



*Reprinted with permission. Educational
use only. Do not copy or distribute.*

PROFESSIONAL RESIDENT THEATRE IN BOSTON: A FEASIBILITY STUDY (1981)

By Michael G. Albano

This article has been reprinted with permission from the author.

Professional Resident Theatre in Boston

A Feasibility Study

A Thesis

submitted by

Michael G. Albano

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Drama

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

October

1981

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter One: The Development of Non-commercial
Professional Theatre in Boston

Chapter Two: The Influence of Social Factors on Theatre
and the Performing Arts in Boston

Chapter Three: Primary Economic Considerations for Theatre
and the Performing Arts in Boston

Chapter Four: Primary Political Considerations for Theatre
and the Performing Arts in Boston

Chapter Five: Indigenous Theatre and Service Organizations

Chapter Six: A Model and Four Contemporary Proposals

Endnotes

Bibliography

List of Interviews: Held with Members of Boston's Performing Arts
Community

B 12-16 81

INTRODUCTION

Boston is filled with a wide variety of cultural and recreational resources. It is the home of a world famous symphony orchestra, a nationally known opera company and a respectable and well-attended ballet company. As a center of learning, Boston is unsurpassed in the nation and the city's professional sports teams are often division leaders in both victories and attendance. However, despite this bounty, the fact remains that Boston does not shelter a nonprofit professional resident theatre company which can come close to matching the quality or the achievement of any of the city's other major performing arts organizations, and it has not sheltered such a company for nearly a decade. This does not mean that Boston is presently devoid of theatrical activity. On the contrary, the Boston theatregoer usually has a fair number of productions from which to choose, but these productions are generally either the technically skilled but artistically empty fare of Broadway try-outs and road shows, or they are the ambitious but limited offerings from small local groups. Boston has no Arena Stage (Washington, D.C.) or American Conservatory Theatre (San Francisco). A Guthrie Theatre (Minneapolis) or a Hartford Stage (Connecticut) cannot be found there.

The regional theatre movement in America was born in the 1950's, grew rapidly in the 1960's, and matured during the 1970's. Its importance to theatre in this country cannot be overemphasized. Regional theatres are now based in nearly every section of the country from Florida to Alaska, thereby enabling many people to see professional productions for the first time and also providing many theatre professionals with outlets for creative expression at

at a secure level of income. Regional theatre has also become the major supplier for Broadway, originally producing such long playing hits as Ain't Misbehavin', A Chorus Line and Annie. The Charles Playhouse and the Theatre Company of Boston were two minor regional theatres that developed in the late 1950's and early 1960's respectively, but they both failed soon after entering the 1970's, due, generally, to bad management and/or lack of public and private support. Although there have been other attempts to form new companies since then, not one has succeeded.

The prime difficulty in establishing a professional resident theatre company in Boston is that Boston is essentially a city with strong commercial theatre tastes. Since the elimination of the stock company at the Boston Museum in 1893, and the rise of the try-out system at the turn of the century, Boston has been dependent on an outside source (i.e., New York) for its choice theatrical fare. This dependency places Boston in a position that it would never accept in music, art or education. The commercial theatre sensibility, which usually emphasizes light musicals or comedies, star performers, and extravagant and costly productions, has prevented most Bostonians from actively supporting the development of alternative forms of theatre. Like the wine snob before the general acceptance of the California grape, the Boston theatregoer believes that the domestic product can never match the "real thing."

Unfortunately, Boston's taste for commercial theatre has also had a detrimental effect on the availability of private funds for nonprofit resident theatres. Many potential donors hesitate to

fund an art form that they have come to know as a strictly profit-making enterprise. It has not yet become clear to the general public, or for that matter, to elected officials and corporate executives, that a high-quality artistically significant nonprofit and professional theatre company deserves and needs outside funding as much as any of the other performing arts.

This thesis examines the social, economic, political, and artistic factors that have influenced the attempts to establish a professional resident theatre company in Boston. These factors have been updated through September 1979 in an attempt to predict the success of such a theatre company now and in the near future.

The development of alternative non-commercial professional theatre in Boston is traced in Chapter One. Special emphasis is given to Boston's three major nonprofit theatre companies of the past: the Repertory Theatre of Boston, the Charles Playhouse and the Theatre Company of Boston. Chapter Two notes the place that theatre holds in Boston's arts and entertainment world. Through the results of a survey conducted by the Ford Foundation in 1971, and through the information contained in the 1972 United States Census of Selected Services, several conclusions are drawn concerning the potential public response for a new professional resident theatre company in Boston. In Chapter Three, the economic considerations for a new professional company are discussed. Because of the commercial theatre's strong influence on all theatre activity in Boston, the chapter begins with the recent financial developments in that field. The chapter continues with an estimate of the involvement the large public and private funding

sources might have with a new company. Since no such theatre company exists in Boston today, Chapter Three also provides economic profiles of Boston's three major performing arts institutions (the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Opera Company of Boston and the Boston Ballet) in order to discern tangible indications of the funding trends in Boston. Chapter Four looks into the political reasons behind the recent government involvement in the arts. An appraisal is made of the effects that government agencies (including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, the Massachusetts Special Commission on the Performing Arts, and the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs) have on the financial health and artistic freedom of Boston's performing arts, particularly theatre. Recommendations for further government involvement are also included. Boston's often neglected local theatre groups are the first of two major topics in Chapter Five. Particularly noted are the histories and future aspirations of the two more popular and financially successful local groups, the Boston Shakespeare Company and the Next Move Theatre. The other major element of this chapter is an examination and appraisal of Boston's service organizations to local arts institutions: ARTS/Boston and the Metropolitan Cultural Alliance. In Chapter Six, the final chapter, a model is drawn which possesses the qualities and characteristics that the writer has determined to be vital for a successful resident professional theatre in Boston. On the basis of this model, four proposals for such a theatre company (a reborn Charles Playhouse under Frank Sugrue and Jeanne Muller, the Boston

Repertory Theatre under Karl Gevecker, Janice Cashell's Massachusetts Center Repertory Company, and the American Repertory Theatre of Robert Brustein at Harvard's Loeb Drama Center) are evaluated. The thesis concludes with an estimate of the overall feasibility of establishing a professional resident theatre company in Boston in the near future.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Development of Non-commercial Professional
Theatre in Boston

Nonprofit professional theatre is a relatively recent phenomenon in Boston's theatrical history. The first theatre in Boston to be given nonprofit tax-exempt status was Henry Jewett's Repertory Theatre of Boston in 1925. Founded as the first civic repertory theatre in the United States, its success was short-lived and it closed after five years. There have been other attempts since then, some of which lasted longer than Jewett's company, but they too all ultimately failed. Before the development of these nonprofit theatres is traced, it will be useful to examine Boston's early theatrical history and see how the social and economic trends of earlier days affected theatre then and now.

Before the theatre could have any opportunity to grow in Boston, it had to become a legal activity, for indeed there was a law on the books in Boston as late as 1797 against public theatricals. Before that time plays were disguised as "Moral Dialogues in Five Acts" in order to circumvent the law and appease the religious leaders in the community. The puritan ethic against entertainment was deeply ingrained and religious feelings against theatre ran high for many years.

As late as 1863, by which time several theatres were doing brisk and regular business, a printed pamphlet of a sermon given at the Bromfield Methodist Church was published denouncing theatre as a "house of pleasure or amusement, and not of recreation ... this discourse is not directed against any abuse of the institution, but against the institution itself."¹ The tensions that existed between the church and the theatre were never enough to do away

completely with all theatrical activity in Boston, but these tensions may have been powerful enough to prevent many from clearing a profit. The Tremont Theatre, which opened in competition to the old Boston or Federal Street Theatre in September 1827, put the Federal Street out of business in three years. However, by 1843, the Tremont too had succumbed to competition, this time from the National Theatre and the Boston Museum which had begun to include dramatic presentations full time in that year. These theatres were not very far from solvency. In the Tremont's last season the deficit was only \$3,000 for the entire year. After several rough years this deficit was enough to cause its closing, but it was not so large to prevent one from thinking that a little less opposition from the clergy might have made a difference.

There were other problems with the state of the theatre at that time which compounded the problem of declining attendance figures. These had to do with the changes in theatre production. All the theatres that produced legitimate drama (as opposed to variety, opera or burlesque) in the 18th and most of the 19th centuries, had a resident or "stock" company of actors. These companies were formed season by season and its actors (usually imported from England) were contracted to stay with the theatre and perform roles as assigned for the entire season. Most stock companies performed all the roles in the plays, except for the occasion when the lead role was played by one of a few "star" British performers who had been venturesome enough to leave the safety of English shores. They crossed the Atlantic to make

special appearances in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston and any other city large enough to support a theatre along the way. America was still quite young and still very dependent on the motherland for its aesthetic fashion. If an actor had developed a reputation (or the report of one) in England, that was enough to attract the American public. The theatre managers, knowing a good attraction when they saw one, were more than willing to pay the star's often outrageous fees in an attempt to raise attendance figures. William Clapp, a contemporary critic and historian, believed that, unlike other large cities, Boston was not wholly accepting of British "stars." In 1821, for example, the great Edmund Kean was booed off the stage for his bad behavior. When Kean apologized and tried again in 1825, he found that Boston does not readily forgive or forget and was forced to flee to Worcester after a riot broke out at the Federal Theatre.

The star system was a good arrangement for a time, but it had serious problems. What had once been an occasional novelty for the audience, soon grew into a habitual expectation. Second-rate British actors, hearing of the gold that could be mined in the "colonies," announced themselves as "stars" and glutted the market. Several theatres including the Tremont, actually put themselves out of business when they tried to outbid other theatres for a desired star's services and found out in the end that they had overbid. Audiences became reluctant to attend productions that only featured the stock performers, and this put theatre managers in a difficult position. If they contracted a star to

come in, they would need to come close to selling out the house for the entire engagement in order to show any profit. Then, once the engagement had been completed and the star had gone, the attendance figures dropped sharply. Clapp notes in A Record of the Boston Stage that in 1846 the theatres were so dependent on star engagements that it was rare that the take would exceed \$100 when only the stock company was performing and quite often a mere \$50 was the evening's gross.² With weekly expenses averaging \$800 at the time, it is no wonder that only the most competent theatre managers were able to devise a profitable season.

Not all classes equally attended the legitimate houses and that hurt management also. Then, as now for the most part, only the wealthier classes could regularly attend the theatricals there. And perhaps they were the only classes inclined to see them. The lower classes were more inclined to go to such theatres as the Lion or the National which presented such entertainment as equestrian shows or "blood and thunder" theatre. These entertainments, in Clapp's words, appealed to the "taste of the lower half million"³ -- elitist words, but somewhat reflective of the truth. When a foreign dignitary came to Boston in the 1840's and a special ball was held in his honor at Faneuil Hall, even a star attraction could not adequately fill the house at the local theatre.⁴

Before the 1850's an audience went to the theatre either for the star who was performing or for the particular attractiveness of an individual play or entertainment. Theatres and the policies

they held changed so frequently that the public was never given the opportunity to develop any familiarity with the stock company. The type of support that a theatre needed for continual survival was the kind that came from church, family and community. The theatre needed to be seen as a noble and honorable profession before it could become an institution. Attending a play had to be seen as a learning, virtuous experience; but it was far too late to again try "Moral Dialogues in Five Acts." Unless a manager came up with a new approach to running a theatre, theatre management would remain a difficult way to earn a living.

While the Tremont Theatre was playing its last few seasons and would soon be sold and converted to the Tremont Temple, Moses Kimball, without realizing it at the time, stumbled upon the method that was not only to make theatregoing morally correct but also would make the members of his company fit topics for family conversation. It was Kimball's good fortune in 1840 to buy out the contents of the New England Museum and to display them a year later in a building known as the Boston Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts. The collection was primarily one of stuffed animals, wax figures and preserved oddities. The added feature of the Museum, however, was the small auditorium upstairs where, if one chose, one could hear some musical entertainment included in the price of admission. Since the entertainments were inside a museum, attendance was generally considered morally correct. In 1843 the way was cleared for the addition of a stock company to perform complete dramatic works, and by 1846 a new building seating 1,200 was built on Tremont Street, next to King's Chapel. Kimball and

his stage manager William Smith knew that the citizens of Boston needed an excuse to attend the theatre, and these men were glad to provide one for them. In much the same manner as B.F. Keith with vaudeville fifty years later, they appealed to a family audience. When they opened their new home it was announced that, "Some of the most chaste and elegant productions of the French, Italian and German drama" would be performed and, "all profane expletives and indecent allusions" would be "totally expurged."⁵ "A proper performance for a proper audience" could have been their motto. Unlike the other theatres in Boston, the Museum was conscious of its performers' images. They had to be honorable off-stage as well as on. When actress Kate Ryan joined the Museum company in 1872 she noted and continued the traditions set down years before.

Familiarity between players and the public was not tolerated ... Our actors avoided publicity. The leading members of the company were conscious of having won a degree of position in the life of the city, and realized that much of their magnetism depended on maintaining a certain glamour around their personality which would fade with intimacy.⁶

Although there were occasional runs lasting several weeks, the bills at the Museum changed very frequently. This repertory approach would not have been feasible however, had the company not been blessed with a large number of performers who were content to stay in Boston and work at the Museum for most of their careers. There was, of course, a regular turn-over from year to year, but most of those who left were young performers, eager to spread their wings. Performers like Kate Ryan, Annie Clarke, William Warren and Mrs. J.R. Vincent stayed with the company between twenty and thirty-

seven years each. They made themselves and the Museum such a familiar part of day-to-day life that they and the Museum became institutions. A review from The Boston Daily Herald for the opening night of 1872 makes it quite clear how the public felt about the Museum company:

The various members of the company, as they appeared one by one in the fine old comedy Town and Country were greeted with the heartiest plaudits and made to feel that they were welcome back to the scene of past triumphs.⁷

Elliot Norton, in his recently published Broadway Down East, believes that such acceptance of the Museum was achieved because the audiences were either too naive or too hypocritical to admit they were attending a theatre rather than a museum.⁸ This had been realized and made light of in Boston even when the old Museum company was still in existence. A newspaper account from 1889 states that,

Worthy church laymen, deacons, -- ay clergymen too -- never scrupled to learn the tales of history and the facts of natural history, as well as fine moral precepts, from the contents of the great glass cabinets in the three tiered hall, while the mere stepping across another threshold, there to see an instructive exhibition of man's ability to imitate other man, never seemed a sin -- no, not even an error of judgement. It was not a theatre that was visited, it was a museum.⁹

It was unfortunate that a theatre had to resort to such games to make itself and its art "respectable," but that does not in any way detract from its achievements. The Boston Museum and its continuously fine stock company were nationally known and played for fifty consecutive years. They had taken much of the world's best classical and popular drama and made them accessible

for the first time to many sections of the population who would not otherwise ever come in contact with these works. They gave honor to their profession and were loved by an admiring public. Very few other companies in this country can claim as much.

By the time the Museum abandoned its stock company in 1893, a great many changes had already occurred in the American theatre. The railroad industry had made great strides in the last several decades. As it became easier for stars to move around to various theatres, it became more convenient for them to bring along several other actors for the other major roles. In this way the star worked primarily with performers he knew and felt comfortable with, and did not have to spend extra time rehearsing with the stock company. This became so popular with the stars and audience alike that by the 1880's, entire casts and set pieces traveled from town to town playing from as briefly as one night to weeks at a time. While this was a boon to the smaller towns which could never really support a full-time company, it was a major blow to many stock companies in cities like Boston. These "combination" companies as they were called, usually performed new and popular musical or melodramatic works straight from New York. The public was no longer interested in the more traditional forms of drama and sought rather, as one observer noted,

sensational, showy, incongruous and unsymmetrical dramas, paying court -- and cash -- to foreign stars and perverting sensitiveness by the acceptance of the evil and demoralizing 'problem play.'¹⁰

Kate Ryan observed that new performers did not know how to play traditional roles.¹¹ The new trend toward combination

companies may have made actors hearty troupers but it did not give them the experience of playing the wide range of styles and roles that had been possible in the old stock companies. When old actors like William Warren and Mrs. J.R. Vincent died in the 1880's, an era died with them. Without the presence of these familiar and able performers, the public lost the last reasons for supporting the old company.

That the stock company at the old Museum did not disband until 1893 is a tribute to the management, the performers and the people of Boston who continued their support to the very end. The Boston Theatre, a 3,100 seat giant on Washington Street, had been the only other truly successful theatre at that time. Built in 1854, it too employed a stock company which lasted until 1885, but it could never compare with the Museum's company in skill or reputation. Musical spectacles, operas and visiting dramatic companies were the rule at the Boston and the stock was just the filler rather than the real attraction. The Boston was a magnificent theatre that was extremely well-managed. Under the Tompkins family the theatre showed a profit for thirty-seven consecutive years. Their entertainment was boldly displayed and widely attended. The respectability that theatre acquired through the efforts of the Boston Museum no doubt aided the Tompkins.

Theatre is not an autonomous art form. As Kate Ryan wisely reflected in 1915,

The stage is largely what people make of it. It simply tries to meet public demand ... The actor of yesterday, to be successful, must change with the development acting constantly undergoes ... Old school, new school, what does it matter, so that it is good?¹²

The new movement of small "art" theatres, created as alternatives to the large commercial houses, eschewed the popular romantic melodramas and elaborate sets of the day and presented daring new works of "social importance" in simple realistic settings. While theatres such as Antoine's Theatre Libre (1887) caused instant excitement in Europe, it took several years before it made any real impression in the United States. One of the earliest examples of its influence in this country took place in Boston in 1891 when James A. Herne presented his Margaret Fleming in a small auditorium.¹³ It closed after only two weeks, but the mere presence of a play that spoke openly about adultery and illegitimacy sufficed to impress a number of Bostonians with the possibility that serious drama could return to Boston. But it would be a number of years before the possibilities would come to anything. For most of the 1890's, Boston theatres continued to present the usual imports from New York. Vaudeville, with its policy of "continuous performances" was born at the Bijou Theatre on Washington Street in 1883, and demonstrated that it had truly come into its own with the opening of the sumptuous new 3,000 seat B.F. Keith Theatre right behind the Bijou in 1894.

1894 also marked the year another playhouse was built in Boston. On Tremont and Chandler, at that time a somewhat less desirable section of town, the Castle Square Theatre presented visiting companies performing light operas and popular dramas. Warmed by the theatre's moderate success, manager J.H. Emery introduced a stock company in May of 1897. Perhaps in an unconscious attempt to harken back to old traditions, Emery employed

James Pitman as stage manager. Pitman had been stage manager at the Boston Museum for twenty-five years. The productions under Emery's management were also reminiscent of the old Museum. Stagings were dignified rather than "showy," and the plays themselves were chosen from a "wide range of entertainment" in order to satisfy "the varied discriminating tastes of his patrons."¹⁴ By depending solely on his stock company, whose members were often praised as upright citizens by management and press alike, Emery was able to keep the price of tickets down to a very competitive range of 15¢ to 75¢.

While the company at the Castle Square was beginning to establish itself in the cultural community, there were new developments in Cambridge. Dr. George Pierce Baker of Harvard's English Department had been trying in vain for the establishment of a theatre program at the University. Baker had been in Europe recently and was much impressed by the innovative theatre work going on. Realizing the administration was definitely not interested in his plans, in 1904 he was able to convince a number of prominent Bostonians including Elizabeth Cabot and Henry Lee Higginson that Boston should have a permanent resident theatre company that would become as respected and accomplished as the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Since Higginson was the main benefactor of the Symphony for many years, he certainly was the right person for this new venture. Winthrop Ames and Lorin Deland were chosen to put together the new company to perform at the Castle Square, and Ames would also be theatre manager.

In their first year of operation, 1905-06, the selection of plays was quite ordinary. Perhaps they were being cautious and consciously chose to keep away from "controversial" pieces like Margaret Fleming or any Ibsen or Strindberg play. Still, the productions were well staged; and with an eye to the future, the management wisely offered subscriptions and opened a downtown ticket booth. The second year of operation, however, was no more inspiring than the first except for a brief Shakespeare festival, and community support was far from overwhelming. There were more than enough enticing attractions going on in Boston at the time to keep Boston audiences from becoming interested in a theatre based on the traditions of the Boston Museum (which had been demolished for ten years by this time). The project was all but abandoned by the end of the second season in 1907 and Winthrop Ames went to Europe on sabbatical in an attempt to learn more of the new drama and its presentation. Ames had planned to build a theatre in Boston on his return but chose to build it in New York instead. Luckily for Boston, the result was the ill-fated New Theatre, a white elephant with problems that foreshadowed those of the Vivian Beaumont Theatre in Lincoln Center.

The Castle Square was left without either a director or a company for the 1907-08 season, and the proprietors went back to the light operatic entertainment that was performed the first three years the theatre was open. An attempt at reestablishing a stock company was made that year by the Bowdin Square Theatre Company but it was both brief and unsuccessful.

The Castle Square was finally to attain real distinction under the management of actor John Craig, beginning with the 1908-09 season. Craig was a star performer with some experience at leading his own company. He had received a good background in classical roles, especially Shakespearean, while a member of Augustin Daly's New York company, and was familiar to Boston audiences as the leading man at the Castle Square from 1899 to 1903, and again from 1905 to 1906. His wife, actress Mary Young, had also played leading roles at the Castle Square. They were a very handsome couple and the sight of them together on stage must have attracted many a matinee matron.

Beyond the formation of a successful resident company (we may now call it a resident company rather than a stock company since they depended on themselves rather than on stars) that performed well-staged versions of popular dramas and musical comedies, Craig was responsible for producing fourteen Shakespearean productions in the first five years of his nine year management. He is perhaps best remembered for his work with Dr. Baker's English 47 class. English 47 was Baker's playwriting course at Harvard, and in an attempt to develop outstanding American writers, John Craig offered the Harvard Play Prize. This was a \$500 award given to the best full-length play written by an enrolled Harvard student (all the awarded plays were written by English 47 students). Also, and more importantly, the chosen play would be produced by the Castle Square resident company. Seven prize plays were eventually chosen under Craig's management and two of them were produced on Broadway. While the chosen plays were worthy, they did not break any new

dramatic ground. Even if John Barrymore did star in it, Believe Me, Zantippe was forgotten long ago. Baker emphasized dramatic construction rather than innovation and that was unfortunate. New and daring attempts at playwriting were not given much encouragement at that time. Craig and Baker chose to play it safe, but "safe" plays do not break new ground. Eugene O'Neill was enrolled in English 47 at that time. Since he never wrote a full-length play during his brief stay, he was therefore ineligible to compete for the Prize. However, one might imagine the course of events had an O'Neill play been chosen: the Castle Square might have become the discoverer of a stunning new playwright and gained national attention through a New York production. But with early and instant success on Broadway, O'Neill would not have had the opportunity to develop his skills with the Provincetown Players. America might have lost one of its few great playwrights.

Even with good productions and the Harvard Prize Play, Craig's company did not fair well enough at the box office to encourage him to continue in Boston. Two years before his departure in 1917, Craig made tentative plans for the erection of a new John Craig Theatre at Boylston and Ipswich Streets in the Fenway. Apparently he was not pleased with the Castle Square Theatre and felt a new structure would be more conducive to the drama he was interested in producing. Since the work he did after he left the Castle Square was not much different from the work he did while he was there, perhaps he simply wished to manage a theatre of his own, or perhaps he felt that the Castle Square, with an address in the unfashionable South End, would never really attract an audience.

The latter supposition was correct. The theatre's days were numbered after Craig left. It survived primarily as a combination house with little distinction until the late 1920's and in 1932, a very significant year in the history of Boston's resident professional companies, it was demolished.

In P.M. Stone's study on the Castle Square Theatre, the two reasons given to explain why Craig did not follow through with his plans and build the John Craig Theatre in 1915 were: 1) that there were insufficient funds to pursue the venture and, 2) that there were "disturbing trends within the entertainment field."¹⁵ There is no explanation as to what these "disturbing trends" were but it is a fair guess that these trends were the virtual takeover of America's audiences by the vaudeville and movie concerns.

By 1905 most of the stock companies in the country's larger cities had been wiped out and most of the few remaining companies were minor. At this time, the combination road show was at its peak. There were over 300 different productions out on the road in 1905 and they were playing in over 2,000 theatres located in any whistle stop that had a theatre and an audience to fill it.¹⁶ But after 1905 the scene began to change and the pendulum that had swung in one direction started to swing back. Transportation costs were going up, so it was no longer economical for a company to play a small out-of-the-way town for a single night or two. Also, attendance was declining in many areas because the public felt, and often justifiably so, that they had been duped by false promises of "beautiful scenery, great stars" and a show which was said to have just arrived "fresh from New York." While this

deception was not always the case, it happened often enough to make audiences wary of spending their money on what might be second-rate entertainment.¹⁷

The two primary reasons the theatre declined at this point and the two reasons that have kept it from ever regaining its dominance in the entertainment world were 1) the increase in production costs beyond that of inflation, and 2) the movies. Reason one can be explained quite simply -- "live theatre" is a "handmade product in a machine made world."¹⁸ The industrial revolution enabled most of the world's everyday goods and services to decrease in cost or remain stable with inflation, but it made the building of a unique thing, like a theatrical production, that much more expensive by comparison. Whatever increases there have been in the cost of living, the cost of producing live theatre has proportionately risen higher. Since costs became higher per production and travel expenses also increased, it made sense for a producer to stay in one place and play there for as long as possible. Thus, the legitimate theatre became centralized in New York.

Reason two is a logical extension of reason one. The movies were a product of the industrial and technological revolutions. Once the movies developed any real level of sophistication (which they had by 1915 with D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation) the theatre, in the minds of the public, was no match for it. (Admission to a movie would cost, even with some vaudeville thrown in, about 25 - 50¢ and a patron could get the best seat in the house for that price. The public saw no reason to sit in the

second balcony and look at actors the size of ants for twice that amount.) How infinitely easier it must have been for a small town theatre owner to simply receive a few tins of film in the mail and hire a piano player than it was to schedule a booking, arrange the dressing rooms and sell tickets in advance. It was cheaper too, of course. Moreover, as long as he had an audience who wanted to come in, he could run the projector all day.

The movies, after all, were the ultimate step in the development of theatre production for the previous 60 years or so. Beginning with Madame Vestris' box set in London in the 1830's, moving along to Antoine's sides of beef in Paris in the 1880's and culminating with David Belasco's rendering of a Child's Restaurant on the New York stage in 1912, the theatre had been moving closer and closer in its attempts to depict realism on the stage. Movies did not involve the "realistic" presentations of the stage, but real houses, trees, rivers, skies and sunlight. Convenient show times, cheaper costs and a unique new medium were what the movies offered. If the viewing public had wanted to keep its theatres it would have transmitted those feelings through the box office.

Theatre production on the road changed dramatically by 1915. The effects would not catch up with New York until just before the stock market crash of 1929, but it would happen there as well. There was at that time an ironic revival of the long-forgotten old stock company system in those smaller towns and cities that still wanted live drama but could not afford or attract touring shows. Instead of classics they were performing recent Broadway hits, much as summer and winter stock companies do today. However, they

too peaked by the mid 20's and had almost disappeared by the late 30's. By 1915, legitimate drama had confined itself almost totally to New York and each show was cast individually. Those individuals who sought to found a theatre with a resident company of professional actors were usually more interested in creating art than in making a profit. Indeed, the odds were stacked against them if they thought they could make a profit, for the days of the Boston Museum and even the Castle Square were gone forever.

There were two companies producing in Boston before 1932 which had, for the most part, become fully aware of the new financial difficulties of theatre production. These theatres, the Toy Theatre of Mrs. Lyman Gale and the Repertory Theatre of Boston under Henry Jewett, both attempted to bring to Boston an alternative to the commercial productions that came from New York and played in such Boston houses as the Shubert, Hollis St., Tremont, Colonial and Wilbur. Both theatre companies were run as non-profit ventures. Both had the support of many prominent Boston citizens. Both failed in just a few years' time.

Mrs. Lyman Gale was an educated woman of good social position who had been active in amateur theatre in Weston, Massachusetts. As had many students of the theatre, she became interested in the new theatre movements in Europe. Once she had seen the Abbey Theatre (in its first American tour and playing at Boston's Plymouth Theatre) perform such pieces as Synge's Playboy of the Western World and Lady Gregory's Spreading the News, she decided that she would use both the inheritance she had recently acquired

and her social position to develop one of America's first little theatres in Boston. The idea of the theatre was "to be simple, honest, a return to the rudimentary principles of stage practice."¹⁹ Not dissimilar to the methods other Little Theatres were to work from, the productions were funded through a small circle of subscribers, and the artists who worked at the theatre received only the satisfaction of their labors. Interesting but modest productions were staged in the three years the Toy Theatre played at its 129 seat theatre (converted from a stable) at 16 Lime Street in the Beacon Hill area. No memorable playwright was discovered among the new works performed although their designer, Livingston Platt, did construct some sets that were well received by contemporary critics. Platt had been heavily influenced by Gordon Craig and his rejection of naturalism, and had during this time designed several of John Craig's Shakespearean productions at the Castle Square. Without high production costs and salaries, the Toy Theatre was able to perform three times a week and still meet expenses for three years from 1912 to 1914, but by the end of the next season the theatre was gone. In 1915 the Toy Theatre was enticed by the allurements of the professional theatre and, consequently, it was simply overwhelmed. Mrs. Gale was led to believe that the company needed a larger house to perform in so that Livingston Platt would have greater opportunities for his set designs and so that more people would be able to see the productions. A new 600 seat theatre was built on Dartmouth Street, next to the Copley Plaza Hotel. Problems arose immediately. Precious weeks during the season were lost while the auditorium was being

completed and even though there was no money coming in, rent had to be paid. Under pressure to make up the lost money, professional actors were employed to attract better business, but the houses were not large enough to cover expenses and more money was lost. By the end of the season, the little company (which had only one year ago been performing with modest but stable success) was now well over its head in debt and forced to admit defeat.

The story of the Toy Theatre would happen again and again not only in Boston, but across the country. Little theatres run by amateurs or "semi-professionals" would become over confident after a few years of breaking even or coming out ahead by a few dollars, and try to become fully professional. Except in rare cases, it would never work. The most recent example in Boston and one which will be examined in greater depth later on, is the Boston Repertory Theatre. This company moved into a newly renovated space after a few somewhat successful seasons performing as amateurs and then vanished after two undistinguished seasons.

The Toy Theatre had learned very quickly that the Boston audience would pay only lip service, not admission fees, to alternatives to the commercial theatre. There were far too many other entertainments in which the public was more interested. A ten week study of all the publicly available amusement activity in Boston was compiled by the 20th Century Club of Boston for the period of November 28, 1909, to February 5, 1910. In it they came up with some rather startling figures. The total average weekly seating capacity for all theatres showing either legitimate drama, opera, dance, vaudeville or movies came to over 750,000 seats at a

time when Boston had a population of 625,000. The seating at vaudeville and movie attractions came to over 85% of that total while the legitimate theatres held only 13% of the total. One must keep in mind that this was 1910 and movie theatres and vaudeville houses were still being erected or converted from legitimate houses almost every year. Clearly the public had made its choice.

For the theatre company not interested in long runs of musicals or popular dramas (for that was the only way to make up production costs and yield a profit) new methods of economic input were vital for existence. Theatre economics had changed greatly from the days of William Hailburton, who, in 1792, published a pamphlet calling for the erection of a large structure that could be used as a public facility for special events, a legislative assembly hall, and a military hall. All construction and running costs were to be met by the profits reaped from a 6,000 seat theatre that was also part of this immense building. Not only would the box office receipts pay for the building, but the "excess" could be used to help the poor!²⁰

Philanthropists, politicians and theatre audiences needed to learn that except for the Broadway production, the theatre could no longer be treated as a business that could reap profits, but should rather be considered in much the same way as an opera company or a symphony orchestra -- culturally vital performing arts groups that need to be subsidized because their costs exceed their incomes.

Less than ten years after the closing of the Toy Theatre, the philanthropists and politicians were sufficiently convinced of these facts to help build Henry Jewett's Repertory Theatre of Boston on Huntington Avenue and to award the company tax-exempt status. It would seem that with such a beginning the future of the company would be very encouraging. But we already know the company lasted but five years.

Henry Jewett was an Australian-born actor who came to this country in 1892 and first performed in the San Francisco area. He later moved to play Shakespearean roles opposite Julia Marlowe and for three seasons was part of Richard Mansfield's company. Jewett's first attempt to found his own company involved a very short-lived stay at the Plymouth Theatre in 1913. Buoyed by the success he achieved the next year in a season of Shakespeare at the Boston Opera House, he moved into the Toy Theatre soon after Mrs. Gale's company had folded. The theatre had since changed its name to the Copley Theatre and in the interim between Gale's and Jewett's companies, movies were shown. His management and production skills enabled Jewett to continue to present plays that were an alternative to the commercial houses. As actor-manager he presented twenty-two plays by Shaw in the eight years the company stayed at the Copley. His success was so encouraging that in 1922 the Copley Theatre was divided in two, turned around and expanded so that its seating capacity reached nearly 2,000. This expansion however, once again demonstrated the dangers of growing too big too quickly. At the end of the 1923-24 season, Jewett's lease on the Copley was not renewed. The attendance for the last two years

must not have been sufficient to satisfy the owner or he would certainly have kept Jewett on. In a labor suit that followed, members of his former acting company alleged that Jewett paid himself a much higher salary than he paid the rest of the company. During the hearing, however, it was revealed that in order to keep the theatre open, he had paid himself less than the average company wage and a third less than he had been paying one of his leading actors, E.E. Clive.²¹

Jewett had attracted a strong following in Boston by 1924. Since 1919 the Frances Jewett Repertory Theatre Club had been in existence to serve as an aid in the administrative and fund raising capacities of the theatre. The loss of lease at the Copley had actually been a good turn of events for Jewett and his followers because it allowed him to seek funding for a new theatre project he had in mind. This theatre would have a resident company of actors which would perform classic and higher quality modern plays in repertory format. Although Jewett would serve as its artistic director, he was no longer responsible for the financial business of the theatre. Because it would be a nonprofit educational institution, financial control was now in the hands of the Board of Trustees. When the Commonwealth of Massachusetts approved the charter granting the Repertory Theatre of Boston nonprofit tax-exempt status as an educational institution, it publicly recognized, for the first time in Massachusetts, that there did exist an alternative to the commercial theatre. Cynics may point out that making it an "educational institution" was a justification similar to the way the Boston Museum was conveniently thought of as a museum --

why wasn't the theatre simply declared nonprofit and tax-exempt without the added burden of providing "education" for the community? This may be a valid argument, but only if one believes that encouraging a community to identify with a theatre can prove harmful. In its first year of operation, the Repertory Theatre ran a weekly Saturday afternoon historical film series (produced by Yale University) for local high school students and was operating a theatre school with courses in acting, directing, design and even theatre management. On the contrary, instead of being a burden, this gave the theatre the chance to become as esteemed an institution in the community as the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Expectations were high for the new theatre when it opened with Sheridan's The Rivals on November 10, 1925. Telegrams were received from well-wishers all over the country. Local clergymen of all denominations sent letters of support. The theatre was the beneficiary of a number of wills and a good deal of the building costs had been paid by supporters who purchased bonds in values of \$100, \$500 and \$1,000 at 6% interest and a maturity date of December 1939. What happened that could force a closing by 1930? The reasons were similar to those that occurred at the Toy Theatre, only compounded. To begin with, the cost of running a professional repertory company was prohibitive. By definition a repertory company could not capitalize on a successful show by letting it continue for as long as it attracted full houses. This meant that it was extremely difficult to make up production costs. Secondly, the running expenses of keeping a full-salaried company of professional actors and technicians for a whole season even on the

occasions they were not needed, were very high. Thirdly, it was revealed at a fund-raising dinner in 1927 on the occasion of the 400th week of performances (since Jewett had taken over the Copley) that the cost of building the theatre was higher than was originally thought. Fourthly, Henry Jewett's death in 1928 left the company without an artistic director and a leader. He had been the driving force behind the creation of this theatre. His wife, Frances Jewett, tried to run the theatre after his death but the debts were too high and the theatre was forced to close.

All the speeches Boston's Brahmins and politicians had made about creating a theatre that would become as much an institution to Boston as its Symphony Orchestra or its Library were simply rhetoric. It was not enough to give a professional repertory theatre a few dollars and a tax-exempt status when it opened and then expect it to fend for itself. Like the Symphony and the Library, the Repertory Theatre needed subsidy -- yearly -- but it never received it. Elliot Norton blames the theatre's decline on the arrival of the "talkies,"²² but they did not become technically proficient until 1930 and that was long after the damage had been done.²³ Theatre costs had become so high that it is likely that nothing except full houses at every performance would have kept the theatre operating without subsidy. Full houses at such a late date might not have been sufficient either, but such attendance perhaps would have made it clear that this theatre was wanted and was part of Boston's established cultural institutions -- but it evidently was not.

The closing of the Repertory Theatre of Boston left Boston only one remaining resident company and that was the one under E. E. Clive at the Copley Theatre. Clive had maintained a company using some of the actors who had stayed on at the Copley when Jewett left and later took in some performers when the Repertory Theatre closed. Clive's ambitions for his company were not as grand as Jewett's. By staying small he was able to survive at the Copley until 1932 when lack of business, due to movie competition, forced closure.

1932 marks a significant break in Boston's theatrical history. The steady decline of live theatre over the previous 15 to 20 years was evident from the number of stock companies that had gone under and the great decline in the number of road shows. The proliferation of movie and vaudeville theatres made it almost impossible to produce successfully anything but popular Broadway hits or an occasional classic with a star in the lead role. The nation was in the deepest part of the Depression that year and the number of people who could afford to subscribe to a repertory company or attend any live theatre had declined significantly, not to mention, of course, the decline in the number of people who could make sizable contributions to offset deficits. For many people the drama demanded too much of one's attention, and far too much of one's wallet. It was easier and cheaper simply to spend 25¢ for a comfortable seat in a lavishly decorated new movie theatre like the Keith Memorial (today's Savoy) or the Metropolitan (today's Metropolitan Center) and see both a talking movie and a live stage show. It would be almost six years before a company

the size of the Toy Theatre would again come on the scene, and it would be almost thirty years before a theatre company would arise that would even come close to achieving what Henry Jewett almost had, but never did.

The only alternative to the commercial drama for most of the thirties was the federally sponsored Federal Theatre Project which began producing plays in Boston and in other cities across the nation from 1935 to 1939. Popular drama, classics, puppet shows, original political drama called The Living Newspaper, and musicals were all offerings in what might be seen as a performing library of world drama. Had our nation's Representatives not been so intimidated by the moguls of the movie industry and some fearful right-wingers, the Federal Theatre might have very well been the answer to the economic problems of producing non-commercial theatre. But the opposition prevailed and the struggle continued.

Two minor theatre companies, each founded by an experienced man of the theatre but consisting almost entirely of amateurs, were organized within several years of each other. The first theatre, and the one that proved less successful, was the New England Repertory Theatre founded by Edwin Burr Pettit in 1938. Productions were modest in scale though ambitious in choice. The company suffered because of a lack of permanent theatre space and since it was war time, the young male leads often changed into military uniforms rather than theatrical costumes. Pettit carried on until 1945 and later became chairman of Brandeis University's theatre department.

The Tributary Theatre began in 1941 through the auspices of

the Community Recreation Service of Boston, Inc. This agency sought "to organize and sponsor a theatre along non-professional lines that would afford opportunity to theatre-minded people living in and near Boston."²⁴ It was, in essence, to be a community theatre. The man chosen to direct and manage the company was Eliot Duvey, an experienced professional actor who had played Shakespearean roles with Robert Mantell and who had been a director at the Copley Theatre during the Federal Theatre Project. During the group's existence, Duvey and his company of amateur actors and designers presented an outstanding selection of classical and modern drama. Frequently, seldom-produced works of great playwrights such as Ibsen's Peer Gynt were staged. Even an occasional world premiere such as Sean O'Casey's Purple Dust was attempted. Shakespeare was Duvey's first love, and he was often played throughout the season and in special Shakespeare Festivals lasting a fortnight. After two years in the tiny Peabody Playhouse on Charles Street, the Company played for the duration of its existence at New England Mutual Hall. Since these two companies, the New England Repertory Theatre and the Tributary Theatre were amateur by design and by nature, they need no longer concern this study, but we may be grateful to them for giving Boston an alternative to the high-priced commercial houses during the war years.

In 1948 a group of talented and ambitious students from Harvard formed in Cambridge the first resident professional theatre since E.E. Clive closed the doors to the Copley in 1932. Like Clive's company, the Brattle Theatre Company (as they were

called since they performed in the old Brattle Hall on the street of the same name) was organized as a profit-making venture, although with a seating capacity of only 460 and a ticket price of \$3.00, the profits were marginal, when they existed at all. Financially, the group moved from solvency to insolvency so frequently that every season contained several moments of crisis in which disbandment seemed imminent. Jerome Kilty, the founder and leader of the company, fortunately possessed a likable and dynamic personality which encouraged bankers and investors to go along with the Brattle's fluctuations. Bonds were issued and the theatre (bought for the company by a founding member's father) was mortgaged and remortgaged. Since the Brattle was not organized as a nonprofit organization, it was totally dependent on its box office for its entire income. Successful plays were given longer runs in an attempt to pad the bank account, but failures appeared far too often and they left the account bare. Even the more successful productions, which usually occurred when a New York actor was brought in, could only make money on the weekends when the student-dominated audience most often chose to attend. Also, as Elliot Norton points out, they were unable to get a good evening's receipts on Sunday evenings because of the blue laws still in effect then.²⁵

The Brattle was able to give intelligent performances of such classic European dramas as Uncle Vanya, Volpone, and Playboy of the Western World. Their work attracted the attention of the Theatre Guild who placed some of the company's actors in a successful Broadway production of The Relapse in 1950. But even

with this good work the roller-coaster movement of the company's finances were unendurable and after four years of production they closed in 1952.

With the closing of the Brattle Theatre Company we reach the end of another period in Boston theatre history. In the years that followed 1952, particularly the late 50's and early 60's, many Americans had become increasingly discontent with the style and variety of the theatre fare available to them -- choices were usually limited to touring Broadway hits or the well-meaning but flat performances of amateurs. A new kind of theatre company was beginning to develop, a kind we had seen before in Henry Jewett's Repertory Theatre of Boston. Armed with tax-exempt status and comprised of professional actors, their intentions were to give the surrounding metropolitan area a theatre they could truly call their own. The all-important difference between these two time periods was that for the first time subsidy was made more widely available to the performing arts. Beginning with the large foundations of Ford and Rockefeller and slowly moving into agencies on federal, state and municipal levels, theatre, music and opera companies were able to lead a more secure existence. By the mid-60's Boston could once again be proud that a local theatre, the Charles Playhouse, could be numbered among the finer resident companies in the nation.

Commercial theatre had also changed since Henry Jewett's day. Confined almost entirely to Broadway, the number of new productions had declined yearly to what would be a steady, but fractional, amount of what it once was. The country was being

bombarded with the canned entertainments of movies, radio, and the new medium now coming into its own, television. Still, a sizable segment of the population was developing an interest and concern for the long-neglected performing arts. Major studies on a national level (in particular, one conducted by Professors Baumol and Bowen for the Twentieth Century Fund and another by the Rockefeller Foundation) were held to determine who attends the arts and how much these arts cost to operate. Boston was to nurture and neglect two resident theatres in the period from 1957 to 1971: the already mentioned Charles Playhouse and the Theatre Company of Boston.

The Charles Playhouse was initiated in a manner similar to the Brattle Theatre Company. As in the case of the Brattle, most of the founders and performers were local college students and graduates. Both had seasons planned and financed on a show-to-show basis rather than planning them wholly in advance. Neither of them was nonprofit although the Charles would become nonprofit in time. The Charles Playhouse, however, was able to perform for fourteen consecutive seasons, the longest period a professional theatre company was and has been able to play in Boston since the days of the Boston Museum.

In the summer of 1957, a company of actors from Boston University's School of Performing Arts had just finished a successful summer producing on Cape Cod. On that success they decided to stay together as a company that fall and in a space above a fish market on Charles Street in Boston's Beacon Hill area, the Charles St. Playhouse was created. Michael Murray, fresh from

stage managing Jose Quintero's production of The Iceman Cometh at New York's Circle in the Square, had come to Boston that fall to study at Boston University under Quintero, who was there as a visiting lecturer. Murray and the actors on Charles Street were soon impressed with each other and Murray became director of the company. Frank Sugrue, a lawyer just out of law school and with some theatrical experience during World War II, became the company's managing director. In a year's time they outgrew their 146 seat house and looked for larger quarters. What they found was a unique mid-19th century building on Warrenton Street in the theatre district. It had originally been a church designed by Asher Benjamin but by 1959 had become a somewhat seedy nightclub. Murray and his group still possessed no clear plan for the company. They simply wanted to do theatre they enjoyed and they believed Boston audiences would enjoy.

The first play performed on their newly built thrust stage was The Iceman Cometh, the New York production still fresh in Murray's mind. The production ran for ten weeks and was followed by four more productions that season. Up to this time, all the actors in the company had been local performers with one or two members added or subtracted as the season progressed. In an attempt to upgrade their performances however, the management traveled to New York that summer of 1959 and looked for more polished performers. Ensemble work was not a keynote at the Charles. Each production was financed and cast separately during the course of the season. With no financial backup, it was a precarious method of running a theatre company, but their fine

work (Elliot Norton called them in 1960, "Boston's first thoroughly professional and thoroughly satisfactory off-Broadway company."²⁶) allowed them to continue.

The decision to become a nonprofit regional theatre came after a nearly disastrous occurrence. A fire broke out in the theatre in January 1963. While it did not cause the walls to crumble, it did cause a stir in the community. Loyal audience members came to the company to show their concern and give their encouragement. The company had been in Boston for four seasons and had developed a solid following. At that point it was decided to follow the lead of such regional theatres as the Arena Stage in Washington, the Alley Theatre in Houston and the Actor's Workshop in San Francisco. With the help of the Ford Foundation they began a major subscription drive, formed a resident company of actors and prepared a full season of plays. The Ford Foundation helped further in getting the company off to a good start by funding trips for Murray and Sugrue to most of the regional theatres across the country so that they could see how those operations were run and financed.

Michael Murray was not unfamiliar with regional theatre. Originally from Washington, he had been exposed to the Arena Stage before and as mentioned above, he was involved with the Circle in the Square as a stage manager. The visits were eye-opening, however, for managing director Frank Sugrue. Putting his experiences to good use, Sugrue and his staff would bring the total number of subscriptions to 11,000 in three years from the inception of the subscription drive -- an excellent number considering that the

Charles could seat only 525.

During the first two years, a resident company of actors was employed. Most of the parts were cast from this company with an occasional role necessitating an actor from outside. For season 1965-66 this policy was dropped except for a core of five or six actors. Looking back on the change, Sugrue explains that ensemble work, despite claims that it leads to tighter and more unified performances, is really a compromise. Far too often, he claims, performers are cast for roles they are unsuited for because there is no other choice in the company. Plays then become chosen because they can fit the performers rather than having performers to fit the play. This, he believes, leads to an actor's theatre rather than a playwrights' theatre.²⁷ Sugrue and Murray were obviously more interested in "product" than "process," unlike a theatre such as Herbert Blau's Actor's Workshop which allowed its company much more freedom to develop as creative performers.

Sugrue and Murray did provide for actor development in another way. Beginning in 1964 they attended the national auditions sponsored every spring in Chicago by the Theatre Communications Group for young actors fresh from acting schools. From these auditions they chose a small company of actors who would perform in a program called the Living Stage. This program, funded with federal dollars, allowed the company to visit high schools in the New England area and present shows usually composed of excerpts from great classics. In addition, the company performed children's theatre at the Charles in the afternoons and played minor roles in the main stage productions. After a year's time, the fledgling actor was either given the opportunity to join Equity and move up to the major company or

he packed his bags. "Graduates" of this program include Jane Alexander and Jill Clayburgh. The Living Stage was a wise move for the Charles. Not only did it give some vital experience to young actors (Frank Sgrue later likened it to keeping them from wandering through the streets of New York), but it exposed theatre, and more importantly to the company, it exposed the Charles Playhouse to hosts of future audience members and supporters. The mid to late 60's produced a good number of youths who became disenchanted with the "establishment," and the theatre, or more precisely, theatre-going, was part of that "establishment." The Charles felt it was important that they see "why live theatre is a special experience."²⁸

While the Charles was doing a good job in recruiting an audience for the long run, it was having a hard time keeping alive for the short run. Audiences continued to come at a fairly constant rate but the company always came out several thousand dollars short at the end of the fiscal year. The box office was able to take up usually between 75 - 80% of the yearly budget. This is an excellent figure for a nonprofit performing arts organization then and today. In the 1967-68 season, for example, the Charles Playhouse had an earned income percentage of 75%. This was the highest earned income percentage of any performing arts organization in Boston including the Symphony, the Opera Company and the Theatre Company of Boston. The problem for the Charles, however, was that even with the highest earned income percentage, it still had the season's highest percentage deficit. This means that it was unable to get sufficient unearned income to make up that deficit. The

unearned income for that season at the Charles totaled \$54,000. Of that total, \$31,000 came from private donors, \$21,000 from the National Endowment and \$2,000 from corporations.²⁹ It is important to note here that no money at all came from foundation sources. Except for the Handel and Haydn Society which makes up almost all of its deficit from its own endowment fund, the Charles Playhouse was the only major performing arts organization in Boston not funded that year by the major foundations. Since the Ford Foundation had supported the company in its first year of nonprofit operation it may be assumed that they felt the company was soundly on its feet -- especially with an earned income of between 75 - 80%. But this could not be further from the truth of the situation. The \$31,000 deficit that resulted at the end of the 1966-67 season was not the first deficit the company had developed. Each season since 1963 had ended with a deficit that had not been paid off by the start of the next fiscal year. Instead, Sugrue and his Board of Directors took care of them by

tucking them under the rug, so to speak, and holding them over until next year. The Board of Directors would sign some bank notes and we'd say, OK, we'll borrow the money now to pay then -- a 'manaña' attitude.³⁰

In December 1967 Sugrue tried to combat this rapidly growing deficit by cutting the proposed budget for the 1968-69 season to make the Charles more economical to run. This meant producing shows that needed less costly sets and costumes and shows that needed fewer actors. For artistic director Michael Murray, this was enough. He had grown tired of tight budgets, he had grown tired of compromise and stagnation.³¹ At mid-season 1967-68, he

resigned. Faced with the loss of its artistic director, the Board of Directors, perhaps in a move to avoid paying another salary, did not replace that vital post. They formed what they called the Artistic Supervision Committee. It was comprised of a board member, an outsider (Professor George Kelly of Brandeis), and Frank Sugrue. These three men would have equal voice in determining the selection of plays for the coming season and in choosing the guest directors for them. It was also decided that as of next season, 1968-69, the theatre would dismiss its core of actors and each show would be cast individually.

It would seem that at this point the Charles possessed little of what we might define as constituting a regional theatre company. True, it was still a nonprofit organization using Equity actors, but there was no artistic director to give an artistic cohesiveness to the season and to develop an identity, or as Joseph Zeigler calls it, an "institutional base,"³² for the theatre. Combined with the fact that actors and directors were now jobbed in for every production, this resulted in a theatre that appeared more like a commercial off-Broadway house. It was, as Frank Sugrue was to admit, "not the way to run a theatre."³³

The three members of the Artistic Supervision Committee had trouble agreeing on a season. They issued a statement to the Board of Directors which, in effect, said that the 1968-69 season would be a "safe" one until a new artistic director was appointed:

This does not mean that the season should be keyed exclusively on the familiar or void of surprises. It does mean restraint at the brink of the untested ... The motto for the coming season is 'Hold, Capture and Bind.' It is not 'Educate, Shock and Agitate.'

Sugrue felt that one member of the Committee, Prof. George Kelly, violated that statement in his insistence to produce what Sugrue termed "obscure" plays. In particular, Kelly wanted to do Edward Bond's Narrow Road to the Deep North. The play was to receive good reviews but only fair houses.

During this time the problem of a growing deficit did not lessen but actually increased, approaching a total of \$300,000 at the start of the 1970-71 season. Also, support to the company was declining. Subscriptions for the 1970-71 season totaled 5,600 -- down from the previously mentioned high of 11,000 only four years earlier. When the first play of that season, In Three Zones by Wilford Leach, attracted poor houses for several weeks, the Board of Directors decided it was time to stop. They could not continue to produce without the financial support they needed to eliminate their ever-growing deficit. The season was halted and an appeal for money went out. A special benefit for the company was held at Hynes Memorial Auditorium. Letters went out to subscribers past and present. But it was a case of too little much too late. In a letter written to its subscribers dated June 10, 1971, the Charles Playhouse officially ceased to exist as a regional theatre.

There are, essentially four reasons why the Charles Playhouse disappeared as a regional theatre in 1970. The first, a loss of "institutional base," has already been discussed. This certainly would explain the precipitous drop in subscriptions. The second reason is the lack of support from foundation sources who either ignored or misinterpreted the financial situation

developing over the years. The third is the fact that Sugrue and the Board of Directors had allowed the deficit to accrue to an insurmountable figure rather than seeking additional funds for each year's individual income gap. The last reason, and ultimately the principal one, is the general lack of support the Charles received from private contributors. Returning again to the critical year 1966-67, we find that while the Boston Symphony received close to \$500,000 in private contributions that year, and the Opera Company received close to \$250,000, the Charles Playhouse received only \$31,000. It is apparent from these figures that those individuals who could afford to support the performing arts chose symphonic music and opera over theatre. Even when the private contributions to the Theatre Company of Boston (\$20,000) for that year are added to the Charles' amount, the total amount given to both theatres was only 7% that given to the Symphony and the Opera, or \$51,000 compared with \$750,000. It is true that the level of achievement that the Charles had reached up to that point was certainly not as great as either the Symphony or the Opera Company. In proportion to each other, however, the contributions to the Charles are indeed quite low. Theatre in Boston had not yet been deemed ready or proper for institutional funding by the city's wealthier residents. It was 1970, but things had not really changed that much since the days of Henry Jewett.

The Charles Playhouse had been founded by a group of actors from Boston University and an artistic director who came from New York's Circle in the Square. These circumstances were repeated when a new nonprofit company, the Theatre Company of Boston, was

organized in 1963. Much of the similarity between the two companies, however, ends here. David Wheeler, the company's director, had been Jose Quintero's assistant at Circle in the Square, but artistic and financial problems led to a parting of the ways. Naomi Thornton, who was to act and co-produce with Wheeler the first season, reached Wheeler in New York during the spring of 1963 and discussed the plan she and her fellow actors had for a new theatre company. Both parties were keenly interested in developing new works by American playwrights. An agreement was quickly reached and after a season of summer performances intended to introduce their talents to each other and to the Boston community, they publicly announced their plans for a permanent company and sought funding. In a brochure distributed before the fall season, the group emphasized its intention to become a platform for new writers and its desire to perform in a location in central Boston.

Funding was slow coming in, but they were able to move to a tiny 95 seat space in the Hotel Bostonian. The company wasted no time in producing strong and skillfully prepared productions of Beckett, Pinter, Arden, Ionesco, Albee and others who were in the forefront of the new wave theatre. It was clear that this company would not be another Charles Playhouse, which was, for the most part, doing what might be considered the usual regional theatre fare of Moliere, Chekhov, etc. In its history, the Theatre Company did do an occasional work by Chekhov or O'Neill, but this was the exception. Unlike the Charles, which usually followed the examples of other regional theatres, the Theatre Company made its own policies.

The Theatre Company was able to maintain an excellent company of Equity and local, non-union performers. This was possible the first few years because of an Equity policy which permitted a 50/50 ratio of Equity to non-Equity members in a company. While a permanent core of Equity performers was never maintained, Wheeler was well acquainted with a group of young New York actors who, without much inducement, would regularly come to Boston, perform in a show or two, and go back to New York where they could make money doing television or commercials. The non-Equity performers, who made up the other half of the casts, would usually be local actors affiliated with Boston University. It was an exciting combination that worked well because they all were able to feed from each other's energy. The less experienced local talent felt challenged to work with the professionals, the professionals were excited about doing serious new plays, and Wheeler was able to coordinate the two groups and transfer their energy to his interpretation of the script. The result was a theatre that often transcended the inadequacies of the space, the sets and the costumes.

In a few years' time they drew considerable attention to themselves in Boston and beyond. The 1963 Rogers and Hammerstein College President's Award was presented to Wheeler for being "the person who has done most for the theatre in Boston in the year 1963." Late in that season of 1963-64 they gave the American premiere of Ann Jellicoe's The Knack -- which was later to become a Broadway hit and movie. During the next season their American premiere of John Arden's Live Like Pigs was moved to New York in a

Theatre Company production backed by supporters from Boston and it ran four months off-Broadway. After viewing their production of Bertolt Brecht's Jungle of Cities, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded them a \$14,000 grant to hold a Festival of New American Plays. It was held in the 1965-66 season and included works by Adrienne Kennedy, Sam Shepard, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Rosalyn Drexler. In The Boston Globe (March 6, 1966), Kevin Kelly noted,

In the space of three short years the Company has built an enviable reputation. Under the direction of David Wheeler it has shown an adventurous spirit unequalled by any other regional theatre in the United States.

Kelly noted further that the Company was trying to raise \$15,000 to facilitate a move to the Hotel Touraine. The campaign, he said, "should enlist the interest and money of anyone who believes in theatre per se."

It was clear that the Theatre Company was able to produce successfully a good number of outstanding new plays and that some important groups and individuals were in support of them. But beyond a subscription list that at best reached 2,000 and another loyal group of students and intellectuals who bought single tickets, the Theatre Company never attracted the wider audience constituency that attended the commercial houses. The Company was able to survive as long as it did only because it continued to play in small, shabby theatres, it kept budgets small and it was able to receive regular foundation and National Endowment support.

Boston audiences have been fed on steady diet of New York tryouts and road shows. They are accustomed to and have come to expect their theatre to be nicely packaged in a comfortable house

and performed by actors they have seen or heard of before. Unless a "name" star is in the cast, new plays almost always result in poor houses. Boston audiences are discriminating in their taste for entertainment, but rarely in their taste for more unusual and often for more intellectually stimulating forms of theatre. Even when the Company was praised as a group that consistently performed good plays well, the houses did not increase. Only on the rare occasions that brought vast amounts of publicity to a single play, for example their production of Marat/Sade in the fall of 1966, would an exodus from the Tremont Street theatres occur. But after such plays closed, those audiences never came back to see what other things this company could do. With their "hit" mentality they would wait until another play might come along and cause a similar avalanche of praise and attention. A theatre that had to fight against this "tradition" had little chance for growth.

The Theatre Company was, however, very grateful for audiences it did have. David Wheeler reflected recently:

They were an intensely enthusiastic audience and that made a difference. We thought they were very much with us and their criticism and their sense of moving along with us, certainly challenged us. And we were pleased with that. So, in a sense, the fact that it didn't grow as one would hope, was not as disheartening as it might have been, had it not been for this steady stream of challenge and acceptance.³⁴

The Company was able to grow somewhat, if the audience capacity of the theatre is an indication. Their first theatre, the Hotel Bostonian, seated 95. The second theatre at the Hotel Touraine seated approximately 225. They were forced to move again

in 1967 and spent \$50,000 to convert the Fenway Theatre from a cinema to a theatre seating 400. But the company never did well enough to keep the Hotel Touraine filled, so the increased size of the Fenway Theatre was just a statistic in the purchase. Actually, the move to the Fenway proved financially harmful. Up until this time, the Theatre Company had been struggling, but it had never accrued a deficit the way the Charles had. Foundation sources had been willing to give them money for producing new works and the National Endowment and local foundations gave them money to do a high school touring program, but those dollars could only be used for designated projects. Building funds had to come primarily from their own pockets. The \$50,000 loan for alterations put such a continual strain on their already limited budgets that they were never able to pay it all off. \$20,000 of it remains even today.³⁵

Michael Murray's resignation at the Charles followed only two months after the Theatre Company moved to the Fenway. Talk followed soon after that perhaps David Wheeler would take his place and the two companies would merge. Both companies did give the matter some consideration but each decided against it for the same reason. They each felt the other company was in a deep financial hole and neither of them wanted the other's problems. Those were certainly fair assessments since two years later both companies had ceased to produce actively. But they were much too different in their style and in their choice of plays for the merger to have succeeded. Compromise would have been the favorite pastime at Board meetings and when it came to style and play selection, David

Wheeler did not compromise. Wheeler's talent and leadership would have been a welcome addition to the Charles had the groups been more compatible. One possibly happy solution might have been for both companies to share the Charles' two stages (the 525 seat mainstage and the 280 seat cabaret). The designation of which company got which space would depend on the staging requirements and popular appeal of an individual play. Just the savings in shared rent might have made it worthwhile, but the differences between the companies would probably not have permitted that course either. In any case, both companies were heading downhill. The reasons behind the Charles' disappearance have already been discussed. The problems at the Theatre Company were somewhat different.

The Theatre Company had money problems from the day it opened just as any other nonprofit organization has, and it was aware that the theatre it was interested in producing needed little beyond the necessities of a stage, an audience and some performers. There was always the feeling that they would get through any financial crisis if they were willing to keep the group alive. That proved true with little damage to the productions. The Equity arrangement of a 50/50 company had helped since the Theatre Company could pay the professionals the union minimum and give the local performers whatever was possible. However, Equity rules changed over the years and in a series of yearly increments, the ratio of Equity to non-Equity jumped to 10/1. A boon to those with Equity cards, it hurt companies like the Theatre Company because they could not afford to pay everyone Equity rates. The Equity change

also hurt local performers since it gave them little opportunity to work with professionals. One of the things that David Wheeler felt had made the company an artistic success was the fact that they had been able to maintain a "floating company" of actors who came in from New York when they could because they had an opportunity to do exciting theatre. But the new Equity rules made many existing and subsequent companies decide to discontinue or never "go" Equity in the first place because of the expense. The Theatre Company developed many successful actors using their 50/50 system, among them Paul Benedict, Dustin Hoffman, and Jon Voight. Wheeler, rightfully so, feels the new ruling was a mistake, especially for a city like Boston.³⁶

Further complications leading to the decline of the Theatre Company involved the loss of Sara O'Connor and David Cassidy who both served many functions but were primarily involved in keeping the Company financially solvent. They were replaced with new faces but the financial burden had shifted over to Wheeler and his Board of Directors, who, especially in Wheeler's case, simply were neither skilled nor really interested in fund raising or developing a community base to get funding. Wheeler explained it this way:

We never, perhaps, worked sufficiently at promoting local sources in the way say, would Sarah Caldwell Artistic Director of the Opera Company of Boston or even the Charles. The Charles always had certain people that were very strong vocally and supportive financially. We never had that. We had our friends but on a much smaller scale. I don't think we spent enough time at that [i.e., fund raising]. It's all a question of where you spend your time. We spent our time doing plays ... Well, I don't think that's fair ... It all depends ... sometimes it's luck and sometimes there are certain people who are able to do that. I was never active in that kind of thing

myself ... We had Frank Cassidy producing until 1968 and he was marvelous in all phases of the theatre as director, producer, actor, designer; he had done everything. He got a very high paying job in Washington running the College Theatre Festival ... and then we had Sara O'Connor who was a very good producer and she left too when she had better options ... she's now running the Milwaukee theatre organization ... they were good people but they could only stay at these posts so long.³⁷

The Theatre Company of Boston's artistic and social aims were distinct from most nationally recognized theatre companies. In the quotation above Wheeler explained their concern half in jest: "It's all a question of where you spend your time. We spent our time doing plays." Unlike the Charles and other companies usually identified as "regional theatres," the Theatre Company was not interested in establishing a strong community base and evolving into one of Boston's cultural institutions. Its reasons for being were involved with staging good productions of a wide variety of new and avant-garde works and in the development of new acting talent. The company worked for as long as it was possible. When it became so complicated and difficult merely to survive, the reasons for being vanished. It was no longer artistically stimulating -- in fact, it was quite the opposite. Wheeler accomplished what he had wanted to do and had done it well, but it was unreasonable to expect a group to continue to produce year after year in such a limited financial state. They were burned out.

When people ask 'Why did you stop?' I want to reply, 'How did we ever go on so long, so foolhardy, so impossible, took so much effort on so many people's part' ... It's a surprise that you continued rather than you stopped.³⁸

The Company continued producing, full-time, until 1970 when the Fenway Theatre was taken away from them. It was the third time they were forced to vacate a theatre in seven years. Some half-hearted appeals went out, and Kevin Kelly asked in an effort to help the Company, "Does anybody care?" The answer came back in non-response. An attempt was made to relocate at the Boston Center for the Arts, but it was unsuitable as a performance space.³⁹ Although the name of the group was seen sporadically in special productions starring Al Pacino (The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel in 1972, and Richard III in 1973), or in a summer season like the one produced in 1974 at the Loeb Drama Center and Kresge Auditorium, it was really just David Wheeler bringing some of the old members of the company together again.

Many small local theatre groups, producing plays in a wide variety of theatrical styles and possessing various levels of skill and ambition, performed in Boston during the sixties and seventies. Most groups had no intention to grow in physical size and were content to remain small, albeit poor, attracting their usual following and continuing to produce theatre as well as they knew how. Some groups, like the Poets' Theatre, which specialized in the new works of the literati, and Stage I, which worked primarily with improvisational techniques, have since passed on. Others, such as the Cambridge Ensemble, the Publick Theatre and the People's Theatre, are still in existence, with the Cambridge Ensemble usually attaining the highest level of achievement. The Boston Shakespeare Company and the Next Move Theatre are both recent phenomena in Boston; they have been able to obtain their

own theatres and draw loyal followings in these last few years of the seventies. Later in Chapter Five the major local theatre groups will be examined, especially in terms of how their particular economic characteristics have affected the direction of their artistic goals and the rate of their physical growth.

One local group that has not, as yet, been mentioned in this short history of Boston theatre is the Boston Repertory Theatre. This company is still in existence at this time, at least on paper. All of the original members of the company have left and those who remain have taken a year off from production work to regroup their forces, run a strong subscription drive and start afresh next season with solid financial footing. This group never made any great artistic strides. It rarely tried to do especially challenging productions -- when it did, it usually fell on its face. What makes this company particularly noteworthy for this study is that its founders had planned for the company to become a nationally known regional theatre from the start. Obviously, they did not succeed. Nevertheless, how they failed and why they failed can reveal many things about theatre in contemporary Boston.

The Boston Repertory Theatre was founded in the summer of 1971 under the leadership of Esquire Jauchem. According to Jauchem, the time was right for a new theatre company.

There wasn't any theatre. The Theatre Company of Boston had closed, the Charles Playhouse had closed and it seemed crazy to me that a city this size did not have a company that could fill that void.⁴⁰

Summer seems to have become the traditional period for new

companies to break in their shoes before attempting to run for a whole season. The company members were all very young, with various levels of practical theatre experience behind them. Jauchem had worked for Sarah Caldwell as a special effects designer. David Zucker and Virginia Feingold were M.F.A. candidates in acting at Brandeis University. Others were relatively experienced in lighting, sets, costumes, etc. It was not the first time a group of neophytes joined forces. Had it not been for the mother of a company member who was finally able to track down a place on Cape Cod for them to perform, and had not Sarah Caldwell donated costumes, lights and set pieces, the summer season might never have occurred. Difficulties in finding a theatre precluded a fall season. The Sheraton-Commander Hotel in Cambridge was the arranged space, but plans fell through.

During that period before the next summer season, David Zucker went back to Brandeis and produced a theatre piece he had adapted from a French short story. It was an English stage version of The Little Prince and it was to become the company's trademark and their source of financial stability.

It's hard for a company to start out. You've got to have something, not necessarily a gimmick, but something that's going to draw people -- either a famous name, a lot of money for advertising which we didn't have, or something else that captures the fancy of the people. Which is what The Little Prince did. And it's what the company did best.⁴¹

The company's first season opened with The Little Prince at the Boston Center for the Arts. They performed in repertory style, alternating The Little Prince with The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail and The Thirteen Clocks. Later in the season they attempted A Hat-

ful of Rain, The Romantics, Grandma's in the Cellar and Uncle Vanya. Their productions of lighter works were almost always well-received critically. Their forays into naturalistic drama or the classics were usually panned. The Rep was simply too young and inexperienced to attempt serious drama. Some of the performers were adequate, particularly Zucker, Feingold and Joe Wilkins, but the others were not. The problem lay mainly in the fact that the Rep worked on what might be called a "socialistic" arrangement. From the beginning it was decided that each member of the company would have an equal voice on company policy and action. Responsibilities and duties in the company were also shared because of the small size of the company and lack of money to pay outsiders. But many company members were not suited for certain activities, the most prominent of which was acting. Members who had been trained to design sets or costumes were performing on stage. The result was obvious. Because of their youthful energy and the appeal of their adaptations of The Little Prince, Animal Farm and The Point, these productions were fairly well done and enjoyable, and ~~were well~~ received in the press. The other shows were usually not and continued to remain that way because "nobody wanted to stay with the company if they could only do their work."⁴² Acting roles were given out as an incentive to stay with the company. Still with all these apparent faults, the company was attracting attention and subsequently a following. As early as 1972, a Globe critic, William Henry III, noted that they were the local group with "ranking status" in Boston. This was accomplished by

keeping its ensemble intact, paying 'steady' though scarcely lavish salaries and doing seven shows since June, each with its own set and keeping as many as four in repertory.⁴³

In its second full year, 1972-73, the company moved to a larger space in a safer part of town on Berkeley and Marlborough Streets. Though they continued their intra-company policies, they were able to show signs of becoming firmly established. They began to place good-sized ads in the local papers and for two years they received funding from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities enabling them to charge \$1 admission on Wednesday nights. The season included an adaptation of Animal Farm, Home Free, Luv and The Little Prince.

In their fourth season, 1975-76, they again moved, this time to the Performance Center in Harvard Square's The Garage. The first production that season (by this time the repertory system had grown too expensive and was dropped) was perhaps the turning point in the company's credibility. For the first time in the company's history they cast from outside the group and brought in an Equity actor (with union approval) to play the lead in When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder? It proved to be a sound move. "The company has grown and the production showed that in a nicely polished and professional way."⁴⁴ The next show however was Murder at the Boston Garden, a comedy that revolved around the "Boston Ceramics." David Zucker liked to say that the Rep was known for its frequent plays of "whimsy" and "fantasy," but with productions like Murder at the Boston Garden, Luv, The Little Prince ("Still playing in its fourth year") and The Diary of Adam

Eve, it was perhaps becoming known for its "vapid" drama. Why were so many of these kind of plays mixed in with plays like Red Ryder?, or Uncle Vanya or their political satire Animal Farm?

How were the plays chosen? From Esquire Jauchem:

I picked plays that I liked and I picked plays that I thought people would be interested in coming to see. I do not particularly pick a specific 'style' of play -- you don't just do Shakespeare or just do experimental works ... because I think the kind of theatre we were trying to build has to appeal to a broader audience than that -- it has to be able to bring in the people who like musicals, who like the drama, who like this, that -- so it's eclectic.⁴⁵

In 1973 the Rep published a statement of objectives in which it expressed a desire to avoid an "artsy" image. Unfortunately, the desires that influenced play selection and style resulted in a directionless theatre. It was a theatre without an aesthetic backbone.

In the middle of the fourth season it was decided that the company would finally have its own theatre. A building drive was initiated, funds were sought from local foundations and bank loans were taken. They did most of the renovation themselves, and opened their new home (located in an alley off Boylston Street and steps away from the Colonial Theatre) with an adaptation of Vonnegut's Player Piano. Moliere's The Misanthrope followed. How well had the Rep progressed after five years and after having moved to a new theatre in the Theatre District? Kevin Kelly reviews The Misanthrope:

... the Rep's production is merely high school work (pretty good high school work) underscored here and there with an awkward stretch of charm meant to cover an obvious lack of style. The only question the Rep's evening raises is: how long do we have to wait for the company to graduate?⁴⁶

How much longer could the company continue without changing company policy on acting roles and who would get them? How much more abuse from the press could they endure before they took some action? The next production at the Rep, P.S. Your Cat is Dead! would indicate that things had indeed changed at last. Kevin Kelly called it, "probably the best work done by the Boston Repertory Theatre."⁴⁷ What made this production so different was that it was actually not a product of the Rep. The actors were Equity performers, the director was an outsider, and although some of the Rep's members were in on the production in various capacities, many were not. From this point on, the Rep would be, in essence, a commercial house. Actors and directors were jobbed in for each show. The tight little company that once did The Little Prince in repertory with Animal Farm was there in name only. What happened?

There are two major reasons for the decline of the Rep:
 1) lack of financial security, and 2) decline in company morale. As has been mentioned, the company had limited financial resources during its entire existence and each member of the company performed several tasks to save money. This put an incredible burden on the actors, especially when the added burden of theatre renovation had begun. David Zucker explained what happened to the company:

... the quality of the shows suffered immensely because we were just worn out before curtain time -- we were dead. Trying to do something with energy was impossible.⁴⁸

The lack of energy, of course, did nothing for their performance and bad reviews continued to come in -- and audiences stayed away.

Before the new theatre, if people didn't come for awhile it was OK, our overhead wasn't too high. But when we got to the new theatre, the overhead was incredible. And we sort of knew it was coming ... people felt the end of the Rep. We thought we were sort of banding together just to open that building; that was our main purpose in the last year or so. And when once that happened, the glue wasn't there -- the binding force -- so it dissipated and people went off in different directions. They probably would have stayed if it had been successful but there was no longer anything to fight for in the face of non-success.⁴⁹

In what was to be its last season, 1977-78, the Rep tried to get on sound financial ground by boldly announcing that it would produce four new plays. One was by Israel Horowitz, another by Viveca Lindfors, the third was a new Israeli piece and the fourth a somewhat "kinky" version of Schnitzler's La Ronde changed to Rondelet. The season was a flop.

The Rep never took the time to develop an audience. Although money was tight, it might have been better to run a subscription drive before they opened their new theatre, or at least have done it concurrently. Without a strong subscription roll, the company was forced to live show by show -- a terribly difficult position to maintain when a building has to be paid for and salaries must be paid every week. Of course, it goes without saying that actors should not be over-burdened on performance days.

Still, there were factors that could not be helped. The Company did not go Equity until P.S. Your Cat is Dead! because it could not afford it and only did so then because it had no choice. Equity rates were too high for the young company. Had the rules regarding the ratio of Equity to non-Equity company members remained at the 50/50 scale it had been, rather than the current

10/1, perhaps the level of performance might have been higher. Also, working against the company was a lack of large input of either National Endowment or foundation money.

The development of the Rep may actually be seen as a setback for local Boston theatre groups. Here was a company that had never really produced a successful show beyond The Little Prince, had never possessed a clear idea of their intentions and had never been able to form a firm base of community support -- and still was able to convince banking institutions and private individuals that it would succeed with its new building. It was almost an insult to the community when many of the members gave up at the end of only one year. If David Zucker says they knew that the company was falling apart before the building was completed, why didn't they do something about it then? Their actions certainly will not benefit other groups seeking building funds from banks and private individuals. Until recently, Esquire Jauchem was the only member of the original company to remain. Since the end of the 1977-78 season, he had been very busy preparing for the Rep's reopening, raising money and choosing scripts. Working with him was a newcomer, Karl Gevecker, a business manager who would do most of the fund raising. Now, Jauchem too has left the Rep and rejoined Sarah Caldwell. Karl Gevecker remains to keep the Rep hopeful of another season.

This chapter has been concerned with the development of Boston theatres that grew out of a reaction to commercialism and the empty productions that usually came with it. Although there have always been theatre professionals seriously interested in

establishing a great theatre in Boston -- one which would give artistically superior productions to a variety of plays from the canon of finer world drama, and although there has always been a public which would readily attend and support such a theatre, that theatre has only been a dream. There have been far too many barriers set before any attempt so far. The rest of this study will examine the social, economic and political climates for such a theatre in Boston at this time. Can such a theatre exist?

CHAPTER TWO:

The Influence of Social Factors on Theatre and
the Performing Arts in Boston

Theatrical production in Boston does not exist in a vacuum with rates of growth or recession dependent entirely on the variables of ticket price and attendance. For the commercial theatre, these variables may indeed be the most immediate factors in determining whether or not a specific production will make a profit. There are, however, many other variables which indirectly have a much greater influence. Such variables include the distribution and changes in population, the habits of the working commuter, the competition with other growing fields of entertainment and amusement, economic inflation with resultant rising production costs and the availability of suitable productions.¹ In addition to these variables, the nonprofit theatres are also affected by the availability of funding from public and private sources. Significantly, all these variables are outside the control of theatre managers and producers. Sound financial management, vigorous fund raising and well-aimed advertising are the only weapons these managers and producers have against the fluctuations in society and the economy.

In the fifty years prior to the last major national census in 1970, the Boston metropolitan area grew in a manner similar to most of the metropolitan areas on the East Coast. The dominant trend was the growth of suburban communities at the expense of the central cities. As highways reached further out past the city limits, middle and long distance commuting became increasingly viable. Also, many businesses moved outside the city to avoid the city's high tax rates. In 1920, Boston proper and the four major counties surrounding it (Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk and

Plymouth) had a combined population of 2,427,000 with Boston proper totaling 835,000 or 33% of the combined population. By 1970, the combined population had grown by 82% to 3,700,000 but Boston proper had actually declined by 12% to 735,000 or approximately 20% of the combined population. Even with such a large shift of population to outside the city, Boston still remained important as a place to work. In 1970, 214,175 workers from the four major surrounding counties commuted into Boston on a daily basis while only 56,500 workers from Boston proper commuted out to the other four counties.²

In the face of declining urban population a theatre producer might look at the commutation figures with some hope, for although the overwhelming majority of the population resides outside the city, a large number still enters the city every day and could potentially remain until evening and become audience members. However, the results of a study prepared by Wilbur Smith and Associates in 1974 allow little reason for optimism. This study estimated the number of people in downtown Boston at different hours of the day. The peak number, reached at 1:00 p.m., was 200,000. By 6:00 p.m. that number dropped sharply to 40,000, by 8:00 p.m. it went to 20,000 and by 10:00 p.m. it dropped further to 10,000.³ While the recent revitalization of Quincy Marketplace and the Waterfront may have caused the later evening figures to become somewhat higher at this time, these figures still strongly indicate that downtown Boston is virtually abandoned by the time the 8:00 p.m. curtain rises at most theatrical presentations. Projects such as the revitalization of the Theatre District (including the

alteration of the Music Hall and the erection of Lafayette Plaza, a hotel and retail center on Washington Street), the revitalization of the South End and the control and possible gradual elimination of the Combat Zone, are all vital factors in making downtown Boston a more desirable place to visit or remain past the regular working hours of the day. Theatre in Boston, both commercial and nonprofit, will have little chance to grow beyond its present levels unless these changes toward a more desirable environment come to fruition. Boston theatre is not as strong as New York theatre which can withstand the seediness of Times Square. Broadway is an attraction in itself. There are many other entertainments in Boston and they are all competing for the favors of the resident Bostonian, the commuter and the tourist. Revitalization will prevent local theatre from stagnating or declining.

As a business, theatre competes with other entertainments which are all seeking a share of the vast entertainment dollar. In the Boston metropolitan area alone, the 1972 Census of Selected Services reported that 2,162 amusement and entertainment businesses compiled combined receipts of \$216.3 million in 1972.⁴ The largest share of this total goes to such non-artistic entertainment as commercial sports (including the professional teams -- \$47.6 million), racing (including auto, horse and dog racing -- \$28.2 million), membership sports and recreation clubs (\$25.9 million), and bowling alleys (\$11.7 million). These four areas combine for over 50% of the total entertainment dollar. The motion picture industry had combined receipts of \$78 million of which \$39.5 million was attributed to production, distribution and

service. The other \$38.5 million was a result of movie theatre receipts and represented a sizeable 18% of the combined total entertainment dollar. When the total receipts of the commercial theatre are examined we find receipts of only \$3.7 million or 1.7% of the combined total. Non-commercial theatre receipts are not delineated in the Census report, but in the absence of any large nonprofit professional theatre in Boston in 1972, these receipts would not, in all probability, have exceeded half the commercial theatre receipts. Therefore, the total receipts for all theatrical entertainment in Boston in 1972 did not exceed \$5.5 million or 2.5% of the total entertainment dollar. Clearly, and not surprisingly, the movies are much more widely attended in Boston than theatrical presentations. In that same year, 1972, the combined total of all amusements and entertainments in the nation was \$13.5 billion. With receipts of \$1.8 billion, movies commanded a 13% share of the total entertainment dollar, whereas legitimate theatre had a 2% share of the total with receipts of \$227 million. Legitimate theatre is then, in greater competition with the movies in Boston than it is on the national level. If legitimate theatre receipts are seen in a percentage relationship to movie receipts we find that on the national level, legitimate theatre receipts were 12% as large as movie receipts. On the Boston level, this same relationship reveals that legitimate theatre receipts were only 9.6% as large as movie receipts.

The greater percentage of movie receipts in Boston's total entertainment dollar might bring forth the conclusion that the percentage of Bostonians who regularly attend the movie theatre is

higher than the national average. However, a study sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 1971 indicates opposite conclusions.⁵ This study examined the public's frequency of attendance at the performing arts and the movies. Twelve metropolitan areas, representing all areas of the country, were the base of the sample. Five hundred personal at-home interviews were conducted in each city. The homes and the specific person interviewed in the home were chosen completely at random utilizing both the telephone director and street maps. Those interviewed were questioned as to how often they attended a specific performing art in the last twelve months. Responses were categorized by the rate of exposure to the art form: more than once a week, more than once a month, more than once a year, once, or not exposed. In the category of exposure to movies in movie theatres the national average was a 69% exposure rate. This means that 69% of the United States population saw a movie at a movie theatre at least once in the year prior to the survey and 31% did not. When the exposure rate for the individual cities is given, Boston is listed at an exposure rate of only 66% for that year, or 3% below the national average. In the more financially critical category of per cent exposed more than once a month, Boston still remained below the national average with a rate of 16%, as compared to the national average of 18%, and ranked eighth of the twelve cities in the category of movie attendance.

In the category concerning exposure to a live professional play, the national average exposure rate was 16%, which means that 84% of the people surveyed did not attend a professional

dramatic presentation even once in a year's time. Individually, Boston's exposure rate was 13% -- again, the Boston rate was 3% below the national average. In this category, Boston again ranked eighth among the cities in overall exposure.

Attendance at live professional Broadway musicals fared better than non-musical drama in the national average and in Boston. Eighteen percent of all those surveyed saw at least one Broadway musical in that year -- 2% more than the average for the non-musical drama. Seventeen percent of the Bostonians attended such fare -- 4% higher than the one time rate for non-musical drama. Boston's attendance rate was, however, once more below the national average and the city placed seventh in that category.

This pattern continued for every live performing art that was examined in the survey. Boston's rate of attendance proved to be consistently below the national average. Even when Boston was in possession of a performing arts organization that ranked among the world's best, as in the case of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the survey showed the attendance rate at only 8% for live professional symphony -- the national average was 10%. In the other two major performing art forms, ballet and opera, Boston fared its worst, ranking eleventh and twelfth in percentage of audience exposure respectively. Only 2% of those surveyed in Boston had attended a live professional ballet, and only 1% had attended a live professional opera.

These figures are startling pieces of evidence and should prove more than sufficient to dispel any notion that Boston is a cultural "Mecca." They are certainly sufficient to eliminate the

myth that labels Boston the "Athens of America." In terms of audience support, Boston simply has one of the poorest records in the country. This lack of support may be translated into lack of interest when other information contained in the Ford Foundation survey reveals that Boston's exposure continues to be below the national average in those categories where the performing arts are seen or heard in other media such as radio, television, home recordings, or in live amateur presentations. The only category where Boston's rate of attendance actually rises above the national average is in that category where a professional symphony orchestra is viewed on television. Here, Boston actually places number one among the twelve cities. This may perhaps be attributed to the frequency with which the Boston Symphony has been telecast over local public television station WGBH, or perhaps to the fact that the public bears a particular fondness for watching Arthur Fiedler conduct the Boston Pops. It cannot, however, be judged as evidence of any tangible level of support because this very high rate of audience exposure -- 41% -- was, as stated above, reduced to only an 8% exposure rate at the box office.

If Boston has been less active in its attendance at movies and the performing arts and consistently falls below the national rate of attendance in these art forms, in what entertainments does Boston excel? Are there any entertainment fields where Boston exceeds the national average? The answer can be found in further examination of the 1972 Census of Selected Services. It was noted earlier in this chapter that over 50% of the total entertainment dollar in Boston was spent on the sporting industry which in its

four major forms included all race track operations, professional sports, membership sports and recreation clubs, and bowling alleys. Broken down individually, 12.5% of the total entertainment dollar was spent on race track operations, 22% on professional sports, 12% on membership sports and recreation and clubs and 5.4% on bowling -- in sum, this total sports expenditure comes to a more precise 51.9% of the total entertainment dollar. This percentage is much higher than the national average for the same entertainment forms. On the national level, 6.6% of the entertainment dollar was spent on race track operations, 4% on professional sports, 11.8% on membership sports and recreation clubs, and 8% on bowling. These four entertainment forms totaled only 29.8% of the total national entertainment dollar in that year compared with 51.9% for Boston. Clearly, Boston is a very heavily sports-minded city. This sporting emphasis is particularly evident for the two forms where spectators are involved, those being professional sports and race track operations. On the national level these two forms combined for 10.6% of the total entertainment dollar, but in Boston, this percentage rose dramatically to 34.5%. This wide disparity may be only partially explained by the fact that for its size, Boston has a greater proportion of professional sport teams when compared to the rest of the nation. Greater availability may indeed allow for the possibility of higher spectator sports receipts, but it does not guarantee it. The public must have made a conscious effort to attend regularly such activities or these activities would not have grown so large in number or size. If the theory that the greater availability

of an entertainment will result in a greater percentage of the total receipts is applied to the commercial theatre in Boston, the theory does not hold. Boston's commercial theatre business has been regularly ranked by the trade paper Variety between fifth and seventh among important commercial theatre cities after New York. In spite of its consistently high financial ranking, commercial theatre in Boston, as has been noted earlier, achieved a lower percentage of the total entertainment dollar than the national average for that category in 1972. In that year, 2% of the total national entertainment dollar was contributed by the commercial theatre, whereas only 1.7% of the Boston entertainment dollar was reached by the local commercial theatres.

The performing arts in Boston, both commercial and nonprofit, have had a great deal of difficulty developing into economically stable entities because only very small segments of the population regularly attend these performances. The meaning behind the figures given above is particularly significant and distressing to the local nonprofit organizations which must often rely on the generosity of its donors ~~to foster continued~~ creative activities. The chances for attracting donors will, in most cases, rise or fall in direct proportion to that percentage of the population which regularly exposes itself to the performing arts. Since it has been noted that Boston nearly always registers below the national average percentile in exposure to each type of performing arts presentation, nonprofit performing arts groups in Boston have an uphill battle for survival from the onset. In addition, the great vitality that spectator sports displays in Boston is an

added obstacle in the arts' path. Indeed, the Grecian allusion for Boston should perhaps be changed to the "Sparta of America."

CHAPTER THREE:

Primary Economic Considerations for Theatre and
the Performing Arts in Boston

The fields of economics and politics are often so closely tied to each other that it is difficult to study the dealings a particular subject may have with one of these two fields without also making reference to the other. This observation holds true when examining the effects that economic and political considerations have on the current state of theatre in Boston. Consider the hypothetical case of a nonprofit theatre that is in danger of bankruptcy because its fund raising efforts have come up short and a deficit has appeared. When this theatre's executive director examines his financial books he realizes that had the theatre's annual grant from the state arts council not been cut in half that season, his theatre would be much closer to solvency. In this case, the immediate problem the executive director has is the lack of enough financial support to keep the bills paid; his chronic problem has to do with the low level of support the legislature gives to arts organizations. Ultimately, the problem is both economic and political. For the purposes of this discussion, the effects of economics and politics on theatre in Boston will be examined in isolation from each other so that the essential characteristics of each will become evident.

Commercial and nonprofit theatre have, by definition, different economic makeups. The commercial theatre, whose form in Boston can be seen most often in either the Broadway tryout or road show, is designed to make a profit for its investors. Each production is financed individually, seldom connected to another production coming either before or after it. Nonprofit theatre has no investors, does not see a profit and is happy if its total income

can meet its expenses. It is generally produced by a tax-exempt organization and each presentation's expenses and receipts are part of a season which may contain varying numbers of other presentations. This type of theatre is financed primarily through ticket sales (both singly and by subscription series), private contributions, corporate contributions, and awards from national and local foundations, and from federal, state and local governments. The kinds of plays each form presents are often quite different, and different, too, are production styles and methods of audience development. The major similarities between the two forms in Boston are that they both draw from the same population pool for their audiences, and both forms are subject to the same fluctuations in the economy of the New England region. Perhaps the most important similarity between these forms is that they are both situated only 184 miles from Broadway. This relatively short distance between Boston and New York, the center of theatre activity in the United States, has not helped Boston theatre in achieving any semblance of true individuality. Although this chapter will be primarily concerned with the economics of nonprofit theatre and other performing arts organizations in Boston, the commercial theatre is such an influential element in the total theatre picture that the nature of its economic base will be discussed first.

Boston is an important city for Broadway tryouts, but because of the high production costs, the tryout system has been on the decline and appears much less frequently in Boston than it once did. While the discriminating taste of the Boston

audience was one of the factors that had made the city a desirable place for tryouts, it is also one of the reasons why the tryout is seen less frequently in Boston today. Unless a tryout features a star of the highest magnitude (as in the case of last season's Tribute with Jack Lemmon) or has been written by a popular playwright (such as Neil Simon), Bostonians will not come to the theatre until the new play has "proved" itself with good reviews, waves of media "hype," and enthusiastic word of mouth. It usually takes about one and a half weeks for these three favorable reactions to occur fully and take effect on the public, and by that time, half the usual three week run has gone by with poor houses and low receipts to show for its efforts.¹ The last week of the run may be excellent enough to cover the heavy losses of the first week, but the margin of profit will be small, if there is any profit at all. At \$16.50 or so a ticket, audiences have become highly selective. The fact that a production will be moving to New York is no longer enough of an attraction to draw sizeable audiences. For such a large personal investment, the audience wants to see a show that is polished and proven, and not one that is uneven, unfinished and timid. For these reasons, the road show version of a proven Broadway hit has become the more familiar and profitable tenant in the commercial house.

The audience is not the only group that is unwilling to take a chance on the visiting shows. A poor showing at the box office hurts not only the producer, but also the owner of the theatre. At the Colonial Theatre in Boston, the owners, Jujamcyn Corporation, have protected themselves by altering the usual financial agree-

ments made with visiting shows. Beyond the weekly guarantee that is paid by the visiting show to the theatre, there is a split of the receipts (or "take") which is ordinarily divided 70-30 between the producer and the theatre respectively. The Colonial has changed this by considerably upping the amount of the guarantee and lowering their "take" of the receipts to the ratio of 90-10. A unionized legitimate theatre is costly to maintain. Although a theatre like the Colonial is lit only between 26 and 30 weeks out of the year, it must pay a full-time staff year-round. Salaries and building maintenance fees are high. Unlike the nonprofit houses, commercial theatres pay property taxes. At one time, the Colonial would have been reasonably sure that its original guarantee and "take" of the receipts would have been sufficient to carry it through the "dark" weeks as well as through the periods the theatre was in use. That is no longer true. Of course, in this new arrangement, producers are more hesitant to bring a risky show to the Colonial. This results in even fewer tryouts coming to Boston. Another commercial house in Boston, the Shubert Theatre, has solved the problem of the risky tryout somewhat differently -- in the 1978-79 season it did not present a single tryout and instead housed a steady stream of highly popular current Broadway hits such as Beatlemania and A Chorus Line. In this way the public is more confident in the calibre of the presentation, the producers are reasonably assured of good box office receipts, and the owners of the house will most likely see enough profit to pay for the "dark" weeks between shows and then some. Boston's third major commercial house, the Wilbur

Theatre, is in a state of flux at the present, a victim of the troubled tryout system. Until the end of the 1978-79 season it was leased from its owner, Tufts-New England Medical Center, by Jujamcyn Corporation, but the theatre incurred heavy financial losses the last several years and Jujamcyn decided not to renew its lease in order to concentrate solely on stabilizing the finances at the Colonial. Tufts-New England has recently sold the Wilbur to American Theatre Productions, Inc., a company that specializes in transporting major road shows. This group, headed by Alan Light, plans to house Broadway road shows primarily and may occasionally produce special (and as yet unspecified) presentations.

Even if a local theatre is presenting a popular "hit," there is no guarantee that it will attract large audiences solely by merit of its reputation. It has already been noted in Chapter Two that there are a great many other entertainments in Boston -- most of them costing much less per ticket than the legitimate theatre, and most of them involving much less time and effort to attend. When Donald Tirabassi, the general manager of the Colonial Theatre, was asked how audiences are developed for his theatre, his reply was simply, "Advertise, advertise, advertise."² In recent years, theatre advertising has come to mean more than ads in the newspapers and flyers at hotel information counters. Theatre ads are now heard on the radio and seen on television. High prices are justified when a production is presented as a special event, not just an evening's entertainment. The message conveyed is that the audience member will take part in an

experience that is unique and unattainable in any other medium. This message has been fairly successful. The total gross receipts of Boston's commercial theatres have gone up steadily the last four years and last season, 1977-78, was particularly good for Boston. The total gross receipts were 33% above that of the year before and the average number of weeks each commercial house was lit was the highest in four years. Similar increases, in varying degrees, were common both on Broadway and in major theatre cities across the country, indicating that while Boston was not leading the way by any means, it certainly was not trailing behind, either.³

Another method of audience promotion that historically has been available to commercial theatres in Boston is the season subscription. Beginning in the late 1920's, the Theatre Guild of New York offered a subscription series in Boston that had been quite successful and at one time numbered 20,000 subscribers. In later years, however, the Guild's selections were less pleasing to Boston audiences, the rolls were greatly reduced, and by the end of the 1976-77 season, the Theatre Guild subscription was gone from Boston.⁴ Since then, the only commercial theatre that has been able to initiate its own subscription series is the Shubert Theatre because it is owned by the powerful producing group, the Shubert Organization, and can therefore draw on the large number of successful productions that the Organization has had a hand in producing. However, despite a long and costly ad campaign for the 1977-78 season, the subscription rolls only totaled around 7,000. Although it was only the first year that the Shubert Theatre had attempted a subscription drive, Donald Tirabassi feels those totals

may never grow substantially larger than that, no matter how much advertising is developed because Bostonians are simply not interested in committing themselves to a single theatre for an entire season.⁵ (This theory has already been developed in Chapter One of this study in reference to the history of the Theatre Company of Boston.) Subscriptions may be successful for the commercial theatres in Washington and Los Angeles, but in the near future at least, the prospects in Boston are not as good.

Because the funding for a nonprofit performing arts organization usually comes from a number of different sources, the general manager of a nonprofit theatre has a more difficult time juggling his account books than his commercial theatre counterpart. While the commercial theatre derives almost all of its income from ticket receipts, the nonprofit theatre fills its coffers with both earned and unearned income. Ticket sales (or "earned" income) cover only a portion of the total nonprofit theatre budget. Other income from foundation, private or government sources is termed as "unearned." When devising a yearly budget, the managing director must first carefully determine the total dollars anticipated from both sources before the details of the next season can be planned. Unearned income does not represent the icing on a nonprofit theatre's fiscal cake, but rather is an integral ingredient whose presence is absolutely necessary for the theatre's survival.

The commercial theatre, of course, does not receive unearned income. However, it is able to meet its expenses in ways unrelated or unsuited to nonprofit theatre. Because of the high cost of production, commercial theatre producers must run their plays for

as long as possible in order to make up the initial costs. In the case of the Broadway musical, whose pre-opening expenses can often reach one million dollars and more today, it usually takes a year or so with nearly capacity houses for the producers to make up the investment and begin to show a profit -- even with ticket prices upwards of \$22 to \$28. Most nonprofit theatres would not be able to run a show for such extraordinary periods of time, except perhaps in New York where there are enough audiences to fill the house again and again. Also, nonprofit theatres are simply not interested in such long runs because they usually seek to produce several plays in any given season. They are looking to give regular practice to their art as well as variety to their audience.

A section of Chapter One briefly mentioned the reasons behind the high cost of production in the performing arts. In a theory first introduced by Professors Baumol and Bowen, it was said that the arts are "a hand-made product in a machine-made world" -- implying, therefore, that handmade items are most costly to produce. Mark Blaug in The Economics of the Arts gives a fuller explanation to what has become known to economists of the performing arts as "Baumol's Disease:"⁶

Baumol's Disease refers to the inevitable increases in costs and production occurring in certain labor-intensive service industries, in which technical progress is incapable of raising the productivity of labor for the simple reason that in these industries labor is both an input and an output. In the rest of the economy, wages are continually rising and these wage increases are not necessarily inflationary because they are accompanied by equally continuous increases in the productivity of labor. These non-inflationary wage increases spill over into such fields as the arts (and restaurants, hotels, barber shops, etcetera) in the form of rising prices for materials and ancillary services, as well as rising salaries for artists. But these latter salary increases

are wholly cost inflationary because they are not offset by productivity gainst within the arts. The net result of these forces is either price inflation in the arts, or, if prices are held down by custom and tradition, cost inflation or a growing gap between receipts and expenditures in arts organizations.⁷

The commercial theatre has responded to this trend with "price inflation" -- meaning that ticket prices for Broadway shows continue to go up and up. The nonprofit theatre prefers not to do this (except for modest increases) because of "custom and tradition," and therefore, income "gaps" result. Unless productions are drastically reduced in size and number (often not a viable alternative because of a resulting loss in quality), the only option for nonprofit groups is to seek outside funding. Each funding source is unique in its level, method and aim of support. Some sources can give large amounts of money to a theatre for general purposes, while another source can give a comparatively smaller amount for a special project such as a public performance outdoors. One source can supply funds for an endowment (a rare situation) while still another can lend technical assistance in accounting procedures. The remainder of this chapter will examine the major funding sources available to large nonprofit performing arts organizations.

The National Endowment for the Arts is a federally administered program created by Congressional order in 1966 whose purpose is to act

as a catalyst to increase opportunities for artists and to spur involvement in the arts on the part of private citizens, public and private organizations, and the states and communities. The Endowment's relationship to the primarily private and local cultural community is one of partnership, in which the federal role is to respond to the needs of the field rather than direct or interfere in the creative activities of individual artists or cultural organizations.⁸

With financial, technical and administrative assistance, the Endowment seeks to accomplish three goals: one, to make high quality cultural resources available to a wide audience; two, to help develop cultural institutions artistically and administratively in the public interest; three, to encourage artistic creativity, preserve the national heritage, and enhance the quality of life.⁹

The total program appropriation for the Endowment's first year was \$2.5 million. This total slowly increased through the sixties, reaching \$8.25 million by 1970. In the seventies, appropriations were increased substantially and by 1978 had reached \$114.6 million. The Endowment is now not only the largest single supporter in total dollars to nonprofit theatre, but also is the source that reaches the widest range and number of organizations. The range of organizations it aids extends from the large professional regional theatre companies such as the American Conservatory Theatre and the Arena Stage, to professional training programs, children's theatre groups and service organizations. The largest percentage of the appropriations are awarded to the regional theatres, which in 1977 received over 60% of the total theatre appropriation. Those theatres usually receiving the largest appropriation were, fairly enough, those groups with the most experience, highest quality and best reputation. Smaller alternatively styled theatres are given lesser amounts, which are awarded again in relation to the theatre's vital statistics.

No Boston based theatre has ever received more than \$35,000

from the Endowment in a single year, and that was awarded to the resurrected Theatre Company of Boston for a summer season in 1974. Almost all of the awards to Boston theatre groups have ranged between \$1,500 and \$15,000. During the late sixties, when the Charles Playhouse and the Theatre Company were of sufficient size, reputation and quality to rate among the better medium sized regional theatres in the country, the total Endowment appropriation was still quite small compared to its size today. Therefore, while the awards the two groups did receive were comparable to most of the other regional theatres (e.g., the Theatre Company received \$77,500 between 1966-70 compared to the Guthrie Theatre's \$92,500 for the same period), the awards were not a significant portion of their budgets. If the level of awards in the late sixties had been comparable to what they have been in the late seventies, the Charles Playhouse might have survived. The Charles could have used roughly another \$30,000 in each year of the late sixties -- a relatively small award for today's regional theatres. Should a well-managed, high-quality regional theatre company develop in Boston during the next few years, it can look forward to receiving much more federal support than its predecessors had, and that translates into a better chance for survival.

The next highest single contributor to the performing arts is the Ford Foundation, a private nonprofit institution which

works mainly by granting funds to institutions and organizations for experimental, demonstration and developmental efforts that give promise of producing significant advances in various fields.¹⁰

The Foundation is able to distribute money through returns on its

capital investments. These investments had a market value of \$2.09 billion in 1977 and enabled the Foundation to award a total of \$115.4 million to various institutions of which \$1.95 million went to theatre related activity. Individual theatre groups are awarded funds by the Foundation for two major purposes. The first purpose is to stabilize the finances of already well-established resident theatres, the second is to provide production subsidies to companies who will develop new American plays and playwrights. The total number of grants the Foundation distributes each year to regional theatres is usually quite small, ranging in recent years from as many as five (1977) to as few as none (1972). However, when a theatre does receive a grant it will often involve large injections of capital over a period of several years. Representative examples are grants of \$742,542 to the Arena Stage in 1975, \$506,586 to the Yale Repertory Theatre in 1976, and \$334,753 to the Performing Arts Foundation of Long Island in 1977. Grants have gone as high as \$2 million (to the American Conservatory Theatre in 1974) and as low as \$50,000 (to the Ensemble Studio in 1977), but most are in the \$250 - 750,000 range.

The Foundation has been forced of late to become much more selective in its awards because of the nearly decade long decline in the world capital market. Since most of the Foundation's grant money comes from returns on its portfolio (such returns decreased from \$154.5 million in 1968 to \$92.1 million in 1977), any decrease in the size of the portfolio will result in a corresponding decrease in the level of support. In recent years the level of support for all programs has been reduced from \$251.6 million

in 1974 to \$113.0 million in 1977. Theatre support has gone from a high of \$2.84 million in 1975 to the already mentioned \$1.95 million in 1977. Still, in spite of these large reductions across the board, theatre related activity was only reduced slightly less than a third by 1977, while the entire appropriation was reduced by more than half.

The Foundation's vehicle for stabilizing the finances of performing arts organizations has been the cash reserve program which, since 1971,

provides funds to liquidate half a company's net current liabilities after the company has liquidated the other half in a prescribed period. Thereafter companies must end each fiscal year with current assets at least equal to current liabilities. The program also provides a restricted revolving fund, payable over a four or five year period, from which withdrawals may be made for ongoing expenses. Withdrawals must be returned to the fund by the end of the fiscal year for the company to be eligible for the next installment. At the end of the grant period, companies meeting the program's conditions may keep the revolving fund as unrestricted working capital reserve.¹¹

This program not only gives performing arts organizations the necessary cash to cover "ongoing expenses," but it also enables the individual company to become accustomed to balancing its budget. Although the Boston Ballet¹² and the Opera Company of Boston have both been recipients of the cash reserve program, there has not been a theatre company in Boston since 1971 which would be eligible in terms of artistic and professional quality to qualify for this program. Before 1971 however, the Charles Playhouse and the Theatre Company of Boston might have been prime candidates. In particular, the Charles Playhouse, with its ever-present, ever-growing deficit, could have sorely used both the Foundations' money and its technical

assistance. Such an aid package might have kept the Charles from reaching that point of no return in 1970 when, as mentioned in Chapter One, its deficits accrued to over \$300,000.

Even if the Ford Foundation cannot aid as many theatre groups as it might wish, its method of giving strong capital support to a few artistically and financially worthy groups each year is a wise one. Instead of each of the dozens of regional theatres in the country receiving a somewhat equal but small slice of an already shrunken pie, many groups are forced instead to do without so that a few may truly benefit. Other Foundation programs include funds to develop new American plays as well as continued support of the Theatre Communications Group (the national service organization for the nonprofit professional theatre), demonstrate that the Foundation is strongly committed to non-commercial forms of theatre and aims to accomplish as much as possible with its limited and diminished funds.

The Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities is a state and (through the federal-state partnership program of the National Endowment) federally funded agency founded in 1966, whose purposes are identical to those of the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities. The one important exception, of course, is that its funding is limited to groups and individuals in Massachusetts. Total funding has usually been quite low when compared to other states, especially when it is considered that in 1977-78 Massachusetts was "the second largest arts-producing state in the country with approximately 1,500 arts organizations on its roster."¹³

Total funding expenditures progressed slowly from 1966. By 1974 the total expenditures was \$489,457, and by 1979 it had reached \$2.7 million. Of these totals, \$437,447 and \$1.3 million were designated for cultural organizations for the respective years. The insignificance of state funding becomes even more apparent when one learns that \$200 - 500,000 of this support came from federal sources. Chapter Four will look more closely at the political reasons behind the low level of state funding which in 1977 averaged out to about 45¢ per resident of the Commonwealth¹⁴ while New York State had a per capita funding level around \$2.00. The concern here is to see where and to what purpose these relatively small sums were distributed by the Council throughout the State.

The Council is in a delicate position when it awards grants. Unlike the Ford Foundation, which is a private institution and has nearly total freedom in its grant choices, the Council is a state agency funded with taxpayers' dollars and must therefore answer to every legislator across the state who, not surprisingly, want to make sure that their districts receive a fair share of the funding. The result is that the Council is forced to ration out its small appropriation among neighborhood art centers, local art commissions, literary magazines, performing arts organizations and individual artists. This is not to say that these groups are unworthy of funding. The problem is that with everyone receiving something out of such a small appropriation, little remains to give special consideration to the larger cultural and performing arts institutions. Because funding at the local level is also very low, the Council is forced to make up the deficiencies there and funding is watered

down even further. In 1979, Boston's three major institutions -- the Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the Opera Company of Boston -- received a total of only \$119,000 from the Council when their combined budgets totaled over \$20 million that year. Obviously, these groups cannot depend on state funding to supply more than very meager assistance to their total operating budgets. Indeed, when the descriptions of their grants are examined it is revealed that these grants are often meant to defray expenses for special public events such as free summer concerts and ballet performances at the Hatch Shell on the Esplanade -- events which are outside their regular season budgets.

Council funding can bear greater significance to the smaller arts organizations than the larger since the grants to the former often comprise a higher percentage of their yearly operating budgets. However, through a combination of political pressure and internal policy, the Council often distributes its funds without placing great emphasis on size or, in particular, on artistic excellence. This even-handed approach leads to the awarding of a large number of uniformly small grants to institutions of acknowledged as well as of dubious artistic significance. Such a policy has unfortunate results: innovative companies of high artistic quality receive funds that are insufficient to help implement more than just minimal levels of activity, while other companies of undistinguished purpose and limited achievement receive funds that allow them to hang on and perpetuate their mediocrity. A wiser approach to funding would help to weed out the groups which take important dollars away from those groups which can legitimately request greater

funding on the grounds of superior artistic purpose and achievement.

If the Council is forced to continue working with such small appropriations from the State Legislature (which may actually be reduced because of Governor Edward King's plans for an austerity budget), they will have to reassess their criteria for distributing grant money. Token funding should be avoided in order to put the limited state dollars to their best use. Without a marked change in Council policy, a professional theatre company seeking residence in Boston would need to prepare itself for the low level of state funding and seek more generous funding sources elsewhere.

Individual and corporate contributions are two other types of funding available to performing arts organizations. How much an individual group will rely on private or corporate donations or any other source of funding will depend on how well it is able to meet its expenses through earned income. We can see the importance of these two funding sources to Boston's three major performing arts organizations (the Boston Symphony, the Opera Company and the Boston Ballet) by examining the levels these contributions reached during the 1967-68 and the 1978-79 seasons.

In 1967-68 the Boston Symphony had expenditures of \$3.57 million. Of that total, 15.5% or \$557,000 was made up in private contributions and 1.4% or \$51,420 was received from corporate sources. While expenditures at the Symphony have risen over 300% from 1967-68 to the present \$12 million, private contributions have risen only 150% to \$840,000 and corporate donations have risen only 223% to \$120,000. It is clear that contributions in these areas are lagging behind expenditures at the Symphony. Private contribu-

tions now cover only 7% of expenditures and corporate contributions only 1%. The upshot of this relative decline has been deficits of staggering proportions. The 1977-78 season realized a \$1 million deficit, made up, unfortunately, with precious endowment funds. What the current season's deficit will be is unclear at this time.

The Opera Company has been more fortunate. Its expenditures rose 211% between 1967-68 and 1978-79 (\$757,000 to \$1.6 million). In the same period, private contributions rose almost identically by 214% (\$269,000 to \$576,000) and corporate donations, while still very small in dollar amounts, increased 765% (\$4,700 to \$36,000). Since the Opera Company has no endowment, it is vital that contributions keep up with expenditures. The Opera Company covers only 55% of its expenditures with earned income, and a significant decrease in private support, which now amounts to 35% of total expenditures, would have severe consequences.

The Boston Ballet's growth has been strong and rapid in recent years. Its expenditures have increased from \$354,000 in 1967-68 to \$2.1 million in 1978-79 for a percentage increase of almost 600%. The Ballet was young and poorly managed in 1967-68. Its earned income reached only 43% of expenditures and it incurred a season deficit of 25% or \$88,500. Contributions from private donors were low at only \$32,400 and it had no corporate supporters. With better management in recent years, its current rate of earned income is an impressive 80%. This high box office return enables it to depend much less on contributors than either the Boston Symphony or the Opera Company. Private contributions have risen

almost 700% (from \$13,680 to \$95,000) but are still fairly low for an organization with such a large budget. Of course, corporate contributions could only increase from none at all in 1967-68, and are now near \$70,000.

Historically, private citizens in the United States have been encouraged to make large contributions to the arts and any other nonprofit institution by being able to deduct these contributions from their total taxable income. Such liberal incentives have made the United States one of the highest per capita private supporters of the arts in the world. It has, consequently, also made it one of the lowest per capita supporters in terms of direct government support of the arts. Most of the government's true support for the arts comes in income and property tax exemption which today totals somewhere near \$400 million a year or more.¹⁶

Should a professional resident theatre company be organized in Boston, its prospects of attracting significant private funding are not very encouraging. It has already been noted in Chapter One that both the Charles Playhouse and the Theatre Company of Boston, two nationally known resident theatre companies in the mid-sixties, received relatively small amounts of funding in this area. How much better might these companies fare today is questionable. The Theatre Company did not perform the kinds of plays that would attract wide support today -- any more than it had in the sixties. If the Charles could have improved its management and kept the company financially solvent, it might have been able to attract more private dollars during the seventies. This possibility appears doubtful, however, in light of the recent history of private contri-

butions to Boston's three major performing arts institutions. In the period from 1967-68 to 1978-79, total private contributions for all three groups rose by only 180% (\$839,000 to \$1.51 million) while their total expenditures rose 335% (\$4.68 million to \$15.7 million). Although it is true that contributions have increased overall, the increase is not sufficient to match the increase in expenditures. Significantly, the Boston Ballet received only 6.3% of the contributions for all three groups when it had 13.8% of the expenditures. The successful performing arts organization of the eighties will have to depend heavily on box office receipts and government sources. Most of the "old" private money in Boston has already been taken up by the existing major cultural organizations, and there is, at this time, no indication that the "new" money is ready or willing to commit itself.

The level of corporate contributions has come far in the last ten years and is perhaps the source with the most potential in Boston. Corporate contributions to the three major groups rose 402% between 1967-68 and 1978-79. Although the Boston Ballet's relative share of the area's private contributions has been disappointing, its increased share of the corporate funding dollar has been quite encouraging. In 1978-79 the Ballet received \$70,000 in corporate funding -- only \$50,000 less than the Boston Symphony received when the Ballet's budget for that year was only 17.5% as large. It is true that there are few truly prosperous corporations in Boston, and much of the funding they distribute is devoted to the United Way Fund, education and medical research. However, since growth in education and medicine (primarily building

growth) has reached its peak, the money taken up in these interests may be transferred to the arts. This change may also affect the direction of private contributions.¹⁶ Corporations are becoming increasingly aware of the promotional benefits of sponsoring artistic activities in their communities. Should a new professional resident theatre company establish itself in Boston, the corporate dollar can become an important facet of its total funding. The business world will, of course, want the new company to prove itself managerially, much as the Boston Ballet had to prove itself. Once the new theatre is firmly planted, however, it should find local business to be very receptive.

The major funding sources potentially available to nonprofit arts organizations in Boston have been seen to be the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, private contributions and corporations. There are other minor sources including the City of Boston and small local private foundations, but they offer so little funding to the arts as to be fairly insignificant to the budgets of large arts organizations. The City of Boston's record of financial support to the performing arts is very poor, especially when compared to cities such as New York and San Francisco. Boston, however, is a relatively poor city with little industry and a good portion of real estate tax income is lost by the presence of large amounts of tax-exempt property owned by federal, state, educational and other nonprofit institutions. The Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs was established to make up in technical and political assistance what it could not do with actual dollars.

This office will be more closely examined in Chapter Four, especially in regard to its relationship to local theatre groups.

The present overall economic climate for a new professional resident theatre company in Boston is fair at best. Private contributions are available, but are in short supply, and state support is limited. Corporate contributions are definitely a bright spot, but their actual total contribution at this time is still very small despite continued growth. Any plan for a new professional resident theatre company in Boston will have to take these factors into consideration and then plot the company's emergence as carefully as possible.