

The following is an excerpt from a forthcoming book, The Incomplete Folksinger by Pete Seeger, edited by Jo Schwartz, to be published by Prentice-Hall.

Woody Guthrie, Songwriter

WOODROW WILSON GUTHRIE, one of the great folk song ballad-makers of this century, was born in Okemah, Oklahoma. Childhood in an oil boom town. In 1935, he drifted to California, along with thousands of other “Okies” forced by dust storms and Depression woes to leave their homes. Made a living singing in saloons, occasional fly-by-night radio programs and later on for union meetings, parties, political rallies, dance and theater groups, the Library of Congress Folksong Archives. Dozens of restless trips across the U.S.A. Three marriages and many children. And over one thousand songs.

Woody has described his musical education pretty well. The lonesome old ballads sung by his mother, the honkytonk blues, and the wild hollers that he heard from his father and other men in town. And it is worth emphasizing that his style of guitar picking was picked straight off the recordings of the Carter Family, who were popular around 1931 when Woody was eighteen years old. He also learnt some of his favorite songs directly off their records. Another favorite of his, of course, was Jimmie Rodgers, "the yodeling brakeman." Woody also used to accompany his uncle Jeff, who was a fiddler, and they played on the radio occasionally. And so you see, he fits right in with the usual "country music" category of a small town in Oklahoma in the '20s and '30s. So much so that I know some people in New York, when they first heard him, would say, "Why, he's just a hillbilly singer, isn't he?"

After he had gone to California and was singing for \$1 a day on a Los Angeles radio station, he attracted the attention of a man named Ed Robbin, a news commentator for a radical newspaper, the People's World, over the same radio station. This man got interested in Woody and Woody's ideas, and Woody got interested in him and his ideas. The year was 1938.

Woody was introduced to Will Geer, the actor, who was doing benefits to raise money for the migratory labor camps. Woody came along and dived into the struggle. He became a close friend of Will and his family. Through Geer, Woody started to make a living singing at fund-raising parties around Los Angeles.

Will sent me a copy of Woody's mimeographed songbook, *On a Slow Train through California*, and told me I sure ought to meet Woody when he came to New York. I met him in March of 1940, at a midnight song session on the stage of a Broadway theater. It was again a benefit for the California migratory workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* had been published a year before, and there were many in New York who felt that they wanted to learn more. Will Geer was MC of the show. Burl Ives was in on it and also Leadbelly and Josh White. And there was Woody. A little, short fellow with a western hat and boots, in blue jeans and needing a shave, spinning out stories and singing songs that he had made up himself. His manner was laconic, offhand, as though he didn't much care if the audience was listening or not.

I just naturally wanted to learn more about him. I became a friend of his, and he became a big piece of my education.

I was working for Alan Lomax down in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Woody came down several times, usually on some kind of booking or other. We hit it off pretty well together. Around May 1940, he came down driving a car which he hadn't finished paying for, and asked me if I'd like to come with him to Oklahoma.

I quit my job—such as it was—and we "hitchhiked on credit," as he said, down through Virginia and Tennessee, on to Oklahoma, and then to Pampa, Texas, where Woody's wife and children were staying with her parents. I don't think we stayed in Pampa more than a week or two, and then went back to Oklahoma City where the finance company came and took his car, as I remember it. We went back east with Bob Wood, and were learning things all the way.

I spent the rest of 1940 hitchhiking by myself. Woody re-joined his family on the West Coast and went to work writing songs for the Bonneville Power Administration.

Back in New York, in 1941, I met Lee Hays. He, Mill

Lampell and myself started singing together, calling ourselves the Almanac Singers. ("In the country," said Lee, "a farmhouse would have two books in the house, a Bible and an almanac. One helped us to the next world, the other helped us make it through this one.") We recorded some peace songs and some union songs with the help of friends.

Woody Guthrie arrived in June, having ridden freights and hitchhiked from the Pacific Northwest, where he'd completed his work for the Bonneville Power Administration. He no sooner set foot in our apartment when we said, "Woody, how would you like to go west?" He scratched his head. "I just came from the west, but I don't guess I mind if I join up with you." We had bought a nine-year-old Buick for \$125, a terrible eater of gas and oil.

Within the next few days, we made a few extra dollars recording some records, *Sodbuster Ballads* and *Deepsea Shanties*. Then with a little gasoline money in our pockets we took off. We sang for automobile workers in Detroit, half a dozen varieties of CIO union people in Chicago, Milwaukee, Denver, and then we got to San Francisco.

When we walked down the aisle of a room where one thousand local members of Harry Bridges' longshoremen's union were meeting, we could see some of them turning around in surprise and even disapproval, "What the hell is a bunch of hillbilly singers coming in here for: we got work to do." But when we finished singing for them "Union Maid," "Talking Union," "Which Side Are You On?" and especially "The Ballad of Harry Bridges," their applause was deafening. We walked down that same aisle on our way out and they slapped Woody on the back so hard they nearly knocked him over.

I WAS WITH WOODY WHEN HE WROTE "Union Maid." It was in the early summer of 1940 in Oklahoma City. There, Bob Wood, the communist organizer, had asked Woody and me to sing for a small meeting of oil workers, who were out on strike. Hardly 50 or 60 people were there and some were women, who evidently couldn't get babysitters, and children. It also included some strange men who walked in and lined up along the back of the hall without sitting down. Bob Wood leaned over and said, "I'm not sure if these guys are going to try to break up this meeting or not. It's an open meeting and we can't kick them out. See if you can get the whole crowd singing." So Woody and I did just that. You know, those guys never did break up the meeting. We found out later they had intended to. Perhaps it was the presence of so many women and children that deterred them, perhaps it was the singing. Anyhow, the morning after I found the first two verses of "Union Maid" stuck in Woody's typewriter.

(Years later, in 1947, I got a job singing in a little Greenwich Village nightclub. Woody came down to see how I was doing and in his honor I sang "Union Maid." Some young drunk at a table near Woody started joining in on the chorus but with his own variation, "Oh, you can't scare me, I'm a capitalist, I'm a capitalist, I'm a capitalist." Woody started waving an empty beer bottle around in the air and trying to bean him, shouting, "It's bastards like you who stayed home making millions while we was out fighting the fascists.")

After singing for the longshoremen, the Almanac Singers went down to Los Angeles, temporarily lost a couple of members.

Woody and I zigzagged back up to the San Joaquin Valley,

up the coast to Oregon and Washington, then east, stopping at Butte, Montana, and then Duluth, Minnesota. An organizer for the lumberjacks union asked us if we would be willing to go around and sing in some of the camps, and we said, sure. He was on a routine inspection tour to make sure that the union contract was being obeyed by the bosses. The workers still lived in one big bunkhouse but it was roomy, clean and warm. And as for food, I never saw such a groaning board. For breakfast they had on the table (no fooling), ham, sausage, bacon, chops; they had scrambled eggs, fried eggs, boiled eggs. They had applesauce, prunes, figs, oranges, grapefruit, tomato juice, grape juice, milk, coffee, tea, fried potatoes, pancakes, biscuits, toast. When the cook rang the bell, 50 husky men clumped into the cook shack and sat down and started shoveling in the food. There was no conversation, no talking whatsoever, except maybe "pass the butter please." This was an old country custom, an inflexible rule: no conversation at mealtimes. If anybody had tried to start talking about the weather or anything else, he would have been guilty of bad manners.

The men were mostly of Scandinavian background. The 19th century logging camps had been full of Irish and French Canadians. The 20th century camps were full of Finns and Swedes. They were a taciturn lot. The organizer had told us the previous day, "Don't expect these workers to make a big fuss over your songs, they are Scandinavians. But I know they will be glad to hear you."

In the evening, around the big stove in the center of the bunkhouse, the organizer spoke briefly to the men and answered a few questions, and then he introduced Woody and me. We walked up to the center, sang a song. There was dead silence. We sang another song, there was still dead silence. We looked at each other and said, "Suppose we ought to sing another?" Well, we sang one more. There was still dead silence when we finished. We thanked the men for listening to us, and walked over to the side. One of the men said quietly, "Aren't you going to sing any more, boys?" A little reluctantly we went back and sang a couple more songs, again to complete dead silence, and then we figured we better not push our luck any more and said good night.

The next morning one of the men said to us, "Boy, that music sure was wonderful. Wish you had sang a lot more, we could have listened to it all night."

In the fall of 1941, we started a cooperative apartment known as Almanac House. People came and went all the time. The cuisine was erratic but interesting; the furniture almost nonexistent; the sleeping done at odd hours; the output of songs phenomenal.

We got bookings on the subway circuit; \$5 here and \$10 there. By working hard we just managed to keep body and soul together. On Sunday afternoons we'd hold open house. Thirty-five cents was charged at the door and we and friends would sing all afternoon. We called the sings "hootenannies," a term Woody and I had picked up in Seattle.

In early '42 our Beat Hitler songs ("Reuben James," "Round and Round Hitler's Grave," etc.) actually got us a radio job or two. An agent working for the William Morris Agency got interested in us. He took us around to the Rainbow Room, which was at that time a top New York nightclub at Rockefeller Center. We sang a few songs over the mike that afternoon while the bored manager sat in the empty nightclub. He said

he might have us work there, but we had to "make the act look better." The men should all wear one-suspender overalls and the women members of the Almanacs wear sunbonnets and gunnysack dresses.

We didn't take too kindly to that suggestion and started improvising verses which Woody later mentioned in his autobiography, *Bound for Glory*:

*At the Rainbow Room the soup's on to boil
They're stirring the salad with Standard Oil.*

*The Rainbow Room it's mighty high,
You can see John D. a-flyin' by.*

*It's sixty stories high, they say,
A long way back to the U.S.A.*

We walked out of there not expecting that they'd want to hire us and not really wanting to work there. Furthermore, right after that we were Red-baited in one of the New York papers and the agent quit trying to get us any work at all.

ANYTHING WORTH DISCUSSING was worth a song to Woody: news off the front page, sights and sounds of the countryside he traveled through, thoughts brought to mind by reading anything from Rabelais to Will Rogers.

I remember the night he wrote the song "Tom Joad." He said, "Pete, do you know where I can get a typewriter?"

I said, "I'm staying with someone who has one."

"Well, I got to write a ballad," he said. "I don't usually write ballads to order, but Victor wants me to do a whole album of Dust Bowl songs, and they say they want one about Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*." I asked him if he had read the book and he said, "No, but I saw the movie. Good movie." He went along to the place where I was staying—six flights walking up—on East Fourth Street. The friend I was staying with let him use the typewriter.

Woody had a half gallon jug of wine with him, sat down and started typing away. He would stand up every few seconds and test out a verse on his guitar, and sit down and start typing some more. About one o'clock my friend and I got so sleepy we couldn't stay awake. In the morning we found Woody curled up on the floor under the table. The half gallon of wine was almost empty and the completed ballad was sitting near the typewriter.

Later, at Almanac House, I saw him compose other songs over a period of months. He'd have an idea and fool around with it a little bit, wouldn't be satisfied; then maybe he'd come back to it in a month or two and fool around with it some more.

When World War II came along, I went into the Army, and he went into the Merchant Marines. He's written about his experiences there better than anybody else could tell them. He got torpedoed, visited half a dozen countries, or at least saw their ports, and kept writing verses every day, unconcerned by who thought he was what kind of a character by the way he dressed or acted.

After he got out, he had a new family and had to take care of them; I also had a family I was starting, so we saw each other only a occasional hootenannies.

In 1952, at a party in California, I heard him sing for the last time. He'd come out west hoping to start a new life, not

realizing that his occasional dizzy spells were soon going to get worse and send him to the hospital forever. He sang one or two of his old songs. Then somehow he and I got started making up verses to "Acres of Clams." Woody improvised an unforgettable couple.

The first describes how he was sitting at home one day and the doorbell rings, and there's a man who says he's from the FBI, and would like to ask a few questions. Woody's following verse:

*He asked, will you carry a gun for your country?
I answered the Effbee-aye "Yay!
I will point a gun for my country,
But I won't guarantee you which way!
I won't guarantee you which way-y-y-y!
I won't guarantee you which way!
I will point a gun for my country
But I won't guarantee you which way!"*

Arlo Guthrie tells that when his father went into the hospital he was asked what religion he was, so it could be entered on the correct form.

"All," replied Woody firmly.

"Mr. Guthrie, we must know which religion to list you as."

"All."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Guthrie, it must be one or another."

"All or none," replied Woody.

While he was in the hospital with Huntington's disease, the wasting illness that finally killed him, young people with their guitars and banjos were already singing Woody's songs and making them famous. And of his thousands of verses, I think a large number will outlive this century.

ALAN LOMAX, PERHAPS AMERICA'S FOREMOST folklorist, calls Woody "our best contemporary ballad composer." Others say: "a rusty-voiced Homer," and "the greatest folk poet we've had."

Why are the songs great? Look through his songbooks, only a small sampling of his huge output.

Yes, the words show a fine sense of poetry, of reaching out for exactly the right word at exactly the right place. He used some fine time-tested tunes. The songs are honest; they say things that need to be said.

But above all else, Woody's songs show the genius of simplicity. Any damn fool can get complicated, but it takes genius to attain simplicity. Some of his greatest songs are so deceptively simple that your eye will pass right over them and you will comment to yourself, "Well, I guess this was one of his lesser efforts." Years later you will find the song has grown on you and become part of your life.

Woody took his tunes mostly from different kinds of American folk songs and ballads. He had a deep respect for the ballad form. He knew enough about other song forms to choose many others, but he felt that the old four-line stanza, which told a story and slowly unfolded a moral, was as good as any he could use. Woody said, "I'm not saying some of your tunes from other countries aren't good. But I wasn't raised to them, and neither are the people I'm trying to sing to. So I'm going to use the kind of tunes we understand."

Woody was a great poet; as a prose writer too, I think him a genius. He wasn't pretending to be anybody else—he was just himself. He learnt from everybody, and from everything. He learnt from the King James Bible; he learnt from the left-wing

newspapers and publications; he had a devouring curiosity. I'll never forget the week he discovered Rabelais, and read through a two-inch-thick volume in a couple of days. During the following weeks I could see him experimenting with some of the techniques of style that Rabelais used, such as paragraphs full of images, adjective after adjective getting more fantastic.

Woody was highly selective and knew when he disapproved of something. He once wrote, for instance, "I must remember to steer clear of Walt Whitman's swimmy waters." Perhaps he disapproved of Whitman's unrhymed, unmeasured free verse. But then, Woody himself always stuck to traditional rhymed quatrains. I think, rather, he suspected that he himself, like Whitman, had a weakness for undisciplined rambling-on and wanted to control it.

In early 1940, Woody had gotten a job paying \$200 a week—a lot of money then—to sing one or two songs a week for the Model Tobacco network radio program. One of the things the Model Tobacco people wanted him to do was quit writing columns for his favorite newspaper, The Sunday Worker, week-end edition of the Communist Daily Worker. Woody euphemistically called it "The Sabbath Employee." Those columns of his are classics. He got the idea from the columns Will Rogers used to do for the New York Times. Just a few sentences with a few sharp comments on the news of the day. For example, when he went to Washington in the spring of 1940, Woody wrote: "I'm down here looking at the Potomac River; they say that George Washington threw a silver dollar across it once. It looks a little bit too far for me to do that trick, but maybe he could. After all, a dollar went further in those days."

If Woody had been willing to play along with the Model Tobacco Company and sing the songs they wanted him to sing, and quit doing these columns and his left-wing bookings, he could have stayed with them and had a successful commercial career. But he quit after a month or so.

The Model Tobacco Company tried and failed to force Woody into a respectable mold. There were other attempts. John Greenway's *American Folk Songs of Protest*, published in McCarthy-ridden 1953, contains the following:

"Once more in New York, Guthrie became associated with the Almanac Singers, and through them with People's Songs, an organization in which his individuality was quickly submerged. Before any harm was done to his style, however . . . he gradually dissociated himself from the group."

The best person to answer this is Woody himself. In 1951—just after he signed a contract with a major recording company—Woody wrote to Sing Out (founded by People's Artists, the successor to People's Songs):

"Dear Editor: When some super-reactionary friend of mine looked through several issues of Sing Out and failed to find any songs of my own making he wrote me and said: 'Thank God you're not having anything to do with that bunch.'"

"I've read just about every word of every issue of Sing Out and I just want to say right now before any more of you write in to thank me that I could not agree any more or any plainer nor any stronger with Sing Out if I had wrote every single word of it, and every song myself by my own hand.

"I know everybody on this Sing Out staff just as good as I know any of the members of my own family, or any of my sisters and my brothers. I believe in peace and Sing Out believes in peace; I do my best to fight against war and Sing Out fights just as hard to stop wars as I do; I make ballad-

songs about the news of every day and show you how Jim Crow and race hate hurts and stings and kills off a good part of my country every minute that flies by; and Sing Out sings out with songs to teach, to show, to prove to you these same terrible things; Sing Out sings out, too, to tell you about every little inch we gain in our fight against all of this reaction of hate.

"One little issue of Sing Out is worth more to this humanly race than any thousand tons of other dreamy, dopey junk dished out from the trees of our forest along every Broadway in this world. I don't know of a magazine big or little that comes within a thousand million miles of Sing Out when it comes to doing good around this world.

"More of my songs, my latest peace pieces and my later and older ballads too, will be printed in the pages of Sing Outs to come. I don't want your Tommy Glazzeze Mackarthurish [Tom Glazer had just written a song glorifying General MacArthur] cold bloody handshake nor your word of thanks nor your anything else. Whichever side Mac ain't on, I'm on, whichever side MacCarran ain't on, I am; whichever side Taft-Hartley's not on, I'm on double watch.

"Let this be the end of those remarks that I will use my record contract to fall in love with my bellybutton and forget all of the Peekskills that I've been through with Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, and Earl Robinson, and lots of others. If I do fall into ten per cent ownership of this Record Co. in the morning soon, that will not change one little word of this letter as to which side of things I am and am not on.

Your Buddy,
Woody Guthrie."

WOODY ALWAYS CLAIMED THAT HE could not theorize, that he couldn't keep up with us and our book-learning. He'd bow out of an argument rather than get tangled up in four-syllable words. He had outspoken contempt for mere cleverness. A joke was fine, a pun, a gag—he put plenty of humor into his songs. But humor was not enough by itself. There had to be some solid meat there. So in some of his most humorous songs, like "Talking Dustbowl," there's an undertone of bitter reality. I remember in 1948, when he was listening to some friends trying to write clever political parodies. Suddenly he asked, "Why are you guys scared to be serious?"

Woody was not averse to having his songs sung on the hit parade, but to my knowledge he never wrote a song with the hit parade in mind. He considered most commercial music men as slick people who foisted their own idea of music upon the country. He thought of them the way an Oklahoma farmer thought of Wall Street bankers. So Woody put out of his head the idea of making a lot of money from his songs. He'd write and sing them himself, and mimeograph copies for friends from time to time, and trust that if he put together a song which hit the spot, people would take it up as their own.

Since he frankly agreed that he couldn't tell which of his songs would be good and which would be soon forgotten, he adopted a kind of "scatteration" technique—that is, he'd write a lot of songs, on the theory that at least some of them would be good. For example, as a "research consultant" for the Bonneville Power Authority he wrote several dozen songs. Nearly all of them have some special charm. But it was one, "Roll On, Columbia," which seems destined to last for generations.

Woody scattered his genius so that it will never be all collected: rhymes, letters, notes to himself. In 1960, for instance, I came across a notebook from 1940, when he and I were singing for our supper in the Pacific Northwest. On one page there were some financial memos from me. On the next page was Woody's own memo to himself:

"The worst thing that can happen to you is to cut yourself loose from people. And the best thing is to sort of vaccinate yourself right into the big streams and blood of the people.

"To feel like you know the best and the worst of folks that you see everywhere and never to feel weak or lost, or even lonesome anywhere.

"There is just one thing that can cut you to drifting from the people, and that's any brand or style of greed.

"There is just one way to save yourself, and that's to get together and work and fight for everybody."

I learned so many different things from Woody that I can hardly count them. His ability to identify with the ordinary man and woman, speak their own language without using the fancy words, and never be afraid—no matter where you were: just diving into some situation, trying it out. When he and I used to go around singing together, we hit all kinds of places: CIO unions, churches, saloons, meetings, parties.

I learned from him how just plain orneriness has a kind of wonderful honesty to it that is unbeatable: he was going to cuss, he was going to speak bad language, he was going to shock people, but he was going to stay the way he was. He wasn't going to let New York make him slick and sleek and contented. He was going to stay a rebel to the end.

Burl Ives told me how Woody visited him right after Burl had gotten a new apartment on Riverside Drive in New York. Burl was proud of his furnishings. He had a guest room, and said, "Woody, stay overnight with me."

"Sure, don't mind if I do."

And he never took off his boots all night long. He was a restless sleeper; Burl told me that the next day he found his brand new sheets torn to ribbons by the heels of Woody's cowboy boots.

Well, that's Woody for you. He didn't always pay his bills, and he made life hard for his family and friends sometimes—always traveling, itching heels, ants in his pants. I guess I first learned what an undependable husband Woody must have been when we visited his family in Pampa in 1940. His first wife, Mary, gave up on him when he called it quits on his job with the Bonneville Power Administration. She went back to Texas.

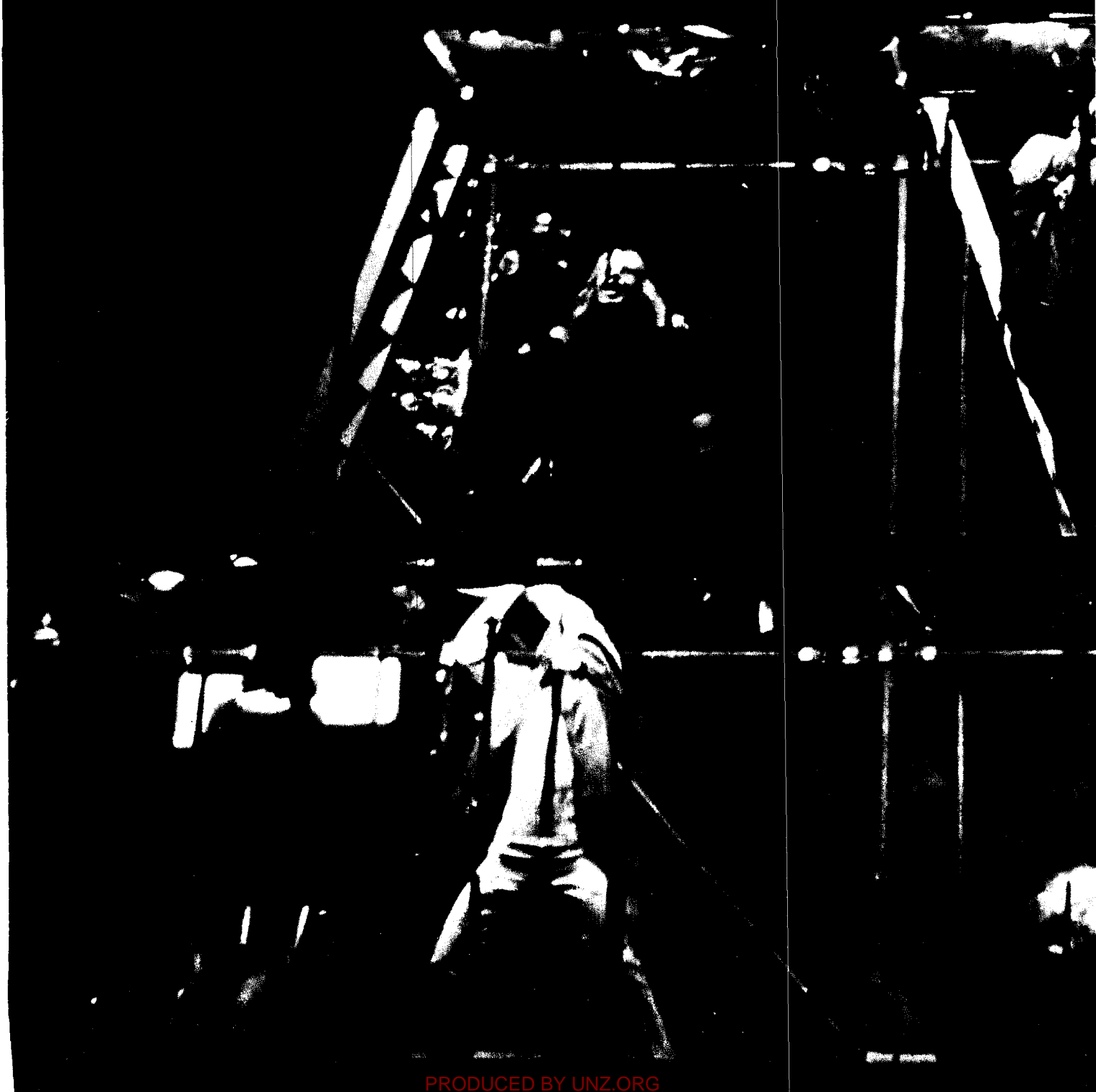
Is that the price of genius? Is it worth paying? Maybe it's easy for me to ask that. It wouldn't be as easy for poor Mary, who was trying to build a home and a family.

But Lord, Lord, he turned out song after song after song!

I have traveled around the country and around the world singing his songs and, although Woody was in a hospital for years before his death last year, I always felt he was very much with me, very much alive. Woody is right beside me, strumming along. I know his songs will go on traveling around the world and will be translated into many languages during the coming century, and will be sung by many people who never heard his name.

What better kind of immortality could a man want?

Le Living



"In the anguished, catastrophic period we live in, we feel an urgent need for a theater which events do not exceed."

—ANTONIN ARTAUD

I AFTER FOUR YEARS OF SELF-IMPOSED exile in Europe, the Living Theater has returned to America. Their homecoming is an event of extraordinary political significance with ramifications far beyond the narrow confines of contemporary theater. To fully appreciate the importance of the Living Theater's return and their six-month national tour, it is essential that one understand that the theater was not always an invalid, that it was not always an ineffectual, elitist and peripheral indulgence outside the central reality of America today.

Once upon a time, to attend a theatrical spectacle was to partake in a magical encapsulation of the godhead; it was a mystical purge, elevating the participant, providing him with the opportunity of involving himself in the creative experience. But the times have changed and cultural attrition has taken its toll, turning the concern of the theater from the magical to mere entertainment: mundane, without real relevance, no longer a transcendental experience. Theater today is devoted to diversion.

Now diversion may be a legitimate function of the music hall stage or the athletic field or the gambling casino, but diversion has nothing to do with the essential function of the theater, which, at the very least, must always be a matter of life or death.

"We must recognize that the theater, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative; that is the secret of its fascination," wrote Antonin Artaud, most lucid and revolutionary of all theater critics, a certified madman, and the prophet of the "essential theater."

No account of the Living Theater may omit reference to Artaud. "He is the madman who inspires us all," says Julian Beck, co-founder and co-director of *Le Living*, as the group is known in Europe. It was Artaud who, from the mental asylum at Reims in the 1930's and early '40s, intuited the paranoid reality which is our America, circa 1968. Not only did he foresee and—in his letters to Jacques Riviere—minutely describe our current crisis, but he also offered a hope in hell, an alternative to a society suiciding itself. Artaud called for a "theater of cruelty," which would have the force to break through language in order to touch life. He wrote, "Theater, like speech, must be free."

To touch life . . . to be touched by life . . . to recover from anomie. Artaud believed that the theater could restore our perception and return us to reality. But before this could happen, the theater itself would have to be restored, it would have to return to a pure poetic expression. Such expression would have to eschew the deceptions of language, and depend upon movements, statements by the body, unadulterated, and the unadorned sound of the human voice. He argued in letters, essays, and manifestos that such a theater could return us to our actuality, to that state where we are again capable of touching and being touched by life.

Antonin Artaud saw nothing frivolous about the theater. He died in 1948, hopelessly deranged, without ever witnessing his vision in production. But 20 years later a troupe called *Le Living* arrives in America with a theater that is not new, but one that has been too long lost; a theater we departed from at

some dismal juncture of history. Perhaps the separation occurred during the period when the Western mentality began to mistake rationality for reality; we began to deprive ourselves of spiritual nourishment. We have turned our theater into an institution, and now our institutions are disintegrating. And the art facade is falling apart like everything else. This disintegration is probably what fantasists and critics refer to as the "cultural revolution."

And those who live on the arts' splendid reflection, those who bask in its reflected glory—critics and reviewers—are forever agreeing that art no longer really works; yet they cannot reconcile themselves to its demise (death of the formal! death of the traditional!) until they have been assured of what is to come. After all the art galleries are bankrupt, the libraries locked, the theaters shuttered, *then what?*

I suggest that the Living Theater is a clue to what is coming next.

II. THE COMPANY ARRIVED IN NEW HAVEN in mid-September, to begin its six-month tour of the States at the Yale School of Drama. Yale is one of the nation's foremost cultural deep freezes. Here tradition is propagated, the status quo maintained, the upper echelon educated and the established institutions defended. To put it plainly, Yale is a bastion of the *ancien régime*. It costs three thousand six hundred dollars per school year to attend Yale University. On this exclusive campus the Living Theater appeared late in September, to demonstrate the possibility of other perspectives and to offer a restoration of alternatives. . . .

The quartet of productions which comprise the Living Theater's repertoire is well beyond the limitations of current aesthetic evaluation. None of the usual rules is relevant—not even the numerical values are constant. For example, while four productions were advertised (*Mysteries and Smaller Pieces; Frankenstein; Antigone; and Paradise Now*), there were, in fact, five spectacles being presented by the Living Theater—the fifth being the entity of the group itself, the Living Theater as a community comprised of 32 life-style performers and six natural children. They are not really performers but a roving band of Paradise-seekers, defining Paradise as total liberation, practicing hypnology and advocating Paradise *now*; their presence and their function are in direct opposition to that repressive totalitarian state called Law and Order.

Their dramatic talents lie not in histrionics but in their ability to provoke, to engender, to agitate, to disturb the State—a talent which has been demonstrated all over Europe.

"We are a revolution disguised as a theater," Julian Beck says, defining the Living Theater with appropriate theatricality. Nevertheless, incredibly, he is telling the truth. Or, to put it more precisely, the truth is telling him . . . for beyond doubt, Julian Beck and everyone else in the company are caught in the throes of their Theater-As-Revolution, just as surely as their mentor, their inspiration, their poor Artaud, was caught in the merciless lucidity of his madness.

The Living Theater is a theatrical reality that Julian Beck and his wife, Judith Malina, began creating in the living room of their spacious upper West End apartment in Manhattan in 1948, and then later that year in a cellar on Wooster Street.

In 1964, the Becks and their company were evicted from the theater they had built for themselves on 14th Street. Only

those realists in the Internal Revenue Service would seriously expect anarchists and artists to keep up with their taxes. In this instance it wasn't a matter of moral principle so much as a case of faulty bookkeeping. Today Judith Malina ruefully reflects, "I only regret that we didn't *refuse* to pay, instead of just not having enough money to pay. . . ."

The Becks lost their theater and took themselves, their company, and *The Brig*, the play they were presenting at the time, to the Mermaid Theater in London. And then they just kept going across the Continent, creating great spectacles, great scandals and reams of controversy, along with a quartet of theatrical masterpieces. Often between engagements, *Le Living* barely kept themselves alive and together, supplementing their irregular income with occasional film work.

Wherever they went (and they went wherever they were invited) they inspired violence, hostility, devotion, great enthusiasm, bad reviews, divided audiences, and embittered theater managers. Their long tour culminated at Avignon earlier this year. The details of the debacle at the Avignon Festival are notorious, conflicting, and more a matter of gossip than hard news. Suffice to say, *Le Living* had been invited to the festival by its director, M. Jean Vilar. After 13 performances from their repertoire, they gave three performances of their latest and most inflammatory work, *Paradise Now*, and were ordered by M. Vilar and the mayor of Avignon to close *Paradise* and to substitute another play. They refused. Ugly words, riot police, charges and countercharges ensued, and *Le Living* departed the Avignon Festival.

And so in mid-September the Living Theater arrived in New York for a six-month national tour, opening at Yale at the invitation of Robert Brustein, dean of the drama school, long a champion and occasionally a critic of the Living Theater.

A few weeks previous, there had been some difficulties about required papers, work permits and visas for the European members of the company, and Brustein had sent a telegram to New York's Mayor Lindsay, asking him to intercede with the Immigration Department. In part, the telegram said, "Without exaggeration, [the Living Theater's tour] will prove to be the most penetrating theater event of recent times."

With all due respect to Dean Brustein, a penetrating theater event is one thing, but a *revolutionary* theater event is quite another.

One afternoon, two days after they arrived at Yale, Judith Malina was sitting downstage right, while on centerstage the set for *Frankenstein* was slowly going 'up with much clanging and banging and frantic activity. Miss Malina was waiting for the crew to finish its work so that they might begin the rehearsal for the production of *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, which was opening that evening. A journalist was with her, taping an interview, when Robert Brustein—tan, handsome, healthy and smiling—appeared onstage and spotted her. Evidently, this was the first in-person meeting between the two since the Becks had left America four years before.

Their colloquy contains certain clues to the liberal mentality and the radical personality.

DEAN BRUSTEIN KISSED MISS MALINA ON the cheek. "Forgive me for not being here when you arrived," he apologized. Judith Malina, rather taken by surprise, seemed a bit flustered. "We're in the midst of great preparations," she said, a touch breathlessly, waving a tiny

hand in the direction of the gigantic *Frankenstein* set. She laughed quickly and added that the other three plays had no sets. Brustein assured her that he was very happy to have her and Julian and the company here at Yale. Miss Malina said that she was glad that he was glad to have them at Yale and added, apropos of nothing, that the only trouble so far was that she was positive that they (the company) were getting a distorted impression of the United States.

"We're very sheltered here, you know, and I'm afraid we're getting, well . . . a *weird view*. You know, we returned to America trembling with fear, but we've been received into the bosom of loving friends," she said with an ingenuous laugh. "Now I *know* that America isn't all sweetness and joy, I know that America isn't Paradise, you can't tell me that!"

"Jules Feiffer is up here rehearsing his new play," Brustein said. "He was up yesterday, and he'll be back on Wednesday for your opening. Jules is very anxious to see you, Judith."

"Hmmm," managed Miss Malina, who tries but really isn't too successful at the sort of civilized small talk that is the bread and butter of social intercourse. "Jules Feiffer. . . ." Miss Malina's eyes darted about. "Nice hotbed you have here."

Brustein blinked. "Pardon me. . . .?"

"I say," said Miss Malina, raising her voice, "I say that you have a good hotbed here."

"Oh yes," Brustein agreed, smiling. "Yes, it's a good place. And the students are marvelous. Solid. Very bright. . . ."

Miss Malina gave him a crooked look and asked slyly, "Are you changing?"

Brustein grinned boyishly. Charm. "Well, we're changing the theater, a little. . . ."

"Yes, but only to serve the State, right?"

"Well . . . that's not what Chekhov thought." Bob Brustein wasn't easily disconcerted. He is a knowledgeable, reasonable man. "Well, you know, when you're living under a State like this . . ." he began, but Miss Malina didn't let him finish.

"We're fresh from the French revolution," she proclaimed, impatiently. Then added provocatively, "We want to see it happen here."

Brustein's smile was implacable. "My feeling is that these are separate compartments. The French revolution didn't produce any theater, and the idea is to keep the theater alive. . . . The revolution was a happening in itself, but it didn't produce any artists of consequence, *outside of Delacroix*."

And there it was, under the spotlight. Shining bright: egg on the face. Brustein was obviously under the impression that Judith Malina was referring to the revolution of the 18th century, while she, of course, was talking about a much more recent insurrection, the student demonstrations of last May. Hadn't he been listening to her? And wasn't she listening to him? She went right on talking, insisting that "the revolution" had produced a great deal. Yes indeed . . . "It produced a whole new concept of anarchism," she pointed out, and Brustein answered, "That's not theater, it's politics."

"You can't separate the two, can you?"

"No, they're not separate, they're contiguous." Dean Brustein agreed, up to a point. "But politics and theater aren't the same thing. They aren't identical. They meet at a certain point . . . but . . ."

"They have a responsibility toward each other," said Miss Malina firmly.

"Absolutely," agreed Brustein.

"They don't exist without each other, so it doesn't matter where you draw the line. . . ." Then she began to talk about their production of *Paradise Now*. "In *Paradise*, I think we set up a situation where that line just about fades away, even if only for a few minutes at a time. . . ."

"Then you're stepping out of art and into life." Brustein obviously disapproved of a very neat trick.

"Life and art are something else at that moment. . . ." Judith maintained. She went on about the theatrical experience, and the flash, and the fact that it wasn't necessary to step back and forth from life to art if your life *was* your art. Brustein listened politely and then said sensibly, "But you'd have to assume the absolute rightness of a cause, or of your cause, and theater doesn't assume the rightness of any single cause." Evidently, Brustein's theater was a democracy. And Judith Malina's theater? Anarchy. Plain and simple anarchy.

"No, you don't have to assume the rightness or wrongness of any cause," she insisted. "You just have to agree to say and do what you mean, or at least, what you believe you mean. As long as you're saying what you mean, well, then, there's no question of the rightness or the wrongness of any cause."

"You know what Ibsen said." Brustein slipped her the scholastic ploy. "Once something is articulated or formularized, it becomes false and its opposite becomes true. And there is the sense of conflict as well," he said, citing the implacable law of Western theater, The Necessity-For-Conflict, or, Why-We-Need-A-Plot-To-Put-On-A-Play. "There has to be a conflict. Two ideas. One of them right and one of them wrong. Now I feel that when the theater becomes identical with life, there's no conflict. . . ."

"*Bill, get out of the way!*" Miss Malina suddenly shouted to a tall, redheaded boy who was directly under a jerry-built, improvised excuse for a hoist which was being used to swing long sections of iron pipe from the pile onstage to the guy wires hanging from the flies. He looked up when Judith called to him. "Will you watch out. That just missed your head. . . ." She abruptly swung back to Brustein, very serious and intense. "No, the conflict is provided by the situation. For example, we're in Geneva and a Prague happens. . . ."

"But Prague was simply a steamroller of tanks over any complexities or implications," Brustein objected.

"If that's what you believed, then that's what you'd say onstage. Now you might want to say that, and I might want to say something else about Prague, you know. . . ."

Brustein sighed. "You really assume that what anybody says is right simply because they're saying it. . . .?"

"Not at all." Judith made the reality-leap. "All I am claiming is that what anybody says is really what they are saying."

Dean Brustein gulped, started to say something, swallowed it, and in a sudden burst of affection he leaned over and kissed Judith Malina on the cheek. Then he stood up and said, "Judith, you're a wonderful theater person, and you always have been. You're one of my favorites. It's going to be interesting," he said, and added with just a trace of regret, "Anyway, you've been away too long. But I have to run now." He took a step backwards. "I've got this, uh . . . this meeting, but maybe afterwards I'll come back and talk to you, or talk *at* you. . . all right?" Quick smile, and he's gone.

Judith Malina stared after him. "I talk too much," she said after a while. Then turning to the journalist, she apologized for the interruption. She gazed at the work onstage; the

Frankenstein set was going up slowly. "I don't think we're ever going to get a chance to rehearse today. . . ." she said miserably.

"Admittedly or not, conscious or unconscious, the poetic state, a transcendent experience of life, is what the public is fundamentally seeking through love, crime, drugs, war or insurrection."

—ANTONIN ARTAUD

"I've been a pacifist all my life, but I don't see how I can continue to be one without becoming a martyr."

—A BERKELEY RESIDENT after the police riot on June 30, 1968.

III. THE BECKS ARE, BY THEIR OWN admission, anarchists and pacifists, and between them they have served 14 prison sentences over the years. Naturally, most of the Living Theater company are of the same pacifistic-anarchistic mind, more or less. They all abhor violence, insist on total liberation, continually sacrifice themselves to the passions and the furies and the enthusiasms of their audiences; they preach peace, and provoke disturbances wherever they go. Yet they are a sweet, gentle group, innocent as lambs, powerful as victims. There is something so absolute about them all, something so extreme, so excessive, and so vulnerable . . . something so religious, so positive, it's fanatical and sometimes even a trifle smug. They are so certain; they know just what they are about.

"I have no illusions about the theater, any theater, being able to stop the war," Judith Malina told a group of Yale drama students one afternoon. *"But I have complete faith in the ability of the theater to destroy the values, and eventually destroy the culture that created those values."*

In this, as in many other regards, the Living Theater resembles the New Left *mise-en-scène*: mindless, furious, excessive. . . . Nothing can help them, nothing can stop them, and God only knows what will come after them.

Meanwhile, they are in the process of evolving what might be termed *participatory theater*. This too was derived from Artaud, who suggested that such a theater would contain a strong element of hysteria, induced by hypnological techniques such as variations of rhythmic monotonies, chants, marches, breathing exercises. . . .

That theater which Artaud called "*essential theater*" is almost wholly devoid of content. A rough outline suffices, for the purpose of this theater is to secure the commitment of those participating. This theater does not perform for an audience, but for those involved; therefore everything in it is designed to achieve maximum participation from those in attendance.

The Living Theater is extraordinarily skillful at this. Their methods are simple, basic, direct, quite effective. Essentially, they depend upon the dynamics of confrontation. They deliberately provoke the audience into reacting. This reaction is the first stage of the seduction which will take the spectator into the spectacle.

In a workshop theater under the main theater, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, Robert Brustein, and about two hundred students met one afternoon. The Living Theater had already presented two of their four scheduled productions, *Mysteries* and *Antigone*. They had succeeded in polarizing opinion. Half the drama school hated them, maintaining that they were the antithesis of theater, while the other half insisted that they were the beginning of theater. Both factions were in attend-

ance. Julian Beck was attempting to define his method, its origins and its direction, its central concerns, its *raison* . . . above all, he wanted to make it clear that the Living Theater was a political theater without being a theater of propaganda.

Julian held forth: "When the work began in the late '40s and in the early '50s, there was a peculiar sort of aesthetic law operating, and that law, essentially, was that you may not mix art and politics. At that time, it was widely believed that one despoils the other. So we kept our *religion* to ourselves and concentrated our public efforts on our art, the theater. We were very much concerned with getting rid of the barrier between the audience and the performers." Julian Beck is an elongated, serene, yet intense man, with a bald crown, and long locks growing around his uncovered pate. He exudes a priest-like mien—gentle, inviolate, sanctified, burning, determined. A man of grace, and an accomplished enchanter, he has come quite a distance from the days when the Living Theater was an infant in his upper West Side apartment.

One of the Becks' earliest productions was Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise*, which Julian made into an American experience, becoming the personification of Dr. Hunkfus, the dwarf who has all sorts of ideas regarding what the theater should be, and who is eventually run out of the theater. That was in the late '40s. By 1963, Julian and the Living Theater had reached a visible turning point. In presenting Kenneth Brown's *The Brig*, they had nearly ceased to be involved with text. Brown's script ran less than 15 pages. Around it the Living Theater created an extraordinary sequence of military choreography, punctuated by violent physical attacks on the actors by other actors.

"I DON'T RECALL A MORE unpleasant evening in the theater." Robert Brustein reviewed the highlights of the Living Theater's history, while Julian sat on the edge of the stage in his shirtsleeves and ate his sandwich; Judith was beside him, picking at a piece of fruit.

"It was a totally exhausting piece of theater, but it made its point." Brustein, casual in a tweed sports jacket and grey flannels, told the assembled drama students about *The Brig*. "It was brutal, but that was the point. It was one of the early glimpses into American totalitarianism; the first we have from the theater, or from any other source, of what was to come; what has come. . . ."

"As you probably know," Brustein went on, "*The Brig* was finally shut down by the Internal Revenue Service. But the production didn't end there; it continued with the company climbing back into the theater after the IRS had locked them out, and bringing a good part of the audience along with them, in order to do a benefit performance for the actors, who hadn't been paid because the tax people had frozen the box office receipts. At any rate, that action brought Judith and Julian to trial.

"Now the trial itself was also an exciting theatrical event, with Judith and Julian defending themselves. . . . It was a rare moment, you may be sure, when Judith put Julian on the stand. . . . And as a result of that trial and that entire unhappy incident, the Becks decided to go into exile. This exile has lasted nearly four years, until about a week ago, when they began their marvelous and triumphant return. . . ."

Dean Brustein went on. "The first play I reviewed [for the New Republic] was at the Living Theater on 14th Street. It

was *The Connection*, and it was a play that changed my mind about what the theater could be. Not because of the text, which, if you read it, you'll find is really rather crude, and improvised . . . but because of what this meant in terms of theatrical advance by these people who had somehow managed to break down the barriers between what was going on onstage and what was going on in life. Of course there was an artifice involved; you were meant to think that these junkies onstage were really junkies and not actors. And I gather that some of them were junkies, but they weren't the junkies they were supposed to be. . . . And I'm afraid that the artifice will always be a problem for them. As long as theater is an imitation, and it will always be an imitation. . . ." Dean Brustein pronounced the limits, and then used himself as an example. "I am wearing my dean's clothes, unconsciously perhaps, but still I'm wearing them in order to say something to you, to play a role. And the Living Theater wears clothing too, I think. . . . So even when they are acting themselves on the stage, *they are acting*. It is really very difficult to actually break that barrier down . . . but I think that over the years, the Living Theater is coming closer and closer to absolute zero. . . ."

Brustein tied up his introduction with a bit of drama criticism, remarking that, "The physical control of the troupe is marvelous. I don't know how this was achieved, but I gather it was a combination of continual breathing exercises, Yoga exercises, as well as living together for the last four years, and sharing nightmares and other experiences together. As a result we have a genuine ensemble. An ensemble that could be achieved only under the conditions it was achieved, in exile. A physical and a spiritual exile which brought them together where they began to discover each other through theater."

To discover each other through theater. Exactly. But then there is theater and there is theater. There is the theater of imitation which Brustein believes will remain imitative. In regards to that theater, Artaud writes: "*Why lie, why try to place on a literary level a thing which is the very cry of life? Why give an appearance of fiction to what is made up of the ineradicable substance of the soul, to what is the wail of reality?*" (Artaud's letter to J. Riviere; 25 May, 1924.)

"WHEN WE HAD OUR THEATER ON 14TH STREET," Julian told the Yale students, "we were presenting simultaneously, in repertory, *Many Loves*, *Tonight We Improvise*, and *The Connection*. So it was natural, I suppose, for many people to think that the message of the Living Theater was that you must always do plays about plays that were in rehearsal. Now this wasn't intentional on our part. At least, it wasn't conscious. But many members of the audience were taken in, and this was probably the worst part of it. People would come to the box office and demand their money back because they had paid to see a show and not a rehearsal . . . well, naturally we were very disturbed. Mainly because what we were doing was really very removed from that truth which we were always talking about.

"In the 1960's we came a few steps closer to that truth when we allowed ourselves to be more open regarding our political position. Now we have always been anarchists, pacifists, and revolutionaries, but when we were asked about the relationship between our politics and our theater, we usually implied that the two were separate things. There was the art of the theater and then there was what went into real life. Of course, this

simply is not true. And the events which led ultimately to our departure for Europe were not tragic—in fact, quite the contrary; they were for us a liberation. We realized that it was no longer necessary to divide theater and life . . . probably because we no longer wanted to.

“From *The Brig*, we went on to create the *Mysteries*, then *Antigone*, *Frankenstein*, and now, *Paradise*, which is still in the process of being evolved. That brings us up to the present, and here we are, still grappling with the relationship between the spectator and the stage. We come the closest to grips with that problem, and with the problem of actuality, in *Paradise Now*. In *Paradise* what we have tried to do is to destroy, as fully as we can, the barriers between the performer and the public. And so in *Paradise*, everyone must become a participant. If one does not take part, one is left slightly lifeless, and one is left in another place, quite outside. And if the spectator doesn’t do it, he can’t see it, because there are no sight lines.”

After Julian had finished speaking, Brustein raised a question concerning the purpose of the nudity in *Paradise Now*. The audience is encouraged to undress, as part of the process of liberation. Brustein maintained that as long as a person retained his reason he was still assuming the mantle of social behavior. “Even if a person is naked he still has his wits, so he really isn’t liberated in the sense of being free of all restraint.

“The second point I want to bring up is do you really want to reach that state? I know that you have great faith in the unaccommodated man, but don’t you also have some reservations? Aren’t you a little afraid that the unaccommodated man may turn out to be a brute? There is that cruelty in nature . . .” he began, but Judith Malina cut him short.

“That’s the myth we want to destroy. I think that brutality is really an attempt to break through the artificial barriers because they are so terribly painful to the natural man. He is constrained by the mythology that if he doesn’t wear a hat he will become a brute. . . . I believe that the whole revolution is opposed to that. The revolution maintains that we are inhuman because we have no way to express ourselves except in false smiles and unnatural courtesies. We believe that if we can destroy the mythology of social behavior, we can demonstrate that we can live much better without all that crap.”

“I don’t know the resolution to this,” Brustein said severely, “but of course you are aware that some very great thinkers and philosophers do disagree with your assumptions about the primal, natural state of man. . . .”

“And some very great thinkers and philosophers agree . . .” countered Judith.

“After Rousseau, I can’t think of one,” Brustein said. “The whole experience of the 20th century has made it impossible to accept such conclusions anymore. Excessive regulations, excessive repressions are brutal, but excessive freedom is even more brutal. You know the primal myth of Freud, if I may mention his name. . . .”

“We are trying to go beyond the primal myth,” cried Judith, and Julian picked up the theme.

“I think that Freud did say that we have a choice between increased barbarism or increased neurosis. And when asked what to do about this, Freud replied, ‘I have no advice.’ But that madman who inspires us all, Artaud, does have some advice . . . by trying to rid ourselves of barbarism, we have armored ourselves against feeling and have become cold and

unnatural creatures. The domination of rationalism, the domination of the intellect, our laws and our mores, have stopped us from being able to use our senses and our bodies.

“Artaud calls for a theater of cruelty, with the idea that this theater of cruelty is going to work therapeutically by gripping the spectator in the guts, and by making him feel something, not intellectually, not sentimentally, in the English sense of the word, meaning to substitute false feeling for true feeling, but to really get them with the ideas entering the body through the body. Perhaps, if we can effect that through theater, it will open other doors to feeling. Now the theater is a limited place of communication, and all therapy can’t take place in the theater, so that one has to conceive of a revolutionary movement, a revolution of feeling, of increased feeling, and the destruction of the armament, starting with the clothing, our clothing which we use to protect ourselves from feeling. By getting rid of the so-called niceties, the defenses, the false forms, we may get closer to the truth, and closer to fulfillment.

“The end of that compact mentality, the end of that approach which insists that life is one thing and art another—that is one of the things we are trying to accomplish. That’s why we are trying to make theater into life, and life into theater. That’s why we hear so often that the real theater is in the streets. . . . We were fortunate enough to be in Paris last May during the revolution, and when the artists gathered together to discuss what they could do to aid and support the students, they began, initially, with all the old ideas. ‘Well, we can make posters, we can print poems, we can do plays in the streets.’ And immediately Judith said, ‘*To do a play alongside the barricades is to degrade the barricades!*’ The actuality there in the street surpassed any false theater.

“They had mounted a heroic play, *The People Against The Repression*, and I need not add that they were playing it quite magnificently. The revolution never had a better showcase. For us to present an artificial play there was pure *ancien régime*. It was over. You couldn’t do that. They spoke of taking over the Odeon, the Comédie Française, and some other theaters in Paris, but the idea of doing plays in these theaters . . . that . . . what? Take over the Odeon and do what . . . ? Some revolutionary texts? Or Ionesco? That would be a mere *putsch*. That would be taking over the power in order to do essentially the same thing.

“When the decision to take over the Odeon was reached, it was decided to turn it not into a place where plays were done or films shown, but to make it into a place of live theater, where everybody became an actor. And what happened was a 24-hour confrontation . . . a debate . . . a marathon performance. Anybody could enter off the street and speak and receive a response. There was great ferment. . . . What I saw at the Odeon was the greatest theater I’ve ever seen,” said Julian, and his large eyes glowed.

“We talk about that a lot in *Paradise*. About the need to get rid of the architecture of elitism, to get rid of the barrier between art and life. To bring the theater out into the streets, and the street into the theater.”

“Then you’d find yourself out of a job, is that the idea?” asked a knowing voice at the back of the small theater.

Julian nodded, vastly amused. “Yes, that’s it exactly. That’s what is called hastening the withering away of the State. When you’re an anarchist, you are interested in the greatest amount of change possible.”

HOW WELL DID THEY SUCCEED? How much change did the Living Theater effect upon even the most susceptible members of the Yale community—the drama students? Does anyone ever know whether or not he succeeds in touching another?

This much we can certainly say: after the long arguments over coffee and cigarettes, after all the pros and all the cons had been laid out in the coffee shops and kitchens around the university, and the traditional theater had been weighed and measured against the *essential theater* of Artaud and the Becks, after all the points of view had been viewed and reviewed and finally blunted, we can be quite sure that the students of the Yale drama department went to class, read their Chekhov, turned in their assignments, and hoped for better grades than they deserved.

This doesn't necessarily mean that nothing has changed because the drama students haven't liberated the University Theater yet or locked Dean Brustein up in the Green Room. Despite Strindberg's statement that the theater has always been dominated by the bourgeois, we can always discover a modicum of comfort in telling ourselves that it need not always be so. The entire situation can change, will change, in a fraction of a second, or a long half hour; that is all the time it takes to turn the structure upside down. One sudden explosion in the culture vacuum is all that it would take to shatter the dreadful *taedium vitae* (which makes schizophrenia look like a bad cold) and turn us from suicide to Paradise here and now.

Several days after the students and the Becks had met in the little theater under the big theater, the Living Theater opened its fourth and final production, their eagerly anticipated collective creation in progress, *Paradise Now*.

"IF-I-COULD-TURN-YOU-ON/IF-I-COULD-DRIVE-YOU-OUT-OF-YOUR-MIND/IF-I-COULD-TELL-YOU/IF-I-COULD-DRIVE-YOU-OUT-OF-YOUR-WRETCHED-MIND/I-WOULD-TELL-YOU. . ."

The evening's spectacle began with members of *Le Living* roaming through the house, screaming at the audience, chanting and complaining. . .

"I am not allowed to travel without a passport!"

"I am not allowed to smoke marijuana!"

"I am not allowed to take my clothes off . . . !"

"Free theater . . . ! Act! Speak! Do what you want, the theater is yours! Feel free . . . ! You, the public, can choose your role and act it out!"

"Free the culture! Enact the cultural revolution!"

And one voice asked, "What is the cultural revolution?"

Indeed, what is the revolution of culture? What does it mean when a gang of victims sets out to change the perceptions, alter the perspectives, revolutionize the arts, and includes the audience in this revolution? And what are the Republicans and Democrats doing about it? What are you and I doing about it? What will it do about us?

Why banality? Why a rigid system of aesthetics? Why actors and why an audience and why should people sit on chairs and tell each other stories? Why aren't we eating more art, practicing the politics of ecstasy, and rolling naked on the illuminated stage, warmed by the footlights, touching and being touched by each other? Wouldn't that be just as interesting as spending the evening attending to language? Why should language be restricted to defining experience? Why shouldn't

language be an experience in itself? Why stick to words when a vast range of human sound is available? Why the hell shouldn't we ascend to Paradise?

The first performance of *Paradise Now* lasted approximately four-and-a-half hours, and at the end of that time, about three hundred people were onstage along with the regular members of the company; about a hundred or more of this number had partially or completely disrobed. And at some crucial moment in the theatrical time continuum, someone, a member of the company or a member of the audience (no one is really sure who did it) cried out, "The play is over! The theater is in the streets! The streets belong to the people! And WE ARE THE PEOPLE!"

And then some people, following the lead of Julian Beck, who marched offstage, up the aisle and out into the Indian Summer evening, clad only in a *cache sexe*, turned the night into a parade, an improvisation, a naked walk at midnight in New Haven.

I happened to be standing at the corner of Chapel Street waiting for the traffic light to change, when I saw the crowd coming out of the University Theater. And I saw, almost simultaneously, a patrol car at the light, also waiting. I saw the expressions on the faces of the officers in that car when they glimpsed the approaching mixed crowd of nearly naked and fully dressed theatergoers, walking on the sidewalk and in the street, away from the theater and into real life. That was a delicious moment. The officers had that look which comes when reason fails and there's nothing at all real about the reality, and it is easier to disbelieve your eyes than to accept what you're actually seeing. Hundreds of half-dressed people marching off the Yale campus. Going where? Why? There had been no word of any demonstrations, protests, or student uprisings. Yet there they were, a whole damned crowd of them marching right towards the patrol car. So who can blame the officers for reacting like frightened, confused men, and arresting the first ten naked people they could grab?

Julian and Judith and some other members of the cast were among those placed under arrest. Nothing unusual about that. Of course the police didn't have to use their Mace on one excited youth who was wearing only his shoes, socks, and undershorts, but then we have to remember that the police also have their point of unreality, past which they should not be pushed, else they panic and people get hurt. Naturally. Whose fault is that? If one aspires to be a real revolutionary, one must develop some compassion for policemen.

The bail was set, the charge was indecent exposure, and the Becks spent a few hours in jail while the details were worked out by their lawyers and the chief of police. Dean Brustein showed up at the station, described the evening as a "controlled occurrence," and said it was all "remarkably harmless and even gentle." The New York Times printed his comments the next morning, consigning it all to history.

It has always been my contention that revolutions should be conducted in the theaters. Further, revolutions should be remarkable, harmless, and definitely *gentle*. I would suggest that all our revolutionaries learn from *Le Living* and discard their guns, along with their clothes, and march naked up the aisles and out into the streets, to mystify and amaze policemen, and by their wonderful, outrageous, wordless eloquence, serve notice that the Cultural Revolution has commenced.

[ART]

The Stamp Collection of Dirk Bach

THE VISUAL FORMAT of postage stamps interests me. I enjoy seeing what happens to additive images contained within borders, to serrated edges, perforations and letter forms. Moreover, it is an extremely suitable vehicle for launching protest statements—particularly ones which involve verbal messages.

I can't recall exactly when I began this series; I think sometime in the early part of 1967. I remember that the idea was initially appealing because of the extraordinary interest Americans take in consecrating memorials of endless variety: zoos, swimming pools, park benches, forests, drinking fountains.

The conception and placement of the bulkier memorials, consisting primarily of artillery pieces which appear to have eternally captured their own town squares and city plazas, seem to have been prompted by a peculiar reverence for historical episodes in which extreme acts of violence have been interpreted as stunning examples of patriotism. The flimsier, less permanent memorials—particularly commemorative postage stamps—tend to be oriented toward exploiting more humanitarian issues, such as "Pray for Peace," "Nebraska Statehood Centennial" and "Law and Order."

I have obviously not concentrated on the theme of commemorative stamps in an effort to improve the design and content of our postals, although there is certainly a need for serious improvement in this area of government publications. Paintings of postage stamps are a means of communicating contemporary themes and concepts without resorting to heavy-handed contemporary visual invectives such as the all-purpose collage.

—DIRK BACH

Artist DIRK BACH is the director of the Scudder Gallery at the University of New Hampshire. During the past few years he has had a number of one-man shows, and he is represented in many public and private collections.

