season to that produced by Arena in Washington, saying New York was "dim" but "nowhere in the land has theater been so lively as in Washington, and of all the several events here the most cheering has been the advance of Arena Stage."¹⁴¹

During the same month, the Associated Press moved a story about Arena calling it "one of the nation's best known regional theaters." The San Juan (P.R.) Star, which carried the piece, appended the following Editor's Note:

The great theatrical hope in Washington is the Arena Stage. Perhaps the most prominent regional theater in the nation, it continues to operate at a deficit, but remains innovative and consistently daring.¹⁴²

During the 1970-71 season, the Arena Stage presented the world premiere of PUEBLO by Stanley Greenberg, which was attended by Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher (who liked it). American premieres presented that season were THE RULING CLASS by Peter Barnes and WIPE-OUT GAMES by Eugene Ionesco in the Donald Watson translation.

¹³⁷App. 136
¹⁴²App. 145

¹³⁸App. 130

¹³⁹App. 137

¹⁴⁰App. 143

¹⁴¹App. 144

As the 1971-72 season began, the Houston (Texas) Chronicle ran a major piece on the Arena and its leadership in the repertory theater movement.¹⁴³ The opening of the 1971-72 season saw also the first public operating fund drive the Arena had mounted. A Washington Post editorial soliciting support called the Arena Stage experimental, innovative, and achieving a high esthetic standard. It went on to say Arena "won audiences by offering them theater fare of the highest and most imaginative quality; it won imitation in a score of other cities by its trials and successes here in Washington Arena Stage makes a rich contribution to the life of the Capital community."¹⁴⁴ The Baltimore Sun, writing of the campaign, took a similar tack calling Arena "a leader in producing new and innovative plays."¹⁴⁵ The New York Times put the campaign in a different light, pointing out that MOONCHILDREN, then in production at Arena, "was the third new play by a young American writer to receive its American premiere at the Arena Stage and then to be transferred to Broadway."¹⁴⁶ The Times went on:

The three plays are not isolated instances. During its 21 years, the Arena has proven fertile ground for new talent.... By general consensus, the Arena is one of the country's major theaters. This month the National Theater Conference gave (Zelda) Fichandler its annual award for distinguished service to the theater - one of the many honors won by the Arena.

Tom Donnelly, writing a Washington theater history in the Daily News' golden anniversary edition, made a stab at reviewing Arena's past, but decided a history of Zelda Fichandler's Arena Stage could fill a newspaper."¹⁴⁷

Midway through the 1971-72 season, in March, it was announced that the Arena Stage and Zelda Fichandler would receive the Margo Jones award. This national award is given to the theater and producer which in the opinion of a panel of playwrights (including Tennessee Williams and William Inge), critics (including Clive Barnes), and theater people "has made the most significant contribution to the dramatic art by producing new plays".¹⁴⁸ During the same month, in an interview in The New York Times on the occasion of his 70th birthday, the producer and director John Houseman said if he were starting over again, he would "get into regional theater. Take Zelda Fichandler. She's created an extraordinary instrument at the Arena Stage."¹⁴⁹ Even the Edinburgh (Scotland) Umbrella ran a photograph of the "Pioneer Along the Potomac," saying of Arena: "Theater companies the world over have long taken notice of the activity alongside the Potomac River."¹⁵⁰

As the season drew to a close, Richard Coe, writing in The Washington Post assessed the season.

¹⁴³App. 146

¹⁴⁴App. 148

¹⁴⁵App. 149

¹⁴⁶App. 152

¹⁴⁷App. 150

¹⁴⁸App. 153

¹⁴⁹App. 154

¹⁵⁰App. 155

"(Zelda Fichandler's) adventuresome play choices decidedly have been an inspiration to playwrights who want to see their work shifted from page to stage.... So, not only does Arena's season show an increased stature on several levels, it also augurs well for our whole theater's future. From a regional status, our resident theaters are spotlighting a national plateau."¹⁵¹

Mr. Coe knew of what he wrote. During the 1971-72 season, Arena presented the American premieres of MOONCHILDREN by Michael Weller and UPTIGHT by Gunter Grass, and the world premiere of A CONFLICT OF INTEREST by Jay Broad. Arena was also featured during May 1972 in an article headed "Decline of Broadway" in the Tribune de Geneve (Switzerland).¹⁵²

In July 1972, Newsweek ran a cover story headlined "New Life in the American Theater." While the story featured Joseph Papp, the piece cited "most notably, Washington's Arena Stage....(as having) produced a respectable body of worthy new plays."¹⁵³ Mel Gussow, writing in Theater 5, a review of theater during 1971-72, devoted a number of pages to Arena's season, and the role of Zelda Fichandler as its artistic director.¹⁵⁴

In March 1973, The New York Times and papers across the nation announced in front page stories that "the United States will send Washington's Arena Stage Company to the Soviet Union this fall with the first American dramatic presentations in the 15 year history of the Soviet-American Cultural-Exchange Program."¹⁵⁵ Aside from that major announcement, the 1972-73 season saw the American premieres of THE FOURSOME by E. A. Whitehead and A PUBLIC PROSECUTOR IN SEARCH OF IT ALL by Max Frisch, and the world premiere of RAISIN by Nemiroff and Zaltzburg, music by Wolden and lyrics by Brittan.

On the eve of Arena's departure to the Soviet Union, Mayor Washington declared September 28, 1973, as Arena Stage Day.¹⁵⁶ The proclamation read:

WHEREAS, Arena Stage has been selected by the United States Department of State and the Soviet Ministry of Culture to represent our country in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and is the first American theater company ever chosen to bring American drama to the peoples of the Soviet Union; and

WHEREAS, Arena Stage has developed, with the assistance and participation of the people of the District of

¹⁵¹App. 156 ¹⁵²App. 158 ¹⁵³App. 160 ¹⁵⁴App. 163 ¹⁵⁵App. 168
¹⁵⁶App. 170, 356

Columbia, into a theater that fully represents American theatrical excellence; and

WHEREAS, through its pursuit of excellence, the Arena Stage has created new theater works that have gone from Arena to our national stages, contributing to the city's reputation as a dynamic and culturally rich capital, and a source of new drama; and

WHEREAS, Arena Stage has become a theater toward which all Washingtonians may look with pride, a theater of national renown and yet a theater for its own immediate community:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, THE MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, do hereby proclaim September 28, 1973 as "ARENA STAGE DAY" in Washington, D.C., and call upon all of our citizens to join with me in honoring the producing director, the actors, directors, designers and technicians of Arena Stage in appreciation of the exceptional cultural and educational contributions which they have made to the people of our community.

The Soviet tour went brilliantly, with large and enthusiastic crowds. The Detroit (Mich.) Free Press reported that tickets were so hard to come by that police checked them at the door to detect counterfeits.¹⁵⁷

The return of Arena from the triumphant tour was met with a paeon of praise from Congress. Senator Percy and Pell and Congressmen Peyser and Hansen made speeches and inserted in the Congressional Record articles concerning the tour, and then Senator Walter Mondale sent a congratulatory letter.¹⁵⁸ The Washington Post also waxed enthusiastic in November 1973, editorializing:

...the group has won local and national acclaim for its performances, but this month, Arena Stage scored three of its most smashing triumphs ever - in Moscow, Leningrad and New York City....Not only were the company's performances of "Inherit the Wind" and "Our Town" the first presentation of serious American drama under the cultural agreement, but they were hits....The Washington Post's Moscow correspondent...reported that members of Moscow's small community, who have

¹⁵⁷App. 171 ¹⁵⁸App. 357-361

seen other cultural extravaganzas come and go in the past, generally agreed that Arena had succeeded in conducting genuine cultural relations - a rare achievement. The enthusiasm of Moscow's theater world for the visit was ample proof of Arena's impact"....The success of Arena's mission to Moscow and Leningrad...now has been complemented in New York where an Arena Stage troupe has received rave reviews for "Raisin" at the 46th Street Theater.¹⁵⁹

RAISIN was later that season to win the Tony for best musical of the year.¹⁶⁰

In February 1974, the Kansas City (Mo.) Star in a review of Washington theater wrote...(Washington has) the Arena Stage, one of the first and certainly one of the best regional theaters in the land."¹⁶¹ The New York Times observed in July 1974 "...the Arena Stage still, as always, a symbol of stability, integrity and quality in the regional theater - is presenting no less than three full-length plays, none of which has yet been seen in New York."¹⁶²

American premieres presented during the 1973-74 season were TOM by Alexander Buzo and IN CELEBRATION by David Storey. Also presented was the world premiere of THE MADNESS OF GOD by Elie Wiesel, and the premiere of the expanded version of LEONCE AND LENA by George Buchner in the Eric Bentley translation. The Arena Stage production of THE MADNESS OF GOD would later be presented on Public Television's "Theater in America" series.¹⁶³

The New York Times previewed the season "out of town" in September 1974, and had special praise for Arena. Said the Times: "Washington, D.C. long famous as a cultural bog, is now one of the liveliest theater towns in the nation - thanks in the first instance to the Arena Stage, one of the oldest and one of the most respected of all resident theaters...."¹⁶⁴

In spring of 1974, the Arena Stage received "official" praise for its tour of the Soviet Union. Culture and Life, the authorized Soviet English-language publication, said "the actors' skill of transformation makes Arena Stage very much akin to the Moscow Art Theater."¹⁶⁵

As the 1974-75 season opened, Richard Coe wrote the latest in what was becoming an annual evaluation of Arena's role in American theater.

¹⁵⁹App. 172

¹⁶⁰App. 181

¹⁶¹App. 173

¹⁶²App. 176

¹⁶³App. 183

¹⁶⁴App. 178

¹⁶⁵App. 180

Arena's influence has been incalculable to the American theater. At first, it was hard to get the powerful agents to allow first productions which they assumed would destroy New York's future interest in the work. Now that process is reversed; agents cry for Arena firsts. Though there had been several earlier, 1967's "The Great White Hope" was a real break-through; and with it came a Pulitzer and awareness, if not recognition, of Arena's several years role of midwife to the original script....Across the land several dozen theaters were born as a result of Arena's example. They carefully followed its subscription basis, choices of plays, institutional atmosphere, "second chance" offerings and new scripts.¹⁶⁶

David Richards wrote a similar evaluation in The Washington Star, but also spiced his evaluation with comments from others. (The individual appears in parenthesis).

"Zelda...has clearly been a profound force in weaning the American theater away from Broadway" (Richards). "Zelda...built the castle from the ground up, brick by brick, and made it truly American in a sociological sense." (Alan Schnider, director). "Arena was one of the few elements of tradition any of us had to hang on to...merely by its presence and longevity, it carried enormous emotional weight." (Arvin Brown, artistic director of the Long Wharf theater in New Haven). "At its best, which is often, Arena manages to be intellectual without being off-putting, adventuresome without being trendy, artful without being esoteric. The fare tends to be provocative in content rather than form...(Richards). "Zelda... has brought her audiences along with her so that she can now successfully produce enormously complex and sophisticated new works." (Ruth Mayleas, Director of Theater Programs for the National Endowment for the Arts).¹⁶⁷

During the 1974-75 season, Arena presented the American premiere of THE ASCENT OF MOUNT FUJI by Aitmatov and Mukhamedzhanov and the world premiere of BOCCACCIO by Kenneth Cavender with music by Richard Peaslee.

In February 1976, Clive Barnes, writing in The London (England) Times about American theater, broke a story of enormous significance. The American Theater Wing, on the recommendation of the American Theater Critics Association, had decided to award a

¹⁶⁶App. 184 ¹⁶⁷App. 186

"Tony" to Arena Stage. The importance of this event in American theater cannot be overestimated. From the beginning of American theater, the geographical center had been Broadway. Aspiring shows would tryout on the road in major cities until they became good enough to go to Broadway. If successful, carbon-copy road companies would be sent back out to the hinterlands. The "Tony" for Arena, presented for its role as a "trailblazer for the other regional theaters that have followed in its successful footsteps,"¹⁶⁸ represented the first acknowledgement by the theater community that there existed theater outside of New York.

The press was quick to recognize the significance of the event, particularly the press outside of New York. Ernest Schier, writing in The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, called Arena

a pioneer in regional theater and one of the most progressive theaters in America....The award to Arena....actually is long overdue....Regional theater is not only the main source of theater for millions of Americans, it is also responsible for some of the finest and most innovative work.¹⁶⁹

The Associated Press drama critic William Glover, whose story was picked up across the country, said "Washington's theater pride, the 26-year-old Arena Stage, has been picked as the first of the nation's professional drama troupes outside New York to get a Broadway Tony award for fine work. Such recognition of stage-craft far from the Great White Way has been long due."¹⁷⁰

An editorial in The Washington Post put it this way:

"This event should be especially pleasing to Washingtonians....as Arena Stage was surely our theater, more than the National or any of the smaller houses and surely more than the grand, federal festival hall known as the Kennedy Center. Arena is a part of this town as much as the C & O canal. It is part of the Washington region's culture in the sense that it cultivates the local intellectual and emotional soil, bringing "life to life".... Arena Stage grew during this city's and the nation's cultural awakening and led the way for similar regional theaters across the country....As the (Tony) citation says Arena Stage has "enriched the Broadway scene and the theater, film and television art across America."¹⁷¹

In a subsequent article in the Post, Richard Coe observed "Arena was chosen because of its leadership in many areas, because its influence has been so strong in showing how to make theater viable as well as creative."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸App. 188 ¹⁶⁹App. 189 ¹⁷⁰App. 190, 194 ¹⁷¹App. 191 ¹⁷²App. 192

The New Haven (Conn.) Register put it this way:

"A special Tony Award was granted this year to the regional professional theater that had made the most significant contribution to the American stage. It was the first time such an award had been offered and represented long overdue recognition of theaters not immediately associated with the New York scene....The Arena Theater well deserves the honors bestowed upon it. It is an outstanding example of consistent growth, and above all identification with the community."¹⁷³

In November, The New York Times ran its perennial Washington as cultural wasteland piece, although Richard Eder was able to find an oasis or two about. Said Eder:

The Arena Stage, which keeps expanding and now has three separate theaters, has developed one of the finest repertory companies in the country.¹⁷⁴

The District of Columbia was also quick to recognize Arena's contribution. On May 3, 1976, the District of Columbia City Council enacted a Resolution to honor Arena Stage in recognition of the Tony and "Arena Stage as one of the District's outstanding cultural facilities."¹⁷⁵

Mayor Washington, not to be upstaged by the Council, declared June 12, 1976, "Arena Stage Night" for Arena's "role in giving vitality to both the artistic life of our Nation's Capital and also to the New Southwest Community in which its theater is located."¹⁷⁶ Perhaps the spirit of the Tony Award is best represented in the citation itself, which read:

Since producing director Zelda Fichandler first opened Arena's doors in 1950, the story of Arena Stage's growth has paralleled the story of America's cultural awakening, as theaters like Arena were created by the people of one city after another across the United States.

Now, 26 years and 211 productions later, Arena is one of very few theaters anywhere in the country that has had continuity of artistic direction for over a quarter century.

¹⁷³App. 196 ¹⁷⁴App. 198 ¹⁷⁵App. 364 ¹⁷⁶App. 365

Over 26 seasons, Mrs. Fichandler has always been attracted to plays with a conscience as well as a sense of humor, and has striven to create a vital tension between new works, and works from earlier generations that speak to our own times. Sample contrasts: distinguished revivals of "Death of A Salesman", "Inherit the Wind", "An Enemy of the People" (all also directed by Mrs. Fichandler), with the premieres of "The Great White Hope", "Zalmen, Or the Madness of God", "Boccaccio", and the first American productions of "Indians", "Moonchildren", and a new Soviet work, "The Ascent of Mount Fuji."

Many of Arena's productions have been seen on Broadway and some including "The Great White Hope" and "Raisin" - have been awarded Tonys. National audiences saw Arena's production of "The Madness of God" on PBS-TV's "Theater in America" series. And two seasons ago, Arena Stage became the first theater company to tour American drama in the U.S.S.R.

A resident company supported by enthusiastic local audiences, Arena Stage and Zelda Fichandler have achieved national and international recognition for theatrical excellence and innovation. The award-winning architecture on Washington's waterfront now houses two theaters--an 800-seat theater in the round, and a 500-seat endstage--as well as a 160-seat cabaret theater for the development of new playwrights. In addition, Arena Stage supports a professional improvisational company, Living Stage, which brings free theater into inner-city neighborhoods.

During the 1975-76 season, the Arena continued its policy of presenting the new theater which was partially responsible for its Tony. Presented that season were the American premieres of THE TOT FAMILY by Istvan Orkeny in the Robert Salos translation and the world premiere of DANDELION WINE by Ray Bradbury, stage adaption by Peter Bailey.

Perhaps more than any other factor, the Tony gave national stature to Arena, even in the face of more visible competition from the Kennedy Center. An article in the Miami Herald on February 6, 1977, headlined, "D.C. Stages Don't Stop at JFK Center" described Arena as a "showcase for new plays that have gone on to great fame (and)....a trailblazer for the regional theater movement in the U.S."¹⁷⁷ The article also quoted the two major Washington theater critics to this effect:

¹⁷⁷App. 199

"As a theater critic, I think that the most eminently exciting theater is done by the Arena," said Dave Richards of The Washington Star. "Its much more venturesome intellectually than the rest. Zelda picks avant-garde works we'd never see here otherwise...." Arena Stage's meaning for Washington can hardly be overstated," said Richard Coe of the Washington Post. "From this institution has flowed a concept of theaters, productions, standards and audiences that are now an inspiration to scores of theaters across America."

During that 1976-77 season, as if to prove the critics right, the Arena produced the American premieres of FOREVER YOURS, MARIE-LOU by Michael Tremblay, THAT TIME and FOOTFALLS by Samuel Beckett, and CATSPLAY by Istvan Orkeny, as well as the world premiere of A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN FILM. In March 1977, Zelda Fichandler was presented with an honorary award "In Recognition of Her Outstanding Contribution as Co-Founder, Producer, and Director of the Arena Stage." by the United States Institute of Theatre Technology.¹⁷⁸

The 1977-78 season saw acclaim continuing for the Arena Stage. Richard Eder, writing on "Theater USA" in Horizon magazine, later reprinted in the Eastern Airlines Magazine Review, called Arena "one of the oldest, best and most vigorous" of the major resident theaters.¹⁷⁹ In January 1978, Clive Barnes philosophizing in the New York Post on the future of the Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center called for it to become what "Arena Stage is to Washington". High praise, and further evidence of the role of Arena as a paradigm for what Mr. Barnes called "national classic theater."¹⁸⁰

February 1978 found Washington's theater star rising in the view of the national press, with Arena as the primary cause. Eliot Norton, writing in the Boston Herald American, headlined his piece "From Theatrical Desert, Washington, D.C. Now Rated 2nd in U.S." "Mrs. Fichandler is the real heroine," in Mr. Norton's view.¹⁸¹ In View, a magazine published by Eastern Airlines, Washington was called one of "the top four or five theater cities in the country," and one of the key elements is the Arena Stage, "the granddaddy of all of the off and off-off Broadway-style theaters in the Capital region."¹⁸² Several months later, the Cincinnati Enquirer continued this theme recommending to its readers that they take a "theatrical jaunt" to Washington, and be sure to attend "Arena Stage, one of America's best theaters, bar none."¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸App. 366
¹⁸³App. 210

¹⁷⁹App. 201

¹⁸⁰App. 205

¹⁸¹App. 207

¹⁸²App. 208

In May, as the season drew to a close, local praise came in a major article in the WGMS Guide to the Arts magazine. Said the publisher about Arena: "Arena has become the standard by which many resident theaters are measured, a standard raised higher with each new season."¹⁸⁴

During the 1977-78 season, the Arena Stage presented the American premiere of DUCK HUNTING by Alexander Vampilov.

The summer of 1978 saw Arena receiving praise from near and far. A delegation from the Performing Arts Society of the People's Republic of China was fascinated with the Arena Stage, as had many foreign delegations before it.¹⁸⁵ Closer to home, Richard Eder in The New York Times bemoaned the fact that New Yorkers had not had sufficient opportunity to see the great Rumanian director Liviu Ciulei, although he pointed out that Washingtonians had been able to see Mr. Ciulei's work three times at the Arena Stage.¹⁸⁶

The opening of the 1978-79 season saw another major article by Eliot Norton in the Boston Herald American on the resident theater movement. Not only does the Arena present, in Mr. Norton's words, "dramas of uncommon style and substance," but "without (Zelda Fichandler's) pioneering work and the work of her associates, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts wouldn't have had a chance for success. It was her Arena Stage which created an audience and developed a taste for theater in Washington."¹⁸⁷ Mr. Norton also wrote a second piece shortly thereafter concerning Washington theater specifically, in which he called Zelda Fichandler "the pioneer who turned Washingtonians to showgoing" and "stimulated what is now known as the 'regional theater movement'."¹⁸⁸

By the time the season was drawing to a close in May 1979, an article in The New York Times, headlined "Performing Artists Find Stimulation in the Capital", assigned Arena a central role in that regard.¹⁸⁹ During the 1978-79 season, the Arena Stage presented the American premiere of TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS by Odon von Horvath and the world premiere of LOOSE ENDS by Michael Weller and TINTYPES by Kyte, Marvin and Pearle.

Highlighting the 1979-80 season to date has been the appearance of the Arena Stage as the first American company to perform in the Hong Kong International Arts Festival, causing the South China Morning Post to lament "on this first night Arena treated the City Hall stage as home. What a pity for us it isn't."¹⁹⁰ On this occasion, the District of Columbia Commission on the Arts and Humanities issued a "Statement of Support" which said, in part, "(w)e thank you for your magnificent contribution to the arts

¹⁸⁴App. 211 ¹⁸⁵App. 217 ¹⁸⁶App. 217 ¹⁸⁷App. 218
¹⁸⁸App. 220 ¹⁸⁹App. 222 ¹⁹⁰App. 223-225

community of Washington, D.C., the country, and to the rest of the world." An equally telling analysis appeared in the Baltimore Sun in February 1980, where the Sun's drama critic wrote:

"The final proof of a play's quality, I have gradually concluded over the years, is how it weathers a production at Arena Stage - for this theatrical organization.... has proven itself so consistently superior that if it can't make something look good, nothing can."¹⁹¹

A perhaps paramount indication of Arena's importance, at least in some circles, occurred on February 10, 1980, when The New York Times Magazine crossword puzzle had, at 55 down, "Washington's _____ Theater." The answer had five letters and began with "A".¹⁹²

¹⁹¹App. 226A ¹⁹²App. 226