A HISTORY OF THE KARAMU THEATRE
OF KARAMU HOUSE, 1915-1960

DISSERTATION

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By

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To my wife, Dorothy, who made it possible.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is in Cleveland, Ohio, an interracial community theatre called "Karamu," currently functioning as one arm of an interracial arts-community center, Karamu House. The purpose of this study is to examine the history of Karamu Theatre, to indicate and focus on its uniqueness, to determine the success of its interracialism and, by the study of its beginnings, its growth, and its development, discover the "secrets of its success."

Karamu is no ordinary community theatre--this is fact, not opinion--and the warrant for a depth study of a community theatre lies precisely in this fact. It is a theatre which has accumulated more than its share of encomiums, many of which take the superlative degree:

The Karamu Theatre is socially and theatrically indispensable.¹ (Frederic McConnell, The Cleveland Playhouse)

... the outstanding Negro community theatre in America.² (Norris Houghton)

¹Twenty-fifth Anniversary Program, Karamu House, 1940.

... unquestionably the best Negro theatre in the U. S.¹ (William McDermott, The Cleveland Plain Dealer)

... widely recognized as the outstanding dramatic group of the kind in the world.² (Harlan Hatcher
and Frank Durham)

... the most outstanding colored little theatre in the country.³ (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Commendation for Karamu House has been even more widespread, and is relevant to this study because of the unique interrelationship of theatre with other Karamu House activities:

... one of the institutions of first importance to the community, state and nation.⁴ (Louis Bromfield)

The only place of its kind in the world, Cleveland's Karamu House stands as a milestone in the progress of U. S. race relations.⁵ (Life)

... the greatest single democratizing force in its community.⁶ (Theatre Arts)

But eulogies are frequently created for special occasions, and delivered as window dressing; often only the hard facts of achievement can compel and merit attention.

¹April 19, 1942. Mr. McDermott made this statement again in the Cleveland Plain Dealer on July 10, 1955.


⁴Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 8, 1942. Hereafter cited as CPD.

⁵June 18, 1951.

⁶Quoted in Karamu House—A promise fulfilled, a goal in sight (Karamu House printed brochure, 1954), 18.
Karamu Theatre (under three successive names) has existed for forty-one years; the House for forty-six. Its normal, annual, major production program comprises six or seven dramas, three operas, and three or four musicals. Its subsidiary theatre and theatre-related program includes regular children's theatre activities and productions (currently drama and lyric theatre), a Student (or Youth) Theatre group with productions, a Lab Workshop organization, and an extensive dance program with strong theatre ties.

From the 1920-21 season to date, over three hundred plays have been presented as major productions. This figure includes musicals and operas, but does not include productions of the subsidiary theatre groups listed above, nor of the variety of subsidiary groups which functioned within the Karamu Theatre framework in the thirties and early forties.

The method for such a study is conventional only up to a point. First, thorough research into previously published material was completed (there were twice as many periodical as book references, and literally thousands of pertinent newspaper items). Then, a systematic search of Karamu's scrapbooks and files was undertaken (Karamu "publishes" numerous reports, brochures, and announcements of value). It is, however, unfortunate--though true--as
Professor Irving M. Brown has observed in his careful study, "Cleveland Theatre in the Twenties":

Drama groups, especially newly formed ones, rarely concern themselves with record keeping and often do not date their programs . . . . Material taken from local periodicals . . . sometimes lacked important details and occasionally was inaccurate.¹

So, the less orthodox interview technique--despite its pitfalls--began to play an important role in the research. The writer is particularly fortunate in having available to him for interview purposes Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, the co-founders of the institution in 1915 who have served uninterruptedly since as the co-directors of Karamu House. In addition, Mrs. Jelliffe is presently also Executive Director of the Karamu Theatre, and was, for over twenty years, the director of all Karamu Theatre plays. During that same time, Mr. Jelliffe was in charge of the technical aspects of production, and the exploitation of the educational opportunities and values therein. The Jelliffes are, as this study will indicate, dedicated and devoted executives, and their continuity of leadership has been an invaluable asset in the preparation of this history. Other interviews were also helpful. (The majority of the interviews for this study were tape-recorded.)

The assumption was made that other past Karamu theatre directors could add to such a study as this their insights, philosophies, experiences, and procedures; and so, a questionnaire was circulated among them.\(^1\) It is worth noting that most of their answers were thorough, thoughtful, and illuminating. Shorter questionnaires were sent to Cleveland drama critics and Karamu Theatre actors and staff members.\(^2\) There was a one hundred per cent return on all questionnaires.

The final element in this variety of research methods is the personal experience of the writer, who has been since 1955, the Director of Drama Productions for Karamu Theatre. This position for this length of time would seem to permit knowledgeable and effective (if not completely objective) evaluation of historical materials in the perspective of the present, and an understandable interest in the prognosis for Karamu.

The organizational approach to the study is primarily chronological. Some preliminary attention of a biographical nature to the Jelliffes is surely justified, and reveals the animating spirit of the institution. Beyond that, the study attempts to dispose the historical

\(^1\)See Appendix VIII.

\(^2\)The critics' replies are in Ch. VIII; the results of the actors-staff questionnaire are summarized in Appendix VI.
facts, causes, and influences within each period against their proper backgrounds, select and isolate the characterizing principles of the institution as they may emerge, assess Karamu's degree of success and abstract the determinants for it; and fashion the whole so that it precisely visualizes and vitalizes the thesis subject.

It is apparent that any serious, comprehensive study of a working theatre will yield a high assay for other theatre "prospectors." In the case of Karamu there is the added factor of the Negro participation and the interracial nature of the theatre activity. It is already a social cliché to note the increasing scope of interracialism in the United States, and a commonplace to speak of integration on a multitude of levels, including that of the theatre. One may conclude (and one certainly hopes) that university and community theatres will find significance and assistance in such a study, in working out a rationale for the new factors and situations which societal changes may thrust upon them.
CHAPTER II

THE JELLIFFES: THE SINE QUA NON OF KARAMU

It is apparent that without the Jelliffes\textsuperscript{1} there might never have been a Karamu, or, if someone else had succeeded--as they have--in founding and maintaining this institution, its character would certainly have been other than it is. With this in mind, a close look at their background seems clearly warranted.

Russell Wesley Jelliffe was born in Mansfield, Ohio, on November 19, 1891, one of the five sons of Mr. Charles W. Jelliffe, who founded the Pickering and Jelliffe jewelry store there. Russell was a newspaper boy from the seventh grade until his second year at Mansfield High School, where he graduated in 1909.\textsuperscript{2} A siege of typhoid fever--which left him with one leg noticeably thinner than the other--delayed his college by one year, and he entered Oberlin in the fall of 1910.\textsuperscript{3} There he became a political science student, a member of the Student

\textsuperscript{1}Above, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{2}Mansfield News-Journal, Sept. 28, 1954.

\textsuperscript{3}Interview, May 18, 1961.
Senate, and president of his Senior Class, the Class of '14.1

Rowena Woodham Jelliffe was born in Albion, Illinois, and enrolled in Oberlin College in 1910, as a psychology major. There she was moderately active in dramatics, became President of the Oberlin Women's Suffrage League, and earned a scholarship for a year's graduate study in Sociology at the School of Civics of the University of Chicago.2 In her senior year, 1914, she became engaged to Russell Jelliffe, whom she had met in their freshman year, and who had himself earned a similar University of Chicago scholarship.

Russell Jelliffe and Rowena Woodham lived at Chicago Commons, a settlement house headed by Graham Taylor, and did field work there and at Jane Addams' Hull House, where they both worked on a University-sponsored housing study of the immediate area.3 In the spring, they took their University examinations (one day early to allow for their wedding on May 28, 19154) and on June 17, with their M.A.'s from the University of Chicago, they arrived in Cleveland to undertake a survey and study which led, five months later,

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1Fortieth Anniversary Program, Karamu House, Nov. 5, 1955. (Mimeographed, in the Karamu files.)

2Ibid. 3Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.

4CPD, March 5, 1961.
to the establishment of what we now know as Karamu House. At this writing, they are in their forty-sixth year of that work.

From this biographical sketch, one is led to consider the formative influences and the ideological heritage of this couple. What currents of thought created the patterns by which they acted? What events and which personalities influenced and predisposed their particular biases?

Rowena Jelliffe, recalling the mutual romantic attraction they felt, has called it "natural" that she and Russell "should gravitate to each other." But, secondarily, they became aware of similar interests and background. Both of their families took democracy seriously. Russell Jelliffe's father invited German immigrants into his Mansfield home in order to assist them in their adjustment to American ways. Rowena Jelliffe's great-grandfather came from England, where his opposition to the Corn Laws and his agnostic philosophy were incompatible with the social climate. With a pioneer's desire for free self-expression, he became one of the founders of the Birkbeck colony in Albion, Illinois, north of the social experiment of Robert Owen, the New Harmony community, just across the

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2 CPD, June 16, 1940.
Wabash River in Indiana.\textsuperscript{1} This contact with the New Harmony settlement was particularly important to the idealists of Albion, and the Owenites' concepts of free and universal public education and the firm belief in women's rights, coupled with their significant "firsts": kindergarten, trade school, free library, civic dramatic club\textsuperscript{2}--left an imprint on the Birkbeck community. These concepts filtered down, undiluted, through the eleven grandparents that Rowena Woodham knew (her father and mother married within the community) among her ancestors--the Baxters, the Glovers, the Saxas, the Potters, and the Woodhams--in her kin-centered youth in Albion, Illinois.\textsuperscript{3}

The awareness of this egalitarian heritage was always a living thing to the Jelliffes. "Both Russell's father and mine, and their fathers before them, spent

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{1}] Interview, May 5, 1961.
\item[\textsuperscript{3}] Interview, May 6, 1961. Actually, there was an even closer connection. Richard Flower, Mrs. Jelliffe's mother's cousin, was the agent commissioned by Father George Rapp and Frederick Rapp to sell the Rappite religious colony of Harmonie (as it was then known), and Flower, on a trip back to England from Albion, was fortunate enough to locate the visionary philanthropist, Robert Owen, and negotiate the sale. The story of the Rappites and the Owenites--"the New Harmony story"--and the philosophy of the full life, lived in happiness and peace, is well told in Blair's pamphlet (see n. 2).
\end{itemize}
their lives working for the building of their country."¹

More precise and more forceful is Rowena Jelliffe's firm impression that she was "virtually nursed" on the idea her English immigrant parents "thoroughly hammered into me [.] that we in America are working on an important experiment in building democracy."² More romantic, but equally forceful, is this memory of her childhood:

[She] used to sit on the hearth in her [great grand-] father's log cabin at Albion, Ohio [sic], and listen to her two great grandfathers arguing about ways to build the nation.

"We've got to build this nation and build it right," the white haired gentlemen would say, and Rowena, her eyes wide with the importance of it all, would silently nod a grave assent.³

This "grave assent" given even in childhood grew in "these young persons" to an affirmation: "Democracy was an exciting and militant philosophy."⁴ And their subsequent enrollment in Oberlin seems to have been a proper and logical step in the light of this "affirmation," for that College, too, had a most "exciting and militant philosophy."

Oberlin College's liberalism and its student body

³New York World-Telegram, Feb. 8, 1941.
⁴CPD, June 16, 1940.
have patiently endured satire and exaggeration through the years—as have Antioch and Bennington, Harvard and Yale. But there is a solid basis in fact for Oberlin's progressivism. In 1835, two years after its founding, the College enunciated its policy of admitting all students regardless of race. In 1841, Oberlin became the first American institution of higher learning to admit women and to grant them degrees under conditions similar to those in the best men's colleges of the time. The town of Oberlin was a station on the "Underground Railroad," and President Charles Finney himself sheltered runaway slaves en route to Canada. The "John Price incident," in which this runaway slave, recaptured in Oberlin by his Southern master and rescued at Wellington nearby by a large group of Oberlin professors and students, speaks eloquently of the tradition of freedom with which town and gown were imbued.¹

As Oberlin students, the Jelliffes came under strong pedagogical influences, the chief of which seems to have been that of Professor A. B. Wolfe, in Sociology.² Professor Wolfe represented the liberal viewpoint toward many areas of American life and he was a significant guide

¹Encyclopaedia Britannica, XVI (1953), 668. Slavery had been abolished by legislation in Ohio in 1802, long before Michigan (1835) and Illinois (1818) (Henry W. Farnham, Social Legislation in the United States to 1860 [Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1938]).

²The Jelliffes point out that Wolfe's influence on them both was "fortified and balanced" by Professors Grover in organic evolution, Wager in literature, and Stetson in social psychology. (Interview, June 26, 1961.)
for many students of that generation in economics and sociology—particularly, for the Jelliffes, in race relations.¹

The professor's wife also played a key role in formulating Mrs. Jelliffe's thinking. In an atmosphere of concern for equality of rights, Clara Snell Wolfe was a strong and militant suffragist, prominent in both Ohio and national suffragism, and she was Rowena Jelliffe's mentor in this field.²

The true strength of the Oberlin influence can also be observed by means of a comparison. When asked about the influences of Chicago Commons and Hull House, Rowena Jelliffe spoke of their importance to her and her husband:

"It was an experience, and an extension of something . . . . It was important"; but she felt compelled to add that, of course, it was "not anything new, . . . the sociological influence on us had started much earlier—at Oberlin."³

Possessing the theory of freedom and equality from her Albion youth, Rowena Woodham was lacking in actual contact with Negroes. Her family, like others of the Birkbeck


²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961. Rowena Jelliffe remains active in the fight. She is a member of the Cleveland group of the "Women's Party," a group dedicated to securing full equality for women, and lobbying for a Constitutional amendment legally abolishing discrimination on the basis of sex.

³Ibid.
Colony, took the 125 mile trip to St. Louis several times a year for major shopping, and it was there, as a young girl, that she saw Negroes for the first time. It was not until Oberlin, however, that she met and became acquainted with a Negro, a schoolmate and fellow-worker in a social psychology course. Rowena met her with the consciousness handed down to her from her forebears, that "the way we handled the problems arising over the racial differences between the Negro and the white people would be the crucial test"\(^1\) in establishing a truly democratic national community. This Negro girl was in every sense a respected equal, and there was, of course, no barrier in getting to know her, no problem of "overcoming anything."\(^2\) Given her philosophical heritage, and the nature of this first interracial contact under the fair auspices of Oberlin College, Rowena Woodham's future course seems well and clearly charted.

Russell Jelliffe, on the other hand, had two very interesting, early contacts with Negroes, both of which now seem to have been seminal. Boyd Hicks was a Negro playmate of Russell's in Mansfield, Ohio, and when, at about the age of twelve, after having shared numerous playing and living experiences, Russell was accepted as a member in a Y.M.C.A.

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\(^1\) *News*, Jan. 31, 1939.

boys' club and Boyd was not, the event made a strong impression on the white boy. This episode has been widely reported,\(^1\) and Russell Jelliffe remembers it as "the first time I ever realized there was any prejudice between white boys and colored boys."\(^2\)

The bitter memory of Boyd Hicks' rejection would not leave Russell Jelliffe, for though he felt he should do something about it, one is rarely a "doer" at age twelve, and he could not purge it. He carried it with him, and spoke of it at Oberlin to Rowena Woodham, as they became better acquainted. He told her how he had felt the wrong at the time—and "not just because he was my friend [italics mine]"—how he sensed suddenly the gravity of it; and now, in a sad, strange, but explicable way, this event appeared to lessen the friendship with Boyd, as the ugly wall of discrimination separated them.

The second contact was equally important, but more "positive," as Rowena Jelliffe calls it, because the influence it exercised was "on the basis of respect."\(^3\) There was in Mansfield, Ohio, when Russell was a boy, a Negro cateress, Anna Bradford. As popular and beloved as she


was unlettered but intelligent, she was a member and pew holder of the First Congregational, a white church. With a deep love for the learning she lacked, "Annie" Bradford in her will endowed a public library—the first in Mansfield—and it was housed in the Sunday school room of the church basement, though it served the whole town. And as Russell Jelliffe grew up, he could see the face of this beneficent colored woman looking out of the steel engraved portrait of her hung on the library wall.¹

The core of significance and relevance here can perhaps best be understood through Rowena Jelliffe's knowledge of the episode. She learned of it at a time when she and Russell Jelliffe were hunting for a future course in life, and were beginning to think about the area of race relations, and its validity as a test of democratic values in the United States. This is the context in which Russell Jelliffe remembered and thought and talked of Anna Bradford.

Another boy who shared that Mansfield Sunday school room, Miss Bradford's portrait, and her books with Russell Jelliffe, was Louis Bromfield, author, and in later years a national sponsor of Karamu. His subscription of $6000 "towards the [Karamu] theatre library room as a memorial

to 'Auntie' Bradford'\textsuperscript{1} was his repayment of a spiritual debt owed a woman who "felt that books are a way of life, and this is what I want to do with my money."\textsuperscript{2}

And so the heritage of family, youth, and college accumulated, and brought these two students—with their fund of common interests—to Chicago for post-graduate work. They found their studies and field work exciting, and they absorbed much knowledge and experience that was later to be reflected in the orthodox settlement house pattern in which Karamu was begun. But more significant than their knowledge of standard settlement house operation, and more relevant to an understanding of Karamu House today, are the "extras" they absorbed, the philosophies and approaches to people and community problems that can raise an organization above the "standard," or "orthodox" level. Here were the beginnings of the "educational-cultural" philosophy, as opposed to welfare.

From Graham Taylor, the theologian head of Chicago Commons, the Jelliffes learned the value of the "community-centered" settlement, as opposed to merely "house-centered." Taylor was a more liberal man than most of the Chicago theologians, and "he was always bouncing back and forth between his theological concern and his concern for

\textsuperscript{1}Mansfield News-Journal, Aug. 23, 1942.

\textsuperscript{2}Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961.
the civic structure of the city." He—with the help of other reformers—attacked corruption in Chicago, refusing to stay in his "settlement house niche," and to leave the clean-up job to others.¹ Karamu House today is, quite clearly, a strongly "community-centered" community center, and the Jelliffes are totally immersed in a great variety of civic matters.

Though Hull House's sociological bases may not have been "new" to the Jelliffes,² the influence of Jane Addams most certainly was. Miss Addams showed a "passionate concern" for "recognizing these things that people had brought with them"—the various crafts of the European immigrant clientele of Hull House—and she developed a strong arts program there.³ Anyone who knows Karamu today knows its arts program, and anyone who knows the Jelliffes is aware of their deep concern and respect for native, innate talents—"things which people bring with them"—to serve those people as a firm basis for their further human development, and to constitute their contribution to the mainstream of human life and activity.

A corollary to that care for "things people bring with them," is the Jelliffes' oft-expressed executive

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.
²Above, p. 13.
philosophy—carried over from their Chicago experiences—that

you don't come in and slam people into a mold. That was one thing we were pretty committed to from the beginnings, that you had to accept people where they were, and then it was our business to move them from there. But you had to accept them where they were. ¹

This can be frustrating, of course, especially to a firm person with a definite point of view on some important issue. And Rowena Jelliffe was firm: "the strongest willed person I have ever known";² "extremely strong personality";³ an anonymous observer has affectionately called her "a cast-iron Dresden doll." And Rowena Jelliffe had an "important issue," too: "We talked about integration, and Mrs. Jelliffe couldn't understand why everyone then didn't feel as she did."⁴ But despite impatience and frustration, the Jelliffes persisted in their "loose reins" theory, or—and Rowena Jelliffe has concurred in this description of their administrative procedures—"tight reins, but well hidden."⁵

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.

²Letter from Gerald C. Marans, former Karamu Director of Drama, March 19, 1961.

³Questionnaire from Kurt Cerny, former Karamu Director of Drama, April 21, 1961.

⁴News, Nov. 3, 1955. The speaker is Mrs. Hazel Mountain Walker, an important figure in the history of Karamu, whose contributions will be more fully treated in Chapter IV.

⁵Interview, May 6, 1961.
At one point, Mrs. Jelliffe had been the leader of Karamu's drama group for several years, and wanted very much to produce Negro plays, but she "never pressed the matter, preferring to wait with a good deal of impatience until they [the actors] of their own accord should choose to do them."¹ Many times the Jelliffes held back:

We waited on many occasions for the time when people would ask about programming, feeling that in the long run you were better off with this as a basis for an activity. Frequently we waited beyond the time when we felt there was a readiness, a rightness.²

This seemingly "laissez-faire" leadership philosophy is summed up in this observation: "The Jelliffes have only one rule--that nobody is to be urged to do anything. The Jelliffes merely expose their people to an idea."³

The most important aspect of all, in this picture of the Jelliffes created here out of their heritage, their training, their philosophy, and their character, is their devotion to "the cause to which they desired to devote their lives." These words were spoken by Professor R. Archibald Jelliffe, a distant cousin, as Oberlin College honored Russell and Rowena Jelliffe.⁴ He said further:

Not all college students, before the time of their graduation, possess the sure knowledge of the

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, quoted in [W. E. B. DuBois], "The Gilpin Players of Cleveland," The Crisis, XXXVII, No. 6 (June, 1930), 191.
particular vocation by which they hope to justify their existence; but it was the good fortune of Russell Jelliffe and Rowena Woodham of the Class of 1914, to know [it] even then. And from that time on, with constantly enlarging influence and deepening wisdom, they have confirmed their original decision.¹

Rose Griffiths Ruhlman, another important figure and staff member in the earliest years,² was firm in assessing this devotion: "They were dedicated people clearly from the start. They meant this to be their life work. They may not have known the specific direction, but they knew that their life lay there."³ The attribute of tenacity was evident quite early: "Our college friends had disapproved of our going to work together. Our parents thought it distinctly unorthodox. But there was never any doubt in my own mind that it would work [italics mine]."⁴

Helen Conard Keesecker, a long-time friend of Karamu's and the Jelliffes, praised this quality of grit and dedication by calling it "stubbornness," for it had an integrity in it which she felt kept the Jelliffes from compromising on "their unrelenting policy of racial equality." She hoped their "stubbornness" would stay with them, and "not diminish when one battle of the great struggle has been

¹Oberlin Alumni Bulletin, July, 1944.
²Below, Ch. III. ³Interview, April 24, 1961.
And Rowena Jelliffe herself touched on this very point of purposeful dedication, in speaking at Karamu's Fortieth Anniversary celebration:

To live out fully and freely what any man reaches for, or can be awakened to know the need of, to stand in dignity before—and with—all other men of his society was inherent and clearly stated by the founders of this nation. That we have possessed a little part of this as the motivating core of our lives [italics mine] we can really claim no credit for.

And she went on to reveal her awareness of, and her indebtedness to, the variety of influences, philosophies, and contacts which affected her personality and that of her husband: "For such things come from that strange mingling of what is given one by family, friends, co-workers, and a thousand associations."2

From these biographical, "private" impressions, let us see Karamu's founders by means of their high degree of public recognition. The honors awarded the Jelliffes, like those for Karamu Theatre and Karamu House described in Chapter I, are helpful here for the civic image they give us of them, relevant here only as they represent their total achievement.

The Charles Eisenman Award, conferred on them early in 1941 by the Cleveland Jewish Welfare Federation, had

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1Cleveland Herald, Dec. 13, 1940.
2Nov. 5, 1955. (Mimeographed, in Karamu files.)
been given annually for seventeen years "for the achievement of some constructive plan or suggestion of outstanding value to the city of Cleveland in the field of civic and social enterprise."\(^1\) The responses of Russell and Rowena Jelliffe to this award, which sought them out beyond the borders of Jewish endeavor, reflect both character and philosophy. She saw in it "courage for the running of the second lap,"\(^2\) and added: "I take this award not as a mark of something done; but as a challenge of things yet to do."\(^3\) Mr. Jelliffe appealed for co-operation "in making the Negro a strong sinew in America's wings,"\(^4\) asserting a basic philosophy of Karamu and one of its raisons d'être.

In 1944, Oberlin College, at its 111th commencement, awarded the honorary Doctor of Laws to Russell and Rowena Jelliffe. The citation, cognizant of Oberlin's traditional freedom of educational and cultural opportunity for white and Negro alike, found it fitting to honor a couple who have "translated that tradition into the practice of their lives . . . [demonstrating] their active faith in Oberlin ideals."\(^5\) Seven years later, Western

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\(^1\)Cleveland Year Book, 1924 (Cleveland: Cleveland Foundation, 1924), 223. Hereafter cited as CYB.

\(^2\)Press, Jan. 27, 1941.

\(^3\)CPD, editorial, Jan. 28, 1941.

\(^4\)Press, Jan. 27, 1941.

Reserve University followed suit, awarding them the honorary Doctor of Humanities degrees, and in 1959, Mr. Jelliffe was again honored by his alma mater, which named him Alumni Trustee of the College, to serve a six-year term, beginning in 1960.

More civic recognition came in 1957, when the annual Citizenship Award of the American Veterans' Committee was conferred by Cleveland's Freedom Chapter. In 1959, the Cleveland Plain Dealer named Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe "Clevelanders of the Year," and later that year a second Cleveland daily listed Mrs. Jelliffe as one of the city's ten outstanding career women.¹

Russell W. Jelliffe's appointment in December, 1959 as the Foreman of Cuyahoga County's Grand Jury seemed highly appropriate in view of his civic background and his forty-four years with Karamu House, but his report upon the discharge of the Grand Jury was by no means an "expected" one--except by those who were well aware of his overriding concern for the issues involved. At a time when the Negro crime rate was high, and racist explanations were being offered, he said of the 550 felony cases which came before him: "More than sixty-five per cent of all that crime, regardless of race, came out of substandard

And further, he used his jury experience to conclude:

Poverty and ignorance in the middle of affluence, coupled with restrictions as to residential movement of people and a climate of discrimination with its associated sense of defeat and second-class citizenship, would seem to be the real cause of crime and anti-social attitudes rather than race and national origin.²

In the spring of 1960 both Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe were invited to participate in and lead discussion groups at the White House Conference on Youth.

Although it is true that praise proffered with regularity may create a public image unrelated to public deeds, it would seem, by the nature of these representative honors, that they accurately reflect the heritage and the philosophy of the Jelliffes, turned into action.

¹CPD, May 12, 1960. This statistic was used by Mr. Jelliffe as part of his testimony before the Cleveland City Council, as a witness in favor of a bill to outlaw discrimination in private housing.

²Cleveland Call and Post, Editorial, April 23, 1960. Hereafter cited as C&P.
CHAPTER III

HOW IT BEGAN . . . CLEVELAND, 1915

The Second Presbyterian Church (later combined with the Euclid Avenue Presbyterian to form the present well-known Church of the Covenant), at East 30th Street and Prospect Avenue, was "one of the most influential and wealthy churches of the city" in 1915. Its Men's Club, of which philanthropist Dr. Dudley Peter Allen was perhaps the outstanding figure, included many men who had played and were to play prominent roles in the drama of a developing Cleveland: Dudley S. Blossom, Edward S. Bassett, Amos B. McNairy, Fayette Brown, Elton Hoyt II, B. L. Britton, A. T. Hills, Harold T. Clark,1 Otto Miller, A. C. House, A. L. Osborne, Willard M. Clapp, S. F. Haserot, W. F. MacKay, George H. Gardner, and Dr. Charles Edwin Briggs.2 And its Pastor, Dr. Paul F. Sutphen, was a man of "characteristic initiative and fine judgment . . . an inspirational leader."3

1CPD, June 16, 1940. 2Press, Dec. 6, 1940.
3William Ganson Rose, Cleveland, the Making of a City (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1950), 732. Dr. Sutphen was Pastor Emeritus of the Church of the Covenant when he died, widely mourned, on Aug. 11, 1929, at seventy-three (CYB, 1929, 25).
When the Men's Club initiated a plan to remodel the Church and provide permanent meeting rooms for itself, Dr. Allen, mindful of the Church's community responsibility, and "of the Negro neighborhood which had recently sprung up close to the church," countered with a rather general, but more "civic" proposal for a "neighborhood project" instead.\(^2\)

As boys and young men, these men had lived in the neighborhood. They were interested in it. They investigated and found no recreational or welfare organization in the territory which was fast becoming a very congested one, much in need of some play and educational center. So they decided to open what was to be a small venture.\(^3\)

So the church group agreed on "betterment," but they were, observed Jo Sinclair, "very vague as to what they meant by 'betterment."' A bible class, a settlement, anything."\(^4\)

But their intensive campaign drive was not vague, nor was Dudley Allen's "kick-off" pledge of $5,000.\(^5\) Nor, for that matter was the direction of their intention, since Dr. Allen, a prominent and loyal alumnus, "wondered if Oberlin College, noted for its emphasis on social studies, might not have among its students or graduates just the right people to direct the undertaking."\(^6\) He was put in

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\(^1\)Jo Sinclair, loc. cit., 100. \(^2\)Press, Dec. 6, 1940.

\(^3\)Walter C. White, Sunday News-Leader, Nov. 13, 1921.

\(^4\)Loc. cit. \(^5\)Press, Dec. 6, 1940.

\(^6\)Ibid.
touch with Russell Jelliffe and Rowena Woodham, at the
time hard at work at the University of Chicago. After pre-
liminary discussions and a visit to Cleveland by Russell
Jelliffe at Christmastime, 1914, the Jelliffes accepted
the invitation of the Men's Club of the Second Presbyterian
Church and, on December 19, 1915, moved into an old (though
attractively refurbished) cottage on East 38th Street off
Central Avenue, to begin a study-project of the neighbor-
hood, in the neighborhood. 1

What was this neighborhood like? It was, contrary
to current public understanding, "by no means predominantly
Negro" (although it is so today). In 1915, The Playhouse,
or Playhouse Settlement as the East 38th Street location
soon became known, "was more white than Negro." 2 Actually,
"the groups most largely represented are Negro, Hebrew,
Syrian, and Italian ... about twenty-five per cent
Negro." 3 The total Negro population of all of Cleveland
was only 8,448 in 1910, 4 and 6,000 of that number were

1 White, Sunday News-Leader, Nov. 13, 1921.
2 Bontemps and Conroy, op. cit., 207.
4 Paul E. Baker, Negro-White Adjustment: An Investi-
gation and Analysis of Methods in the Interracial Move-
ment in the United States (New York: Association Press,
1934), 179.
5 Rose, op. cit., 690. The CYB, 1922 figure is
8,410. (P. 15)
west of East 55th Street,\textsuperscript{1} as was the new church project. Despite its age, despite the impending sociological change, it was a peaceful neighborhood, almost "small-towny": "You could walk anywhere there at night and feel safe. Of course, you knew everybody," said Mrs. Jelliffe.\textsuperscript{2} Some five years later, the boys of the area could still assure Miss Griffiths, the Girls' Worker of the settlement, that she "never has to worry on the streets at night, because somebody always knows her no matter where she is."\textsuperscript{3} But it was a neighborhood on the verge of change, not only because of the normal, local group migration, but because of national events.

The local movements of population were similar to those of all northern, urban cities. The earliest settlers moved further away from the city's center, and successive waves of other ethnic groups succeeded them, and moved on in their turn. In the 1880's, Austrians and Germans lived nearby, and Seidenwand's Saloon on the corner of 38th Street and Central Avenue was to become the nursery building

\hspace{1cm}\textsuperscript{1}Howard Whipple Green,\textit{ A Study of the Movement of the Negro Population of Cleveland} (Cleveland: Cuyahoga County Public Health Association, 1924), 2. Prepared by the Ass'n. Bureau of Statistics and Research, and "based upon the 1910 and 1920 census figures and the April, 1921 and Oct., 1923 school census figures."

\hspace{1cm}\textsuperscript{2}Interview, April 6, 1961.

\hspace{1cm}\textsuperscript{3}Mrs. Rose Griffiths Ruhlman, interview, April 24, 1961.
of Karamu. There was a significant Jewish population in the area, and Mrs. H. M. Walker, whose successful teaching career began at this time at Mayflower School, near 31st and Orange, remembers that "when I first taught . . . we were predominantly Jewish. On the Jewish holiday, I had nobody there but myself. And then, of course, it became Slavic, Italian, and Negro. Now it is predominantly Negro, of course." Italian groups lingered in the area with--among other effects--the occasional frictions, as Mrs. Jelliffe reported: "There are fights recorded between Italians and Negroes in about 1922 and 1923."3

The most significant, long-lasting change, that of white to colored, was accelerated by World War I. The manpower demands of industry grew, and Southern rural Negroes were either brought or came of their own volition into the urban cities of the North, and this mass movement almost completely submerged the older elements of the colored population . . . . Many of them came with only the clothing they were wearing, with no preparation for housing, and with little idea of the problems they must inevitably encounter. The limited social agencies were wholly inadequate to meet the serious situation.4

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2Interview, April 20, 1961.

3Interview, April 10, 1961.

4Rose, op. cit., 686. The speaker is Ohio State Senator Harry E. Davis.
The greatest influx began in 1917, and the first waves were—understandably—made up of those "found standing on the street corners, who had no family responsibilities and who could leave within an hour."\(^1\) These were the "recruits," often brought North at a dollar a head, on open boxcars. They made good money in the mills and foundries, but after the war, when discharged soldiers returned to reclaim their old jobs, these new workers were the first fired, and jobs became very scarce.\(^2\) To complicate matters, the second waves of Southern Negroes poured into Cleveland at about this time, those who had taken the time to dispose of their Southern property, and to plan their families' trek North.\(^3\)

During this war-time period, the colored population of Cleveland soared. There had been a slow growth to 10,000\(^4\) or 15,000 by 1915,\(^5\) but from 1917 on, the growth was extremely rapid. The new census revealed 34,451 Negroes in Cleveland, a jump from 8,448, or 1.5 per cent of the total Cleveland population (560,663) in 1910, to 4.3

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\(^1\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.

\(^2\)Works Projects Administration, Peoples of Cleveland, A compilation by workers of the Writers' Program (Cleveland: Works Projects Administration, 1942), 185-97.

\(^3\)CPD, June 16, 1940.

\(^4\)Jewish Review and Observer, March 13, 1942.

\(^5\)CPD, Oct. 31, 1937. There is, of course, no official 1915 census figure.
per cent of the 796,841 inhabitants in 1920.\(^1\) Mr. and Mrs. Jelfiife have on many occasions referred to one three-month period in 1918, when the colored population of Cleveland doubled. And much of this growth was reflected in the area around the Playhouse: by 1920, 24,000 Negroes lived west of East 55th Street, where 6,000 had lived earlier, and Ward Eleven jumped from thirteen Negroes in 1910 to 11,737 in 1920.\(^2\)

Overpopulation brings with it attendant evils: overcrowding, followed by subdivision of housing units, followed by increase in boarding, by greater transiency, dislocation of family life, delinquency, disease, and a climbing crime rate. As the years passed, all this took place in the Central Avenue area, and especially in the immediate Playhouse police district, the "Roaring Third," as it became known.

A Negro weekly in 1922 looked back at October, 1921, and spoke of "the vile, immoral, and miserable living conditions then existing, and still existing to an entirely too large degree, in that ward [eleventh] and vicinity—'the Central Avenue district.'\(^3\) Rowena Jelfiife recalled:

People opened up their houses and took in absolute strangers. There were no houses to live in, and

\(^1\)CYP, 1922, 15. \(^2\)Green, loc. cit. \(^3\)Cleveland Gazette, April 1, 1922. Hereafter cited as Gaz.
you would find two families living on two sides of a sheet stretched across a room. These were
terrific times of adjustment.¹

The children were affected, of course. By 1920, all of Cleveland had "more than minimum play areas" with the exception of one area, an area of which the Playhouse Settlement was almost the exact geographical center, and which was further described as "also congested with both general and child population."² And this situation deteriorated still further. Between 1921 and 1924, elementary schools in Wards Eleven and Twelve reported an increased enrollment of forty-nine per cent.³ This was evidence of the further aggravation of the general conditions which had caused the crusading editor of the Negro Cleveland Gazette, Harry C. Smith, to cry out--five years earlier--in frustration and anger at the ineffectiveness of the Negro clergy: "Oh, that spineless Ministers' Alliance! Will nothing move them to action?"⁴

The Gazette continued to hammer at the crime and corruption of the area, and its reports, perhaps a shade overstated by its zeal, give us a graphic enough account of the Playhouse's immediate surroundings:

[There was] a murder about every night among our people of the Central Avenue district. Things were so bad then [1919-20] in that

¹Interview, May 6, 1961. ²CYB, 1921, 251.
district that the corner of E. 29th St. and Central Ave. was referred to as "dead man's corner."  

After the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, liquor and gambling joints were opened and closed with frequency, if not regularity, often within a few short blocks of 38th Street. Of the 257 arrests made in the city of Cleveland on the weekend of Saturday, August 16, 1924, 157 were in the "Roaring Third" where "our people are the most thickly populated." Almost all were for violation of gambling and/or liquor laws.

In 1934, a sociologist, looking back upon the fifteen-year history of the Settlement, described it as in one of the most densely populated areas of Cleveland. The housing conditions there are very bad; disease, poverty, and ignorance combine to make the home and community social situation extremely difficult. The population of the neighborhood consists of mixed foreign and Negro groups, drawn from the laboring class of people.

Why did a young, newly married white couple accept any invitation to live and work in a neighborhood like the one described above, particularly a church invitation?

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1Aug. 6, 1921.  2Gaz., Nov. 19, 1921.

3Gaz., Aug. 23, 1924.  4Baker, loc. cit.

5Granted, much of the worsening of neighborhood conditions developed after 1915, when the Jelliffes arrived. There were many fine families whose presence exerted a stabilizing influence on the area, an influence which endured as long as these people remained. The Jelliffes remember them well, and point out that many of them have continued their Karamu connections. (Interview, June 13, 1961.)
More, why would Mrs. Jelliffe, in looking back, speak of the Men's Club offer as "providential"? To answer these questions, we must return to Chicago in 1914-15, where the Jelliffes were completing their year of graduate study and making plans for the future.

For a couple like Russell Jelliffe and Rowena Woodham, the future was bound to be in the field of human relations, was bound to reflect—as did their heritage—their care for people. Their future work would have to validate their belief—and their parents' before them—that "the way we handled the problems arising over the racial differences between the Negro and the white people would be the crucial test" of democracy in the United States.¹

And, like good social scientists, they worked at planning their future.

Russell and I well remember days before we came here, spent in the old John Crerar Library in Chicago, searching into the history and structure and pattern of many northern cities to find that one where an idea, which had come very urgently upon us, might have a chance of coming to life.²

Their research, coupled with good advice and wise counsel, demonstrated that "Cleveland loomed far above the others [cities], with its line of outstanding mayors and civic

¹News, Jan. 31, 1939.

²Mrs. Jelliffe, remarks made at Karamu's Fortieth Anniversary program, Nov. 5, 1955. (Mimeographed, in Karamu House files.)
leadership. Here was a city that cared and was likely to care increasingly, for all its people.\textsuperscript{1}

What made Cleveland fertile ground for the idea-seed of the Jelliffes? There had always been a liberal tradition at work in the Cleveland area, and the Jelliffes' library work revealed it. The high percentage of foreign-born gave Cleveland "melting-pot" strength and a "melting-pot" character. The 1920 census listed it third in the nation in proportion of foreign-born to the total population, fourth in proportion of native-born with one or both parents foreign-born, and reported that sixty-nine per cent of its total population were either first or second generation immigrants. Twenty-nine different nationalities gave it this "markedly foreign cast," even in "comparison with the other nine largest cities."\textsuperscript{2}

The whole Western Reserve area had historic associations of freedom and rights. Its settlers were pioneers from Connecticut and Massachusetts, and they brought with them into this new frontier their liberalism, their great concern for public education, and their New England brand of trailblazing. In Akron, in 1851, the First National Women's Suffrage Convention had been held, and the ex-slave woman, Sojourner Truth, delivered a memorable address.

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{2}CYB, 1922, 13.
there which has been preserved.\textsuperscript{1} Susan B. Anthony held meetings at the Newbury Community of the Western Reserve, and at Funderson Lake, nearby, "dress reform picnics" were held, where militant suffragettes gathered in bloomers, and without corsets.\textsuperscript{2} The anti-slavery spirit of Oberlin and the New England reformers permeated Cleveland, too. Here there were two "Underground Railway headquarters"—one on the East side, the other, on the West—and runaway slaves could cross the lake to Canada and freedom. Here, as early as 1839, a Colored Men's Union Society was founded, a lyceum group devoted to forensic activities for the small Negro population, who were "industrious, peaceable, intelligent, and ambitious for improvement."\textsuperscript{3}

This industry, peace, intelligence, and ambition helped develop in Cleveland a cordial atmosphere toward—at least—the qualified Negro citizen. William Howard Day, the Editor and Publisher of the first Negro newspaper, "The Aliened American"(1853), came to Cleveland from Oberlin College, where he graduated in 1847. From 1850 to 1860, he was librarian for the Cleveland Library Association, and local Editor of the "Daily True Democrat."\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}CPD, May 24, 1951.
\textsuperscript{2}Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 5, 1961.
\textsuperscript{3}Rose, \textit{op. cit.}, 168.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., 264.
John P. Green, born in North Carolina in 1845, first moved to Cleveland in 1857. He graduated from Central High School to become Cleveland's first Negro member of the legal profession. He was voted a Justice of the Peace in 1873 (the first Negro to hold elective public office), and eight years later handily won a seat as State Representative. He became Ohio's first Negro State Senator, and was appointed in 1897 to a Federal position in the Post Office Department by the McKinley administration, which he had supported against Bryan in the 1896 election. In 1906 he returned to his Cleveland law practice, and he died in an auto accident on the night before Labor Day in 1940, a legal holiday in Ohio (four years before it was nationally so declared) as a result of the state bill Green himself had introduced.¹

Harry C. Smith followed John Green into the Ohio State Legislature. He had been, since 1863, and continued to be, the aggressive Editor and Publisher of the successful Cleveland Gazette, a weekly race paper which published regularly until 1941, having gleefully outlasted--by 1922--eighteen other attempts at establishing a second or a third Negro newspaper, and earning for itself the sobriquet, "The Old Reliable."² Smith served in the Ohio Legislature from

¹Ibid., 354-55, 516.
²Gaz., Dec. 23, 1922.
1894-96; 1896-98; and 1900-02. It was he who enacted the state Civil Rights Law in 1894 and the mob violence or Anti-Lynching Law in 1896.¹

This participation by Negroes in Cleveland's public life should be viewed as only a portion of that city's general progressivism. Irving M. Brown, in reviewing Cleveland's characteristics as a city, observed that its citizens' interest in civic affairs during the twenties was unusual and productive. A survey of the public schools had been completed by 1916 and 92 per cent of its recommendations carried out wholly or in part. A recreational survey was undertaken in 1919 and was followed by an investigation of criminal justice in Cleveland conducted by Dean Roscoe Pound and Professor Felix Frankfurter of the Harvard Law School. In 1921 Cleveland became the first large municipality in the United States to adopt the city manager plan and with it the proportional representation form of balloting. The Cleveland Year Book commented that the adoption of the manager plan was a demonstration of "the pride in democracy and faith in the judgment of the people" and that it "was carried to success by a genuine people's movement, the more remarkable because it did not have to be evoked by the beating of tom-toms or the 'jazzing' of public opinion."²

Although the fact that Ohio adopted its compulsory school attendance law in 1877, six years before Illinois and twenty years before Indiana, is not necessarily

¹Gaz., Jan. 4, 1919, et al. Harry C. Smith was an early supporter of the Jelliffes' work at the Playhouse Settlement, but shifted his position radically during the STEVEDORE episode (below, Ch. V, pp. 213-29).

²Op. cit., 9. (One result of the "recreational survey" referred to in this quotation taken from Brown's study has been noted on p. 33, above.)
conclusive in establishing its social leadership (Michigan's law, for example, was passed in 1871), it is interesting to note that Ohio's law applies to a wider age range, six to eighteen years, than that of any other state.¹ More significant educationally, perhaps, is the potent Cleveland Public Library. Again, Irving Brown, who describes it as one of the most influential educational forces that Cleveland possessed in the twenties. The total circulation for the year 1919 was ... greater per capita than any other large city in the United States. By 1927 circulation [was] ... still the greatest of any of the nation's largest cities."²

Even more revealing was the fact that, as of 1919, "the Community Chest here in Cleveland was the first to be established anywhere." Needless to say, this model for organized communal giving has spread to "more than 2,000 cities and towns in the United States and other lands."³

But overshadowing all other factors in establishing the true liberal nature of the city the Jelliffes felt would be hospitable to any plan involving good interracial and group relations, was Tom L. Johnson. Johnson, politician and public figure without peer, personified


³Anna B. Beattie, Greater Cleveland's Social Services (Rev. ed., Cleveland: Welfare Federation, 1956), 42.
Cleveland's liberal tradition, and exemplified progressive—to some even radical—political thought. He was a disciple of Henry George and the single-taxers, and the platform on which he was elected Cleveland's Mayor in 1901 reflected his advanced political posture: home rule, local option on matters of taxation, the principle of municipal ownership, equalization of taxes, just appraisement, and the most radical plank of all: the three-cent carfare.1 As Oberlin students, the Jelliffes had felt the influence of this nationally-known Mayor, and it is no accident that another prominent Cleveland theatre figure, Frederic McConnell, pointed up his importance in discussing the very topic reviewed above: Cleveland's "favorable social and cultural climate";

Tom L. Johnson, through victory and defeat on behalf of the people, had planted the seeds of social welfare and civic progress at the turn of the century, later to be fostered by the inspired leadership of Newton D. Baker and others. Community wealth and energy derived from American industry and enterprise came to the fore in the founding of a fine symphony orchestra and a museum of art, as well as schools, universities, and institutions for music and art. It was the beginning of the Cleveland Foundation and the Community Chest, both of them pioneer activities in America. The spirit of liberal reform was, of course, manifest throughout the nation during the first decade, but much of it here came from within the city's own soul.2

1Carl Lorenz, Tom L. Johnson, Mayor of Cleveland (New York: A. S. Barnes Co., 1911), 30.

So the Jelliffes, in Chicago, concluded that Cleveland stood above other northern cities in its potential receptivity to that "idea, which had come very urgently upon" them. And then, by sheer coincidence, the offer of the Second Presbyterian Church of Cleveland came and they accepted it. What if it had not come? "We would have broken our necks to get to Cleveland somehow." That's why Rowena Jelliffe could say of such an invitation: "Perhaps it was providential."

The first step was noteworthy: the Jelliffes moved into a cottage in the neighborhood in which they were to work, at 2241 East 38th Street, behind the "main" house at 2239, next door to the city's Grant Playground. The house was logically called the "Playground house"; later, "Jelliffe's playhouse" or just the "Playhouse" (as the neighborhood children on their way to play labeled it), or the Playhouse Settlement as it has been referred to throughout, above. Still later, in 1919 when it severed its Men's Club connection and became a member of the Cleveland Welfare Federation, and the Community Fund became "responsible for its main support," the institution was incorporated and officially known as "The Playhouse Settlement of the Neighborhood Association."

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1Interview, May 5, 1961.

Getting acquainted was obviously high on the priority list:

The Jelliffes started out by visiting the playgrounds. At night, when the games were over, they sat down with a guitar and people gathered around to sing. They began to make friends.¹

And they began, in this way, "to feel the ebb and flow of the interest of children and youth and adults coming to our little cottage, getting to know us and we getting to know them."² This was the personal touch, but applied in these earliest months and years in a social work framework. These "were the years when the Jelliffes clung closely to the settlement house ways with which they were familiar. They used the usual games and athletics ... ."³ But despite "forty-two basketball teams,"⁴ "gym classes ... football team,"⁵ and "dancing, citizenship and boxing";⁶ despite "training in cooking" for boys (Chef's Club),⁷ and "sewing, weaving, manual training and knitting for children";⁸ despite popular Friday night dances which attracted a wide cross-section of the community,⁹ and a

¹CPD, June 16, 1940.
²Mr. Jelliffe, radio interview with Mr. Rey Gillespie, Station WJMO, Cleveland, May 21, 1961.
warm welcome for all "soldiers, sailors and their friends to its reading rooms and game rooms between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 3:30 P.M."\(^1\) --in short--despite the whole apparatus of orthodox settlement house programming, there was a telling difference: underlying all this activity was the significant fact that the Jelliffes never thought of themselves as social workers and did not come to Cleveland with that attitude or understanding.

We came here to do certain things, and we had to think: "Now what is a pattern that is close to what we want to work toward?" Well, it was the settlement pattern which could be turned to our purpose--but we were not particularly given to the settlement movement. We were searching always within this framework that we accepted, at the beginning [italics mine], for new departures, new approaches.\(^2\)

Even in these early years, believing that the Negro group was destined to rise from the submerged class to the great middle class, the Jelliffes saw that the greater need was "education," and not "welfare." As Playhouse Settlement grew, and as various avenues of programming were explored, this lack of social work orthodoxy was to prove more and more important as a factor in determining the ultimate character of the institution. As this history briefly reviews additional program activity--much of it in the standard "welfare" vein--the reader should remain aware of the

\(^{1}\)Gaz., Jan. 25, 1919.

Jelliffes' continuing search for "new departures, new approaches," and how that search ultimately led to a major shift in programming.

The assistance Playhouse Settlement's recreation program received from the city of Cleveland, through the city-maintained playground spaces, ended in the winter, when cold and snow rendered the playgrounds unusable. This led the Jelliffes to campaign for broader use of indoor school facilities for settlement houses, and they were the pioneers in that relationship with the Board of Education.

From the beginning, Karamu House worked closely with the Cleveland public schools. Its first effort was . . . at Longwood Commercial High School. Later the settlement organized and conducted similar classes at Kennard Jr. High School, Brownell High School, East Tech High School, Central High School, and John Burrows Elementary School. This work was so successful that at one time classes organized by Karamu House were being conducted at six Cleveland schools at the same time.¹

Children's activities of an educational bent at the settlement were not ignored either. Far more significant than the Boys' Club parties, with their "standing-on-one-leg" contests, and their prizes of sugar canes or coconuts,² were the variety of stimulating field trips planned for these boys and girls--young people more seriously


²Randall Ruhlman (Boys' Club Worker at Playhouse Settlement, 1920-21), interview, April 24, 1961.
underprivileged because of limited horizons and opportunities
than because of the lack of living necessities. Trips to
the airport developed an interest in mathematics and geo-
ography, a visit to the Central Police Station, to its radio
room, helped to overcome that fear of "the law" and "bops"
that breeds in a neighborhood constantly patrolled by police
cars and beat men. "These children hold conversations
among themselves now," a school teacher observed, "because
for the first time in their lives they have something to talk
about."[1]

A Men's Club and a Women's Club were formed too,
each organized to further the general education program of
Playhouse Settlement. The latter conducted shoppers' sur-
veys on prices of staples in neighborhood stores, and achieved
cuts when comparison shopping showed those prices to be
improperly high.[2] The Men's Club was an attempt to occupy
and train unemployed men during the depression years fol-
lowing World War I, in a variety of activities. The basic
value of the group, however, is evidenced by those activities
which endured even after the membership regained lost jobs:
weekly educational programs, and civic and public affairs
discussion groups concerned with street-car service, street
lighting, garbage collection, and so on.[3]

A constant concern for the in-migrants in the neighborhood—those waves of Southern Negroes who arrived from 1917 on, looking for work—kept the staff on "pretty nearly twenty-four hour days—helping people find jobs, trying to teach people how to take streetcars to get home, teaching people how much to pay for a loaf of bread, and what to do if you were asked for more."¹ The following few lines from a printed Playhouse throwaway, obviously designed for door-to-door neighborhood circulation, suggest some of the drama of the role this settlement played:

The following Agencies may be reached through THE PLAYHOUSE: City Doctor, Hospitals and Dispensaries, Babies' Dispensary, Visiting Nurse Association, Humane Society, Associated Charities, Legal Aid Society, Truant Officer, Juvenile Court, State City Employment Agency—Men and Women's Depts. A telephone is available and someone is in readiness to call doctors and render neighborly assistance. Clubs and Classes are conducted for Boys and Girls, Men and Women, in Arts and Crafts, Gymnasium, Sewing, Cooking, Etc. Library open daily from 3:30 to 5:30 and 7:30 to 9:30 P.M.²

The establishment by the settlement of a summer camp is not in itself unusual, for it seems clearly in the social work pattern. The 1926 Cleveland Year Book lists six other settlement house camps, organized from 1897 (Hiram House) to 1924 (Council Educational Alliance). What is pertinent is that camp dance and dramatics contributed to the mature development of those activities in

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.
²N.d., ca. 1917. (In the Karamu files.)
the city. A brief sketch of the camp's history thus seems appropriate.

The camp opened on June 25, 1923, with separate two-week sessions for boys and girls over fourteen.\(^1\) The camp's capacity was only twenty-four in its first season,\(^2\) but that figure jumped to forty\(^3\) to forty-two\(^4\) to forty-five\(^5\) and, ultimately, to fifty.\(^6\)

Camp facilities were the normal ones, with their growth paralleling the increased capacity. At first, the camp activities were housed in two buildings built by Playhouse Settlement members themselves. The campers lived in tents. Later, when public use of the adjoining lands began to encroach upon their privacy, the camp reluctantly surrendered their isolated, wooded land, "the old plateau." They then selected a new site, also in the Brecksville (Ohio) Reservation, 1600 acres of the Cleveland Metropolitan Park Board's lands.\(^7\) They called it Camp Karamu (after the new name taken by the Neighborhood Association in 1940), and it

\(^{1}\text{Gaz., June 9, 1923.}\)
\(^{2}\text{CYB, 1924, 147.}\)
\(^{3}\text{CYB, 1927, 155. This summer, too, the minimum age limit for campers dropped to eight years, and adults were permitted on weekends.}\)
\(^{4}\text{CYB, 1929, 244.}\)
\(^{5}\text{Press, Dec. 6, 1940.}\)
\(^{6}\text{Dalva, op. cit., 15. Dalva adds that rates were $4.50 per child per week in the beginning, but rose ultimately to $12.00.}\)
\(^{7}\text{Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961.}\)
was about a mile and a half away, more private, with a swimming pool,\(^1\) and with W.P.A. help, "more substantially built":

We had a beautiful old colonial house which was made into a very charming Administration Building. And then a dining hall was built, with fine, hand-carved details. And all the tables that we use now—the ones that everyone raves about—were made for that camp. And then the recreation hall was a large building with large fireplaces in it, one end of which had a stage.\(^2\)

The wooded, park-like locale led to "particular emphasis on nature study,"\(^3\) though the Playhouse Settlement even managed some nature study in the city for those slum youngsters it could not accommodate at camp.\(^4\) The whole range of camp programming was achieved with a budget of $2,750 and a staff of ten in 1928,\(^5\) $3,300 and a staff of eleven in 1930.\(^6\)

\(^1\)Press, Dec. 6, 1940.

\(^2\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.

\(^3\)CYB, 1929, 244.

\(^4\)On June 14, 1932, the Cleveland Press carried a photo of a "park, where a few weeks ago only shacks and piles of refuse stood." This was the deserted lot a few doors east on Central Avenue, which neighborhood children had literally transformed. "These are children who will have no chance to go to summer camps, and are getting their sunshine and exercise in this garden." The Press Landscape Department drew up a set of plans, and a little over one month later felt proud enough to publish a second story and a "before-and-after" photograph! (Press, July 22, 1932.)

\(^5\)CYB, 1927, 155.

\(^6\)CYB, 1929, 244.
The dance activities at Camp Karamu began spontaneously:

In my own mind, I always think of the beginning of dance at Karamu as at camp, where campfires were the order of the evening . . . . And as long as I live, I will remember one night when youngsters who had been toasting marshmallows moved back in the meadow behind the circle where people were sitting, and did this very interesting, exciting dance in the dark—with their glowing sticks outlining what their hands and bodies were doing . . . . After this one night, . . . the thing that was said was "Tomorrow, let's meet on the plateau and do these same things and see what they look like in daylight."

So this became a very exciting part of that camp session . . . . This we think of as the beginning of our modern dance program.¹

Then, as with so many of Karamu's interest groups through the years, a leader began working with the dancers, bringing out individual talent and developing additional skills.

One of the first in a long line of Karamu dance leaders was Marjorie Witt, later Marjorie Witt Johnson, who joined the camp staff on a part-time basis in 1935, immediately after her graduation from Oberlin. On the sound basis of the kind of spontaneous singing-dancing games suggested above, and with the experience of two years of dance study at college, she began to build a dance activity along more organized lines, especially with teen-agers; and particularly in the folk- and modern-dance area.²

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.

Dramatics at camp was of the informal kind, with dramatized stories and skits, and the variety of activities usually loosely assembled under the heading: creative dramatics. In dramatics, unlike the dance, organized work for children had begun years ago, in the city during the regular season, so that sense of excited discovery of a new form was not present, and the lure of the outdoors seemed to displace somewhat the older, already well-established drama work. But there was that sense of continuity of activity—drama and dance carried from city to camp and back, with attendant growth in interest and skill.

The camp was in itself—as was its program—a valid educational, sociological entity. It represented firm cooperation between municipal government in the form of the Metropolitan Park Board, and a private social organization; it provided "unusual opportunities for field work to students of sociology" who lived there as counselors; and it had as its generating purpose to provide a happy home atmosphere for underprivileged children, to expose them to the outdoors, and in so doing, find in them definite tendencies, traits, and talents. The Camp operates on a purely democratic basis.  

The 1947 deficit of $3000 was fatal to Karamu's already

1Ibid.

strained budget, and the camp program was—with understandable reluctance—abandoned.\(^1\)

Children's dramatics, not an untypical settlement house activity, is nevertheless worth additional attention here. First, it has developed well and continually since 1915 to date; second, it was used consciously as an educational force to release and attain the full creative potential of the children involved—as opposed to the end of finished theatre productions; and, finally, it was the germ which led to adult theatre at Karamu—the heart of this study's concern—and precipitated the major shift in programming that ultimately led to today's concept of Karamu as "arts center" rather than "settlement house."

As noted earlier, the dramatics activity at the settlement was informal. Mrs. Jelliffe, the first Children's Theatre director, remembers that it was "just a very simple outgrowth of children playing together and sensing their capacity for creativity and . . . giving themselves to the mood of the game called for."\(^2\) It gradually grew more complex, as actual plays (some original) were added, and produced with regularity on Saturday afternoons (a time still reserved today for Children's Theatre, though performances are not now scheduled for every Saturday,

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\(^1\)Dalva, op. cit., 15.

as formerly). The plays were presented in the adjoining Grant Playground in the summer, and in neighborhood schools in the winter (after regular classroom hours, of course), according to arrangements with the Board of Education.¹

No programs were printed and, apparently, no newspaper announcements of individual plays (Children's Theatre) appeared prior to the early thirties.²

One rather detailed account of a Children's Theatre production did appear much earlier, however, and it seems worth reprinting here for a variety of reasons. It was written by Ormond A. Forte, prominent Cleveland newspaperman and editor of various Negro weeklies. His trip to the children's play at the Longwood School "was born out of a hankering desire to see what manner of community entertainment Mr. Russell W. Jelliffe (white) of 'The Playhouse' was wont to provide":

I beheld black children, brown children, white children—all mixed up in a glorious commonalty—joyous, rollicking, delighted, care-free—black mothers and white mothers, and a sprinkling of fathers "polka-dotting" the scene. But I had not yet seen all. Soon the play "Cinderella" was announced, and in came the characters.

There was a Colored mother, one white and two Colored daughters—one of the latter being "Cinderella." Prince Charming was white, his herald—who, during the play, patiently knelt to unlace the "long boots" of Colored "Cinderella"—was also white. The two stage carpenters—whose big job was to move a

¹Above, p. 45.

small table on and off the stage, were of different races, too, thus completing the wonderful color scheme.

I watched the play closely. There was no seeming condescension on the part of white Prince Charming—who by the way was a girl—as she tripped the toe with brown-skinned Cinderella at the ball, or in the white fairy godmother, as she clothed her Colored goddaughter in "glad raiments" for the marriage with the prince. There was no cringing subservience on the part of dark-skinned Cinderella. It was simply human.¹

"Simply human" . . . it may be that this is the best way to characterize a large portion of Rowena Jelliffe's philosophy in dealing with people—in this case, with children's theatre personnel. Children's singing, dancing, and narrative games led logically to simple children's dramatizations, and from there to created or written skits and plays—folk tales, fairy tales, and more sophisticated efforts. All were marked by an "easy" supervision: "Children playing together and sensing their capacity for creativity and giving themselves to the mood."² Youngsters were "permissively" directed, it would seem, being encouraged to "handle their material freely." The important thing seemed to be development of the potential human forces, almost in contradistinction to the theatrical:

I watched for those [personal] qualities which it seemed to me had value on the stage, and attempted to capture and augment them. It was not the kind of material upon which to use the conventional bag of theatrical tricks.³

¹The Cleveland Advocate, Feb. 22, 1917.
This preference for innate creativity over "technique" and theatricalism re-occurs often as a salient and formative feature of this theatre's history and philosophy.

From time to time other directors worked with the Children's Theatre, and it is logical to assume that they were influenced by the approach noted above. One of them, Mrs. Randall Ruhlman, the former Rose Griffiths, later became a director of the earliest adult group, the Dumas Dramatic Club. Miss Griffiths, a staff Girls' Worker, conducted creative dramatics classes and rehearsed the group at the Longwood School, which "was used all the time for the Children's Theatre." Some of the plays were her own, others she remembers as "just standard things." Her strongest memory has a lesson buried within it which has relevance today in terms of Karamu's makeup: self-consciousness in racial matters can lead to difficulties and misunderstandings, even from people with the best intentions. After she joined the staff, in 1920, she directed a Christmas play of hers called FAIRIES?, and went astray in casting:

Well, the horrible mistake I made in my naïveté was that I decided to have all the little white children play fairies and the Negro children play the brownies. I got corrected along the way, and we ended up with brown fairies and white brownies.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Mr. and Mrs. Randall Ruhlman, joint interview, April 24, 1961.
Mr. Randall Ruhlman, now Secretary of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and a Karamu House Board member, recalls that prior to his joining the Playhouse staff as Boys' Worker, Miss Genevieve Davis was active in club work and helped to direct some of the children's plays in the 1918-19 era.\(^1\) She is the sister of Harry E. Davis, one of Cleveland's outstanding Negroes, and during his lifetime a member of both Ohio's House and Senate. (His assistance in a Karamu "crisis" will be noted later.\(^2\)) Genevieve Davis (now Mrs. Storey) continues to assist the House in a variety of roles, as a volunteer and sustaining friend.

Rowena Jelliffe, whose directing leadership preceded, followed, and was woven in between all of the other part-time children's theatre directors, established a custom at the Saturday afternoon performances which she regrets has "gone out of the window" today:

I used to tell stories at the beginning of every performance--sometimes the story of the play, but usually not. I had a great big pillow on which I sat in front of the curtain, told a seven to ten minute story and then after that, we would always do group singing . . . . All the building used to ring with singing--and not just the songs in the show. Then the play would follow.\(^3\)

The play that followed might very well have been "written by--" as well as "directed by--" or "supervised by--" or "pre-curtain story and songs by--" Mrs. Jelliffe,

\(^1\)Ibid. \(^2\)Below, Ch. V, p. 217. \(^3\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.
so extensive was the practical work she added to her executive leadership of the Children's Theatre. Murris Howard, now Mrs. Arthur Taylor, was half of another husband-and-wife team who were both members and staff at Playhouse Settlement from 1920 to 1943. Mrs. Taylor's first connection was as a girl in Children's Theatre (which she was in later years to direct), and she came regularly after school for rehearsals--on the playground in the summer, or in the Jelliffes' cottage sometimes. She remembers a well-planned schedule of play production, and recalls that "Mrs. Jelliffe usually would write the play, or dramatize a fairy story." Another memory of hers of those summer playground shows puts still a different "hat" on Director Jelliffe: "Sometimes a child wouldn't show up for the performance, and I would play two or three parts in one show. Mrs. Jelliffe would stand in the 'wings,' changing my costume for me from one character to another."1

Although it made no reference to any specific group, the Cleveland Year Book, 1921 felt obliged to take rather realistic cognizance of children's theatre activities in the city's settlement houses:

[They] make an effort from time to time to organize juvenile dramatics for children of their neighborhoods. These are generally fairy plays and seldom soar into the realm of pure art. Occasionally in plays presented by the young people there are moments of real dramatic inspiration.2

1Mrs. Taylor, interview, March 30, 1961. 2P. 280.
If in 1921 the *Cleveland Year Book* could omit mention of Playhouse Settlement's children's theatre activities, by 1926 it noted both the children's and adult groups as involved "in the study and presentation of the higher type drama" [italics mine],¹ and by 1930 it was describing a highly organized, formal program:

The Children's Theatre began producing plays every Saturday from the 1st of November. Some of these plays were exchanged with other settlements, neighborhood schools and branch libraries. A group from the Children's Theatre won first place in the Inter-Settle-ment Dramatic Tournament with an original play based upon the Negro folk tale, Br'er Rabbit. Some fifteen groups such as neighborhood schools, the Phillis Wheatley Association, and out-of-town groups in Youngstown, Columbus, and Bay Village, were assisted in presenting, directing and selecting plays by the Children's Theatre . . . . In connection with the Children's Theatre, marionettes were modeled and made in the Art Studio; and two puppet plays were given: one in the Museum of Art and the other before the P.T.A. in Strongsville, O.²

¹P. 313.

²Pp. 136-37. The adaptation of the Negro folk tale referred to above was called *HOW COME BR'ER RABBIT DO NO WORK*, and was written by Mrs. Jelliffe. It was one of four such adaptations freely made of the old Uncle Remus tales, from the Joel Chandler Harris originals. (Another was called *SHOES FOR THE FOOTS*, and in 1932, at Eldred Hall of Western Reserve University it won the same prize the Br'er Rabbit play won in 1930. The play was repeated at the Museum of Art on April 9 [CPD, March 14, 1932].) Mr. Jelliffe recalls that all of these "delightful things" were produced at the Museum of Art, in the 1930-33 years, and that he made all of the scenic effects for them. (Interview, May 16, 1961.) The Marionette activity was also highly organized, with productions and a workshop: "The boys saw away at puppet houses and puppet fences . . . the girls in their sewing class make their own costumes, and those for the puppets, and announce emphatically that they don't know any more fascinating way to practice sewing than making a jacket for a puppet [CPD, Jan. 30, 1930]."
Perhaps the greatest historical significance of children's theatre is not its steady development and its attainment of today's substantial position, but the fact that it was the germ which led to adult theatre, and also the activity which paved the way for that major shift in programming that caused Karamu to develop as an arts center.

How did it happen? It did not happen because the Jelliffees planned a theatre or art center--they knew only that they were searching for new techniques by which to give voice to their belief that the best utilization of individual capacities would further the public good. And this meant all individuals, white and black, but particularly it meant those whose struggles to mature had been frustrated, whose human potential had been stunted, and whose contributions had rarely found their way into the American mainstream. How did it happen?

Looking back, I can almost put my finger on a day on the playground when I was doing singing-and-dancing games with both Negro and white children, and I saw that the Negro children--in contrast to the white children--had a tremendous capacity for giving themselves to the game. Now this wasn't a slight variation, it was a very marked differential; and I remember the excitement with which I felt this distinction. I don't mean just "exciting"--it was exciting in the avenues that it opened up--the potential for theatre.¹

Both Russell and Rowena Jelliffe had always observed this eagerness on the part of the children to accept suggestions and directions, this absence of inhibition in their

movement or in their readings, this rich capacity for expanding an idea imaginatively, ¹ and this "motoriness, the abili-
ty to let an idea work itself through to [the] fingertips."² They felt that the Negro youngster excelled in these quali-
ties, that he had, overall, the ability to give himself "in a way the white child does not,"³ to the game, or the mood, or that world of make-believe which is the essence of the-
tre. And--quite simply--though "we saw it first in children, we felt it must be in adults."⁴ The moment of discovery stimulated the Jelliffes, for if it were true that adults could be "reached" by theatre activity in the same way as youngsters, and if there was a capacity, a "tremendous, untouched reservoir of theatrical ability"⁵ among Negroes, then this was programming which not only would compete with the pool room, but which would capture "the interest of our young people far into their adult lives . . . challenging and developing the best they had to give."⁶ But most of all, and best of all, here might be the way for the Negro to move into the American mainstream, to link up

¹Mr. Jelliffe, interview, March 15, 1961.
²Rowena Jelliffe, "Children's Plays," 54.
³Ibid.
⁴Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
⁶Mr. Jelliffe, quoted by William McDermott in CFD, April 19, 1942.
in a union previously denied him, via his own, unique contribution.

The games and the basketball teams were not, of course, dropped immediately. As noted above, "you don't come in and slam people into a mold" is a belief of the Jelliffes\(^1\)--"You couldn't leave people out on a limb,"\(^2\) dangling between programs, as it were. But the policy shift was initiated, and executed slowly only because of another conviction on the part of the Jelliffes: wait for the membership to want the idea you want to program.\(^3\) It was 1920, and no adult theatre group had yet come forward on its own.

Some of the other Cleveland settlement houses did have adult theatre at this time, however, and a look at that activity should serve as a background against which to view Playhouse Settlement and the drama group that was soon to appear there.

Professor Brown's survey of Cleveland theatre activities in the twenties does touch on settlement house drama:

> Although the evidences of dramatic activities at these agencies are fragmentary, the material that does exist indicates continuous, many-levelled, and numerous dramatic endeavors, all of them play

\(^1\)Above, Ch. II, p. 19.

\(^2\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.

\(^3\)Above, Ch. II, p. 20.
productions or instruction leading to that end, at most of the settlements.¹

In 1922, invitations by the Cleveland Recreational Council to form an Association of Amateur Dramatic Clubs went to eighty-seven miscellaneous groups, and although there is no way of knowing how many of them represent the settlement house field, the number does suggest extensive activity.² A year later, this federation was organized, headed by the drama group of the Council Educational Alliance under Recreation Council auspices.³

This group, the Council Educational Alliance (a Jewish settlement), comes in for a great deal of praise in Brown's survey. He points out that it utilized much of the same well-trained leadership in its drama program as did its co-religionists in their other drama groups.⁴ Whether for that reason or not, "audience support was such [at Council Educational Alliance] that by 1926 the drama program was


²CYB, 1922, 235. Edith Isaacs, in a 1940 Theatre Arts article on the tributary theatre, notes with praise a total of sixty-nine various theatre groups in Pittsburgh ("Patterns in Perspective," July, 480). This makes an interesting comparison with Cleveland.

³CYB, 1923, 154-55.

⁴Op. cit., 153. Brown lists Frederic McConnell, K. Elmo Lowe (The Cleveland Playhouse), Katherine Wick Kelly (high school and college play director), and Mrs. Martin Heydemann (ex-professional actress and free-lance play director) as directors or advisers of these various Jewish groups.
almost self-supporting, an unusual state of affairs for a settlement house."¹ (It is important to observe that in his declaration of Council Educational Alliance's superiority to the other settlements, he excepts Playhouse Settlement.)²

Though not up to that of Council Educational Alliance, Goodrich House had an active drama program, headed by Miss Ruth Harker, and Mrs. Jelliffe recalls the exchange of Playhouse Settlement productions with them, both adult and children's theatre. This was "around the mid-twenties."³ Merrick House also supported dramatics activities, and Edith Isaacs' reference to both of these agencies indicates that they kept the level of their work relatively high until 1940.⁴ Today, neither institution meets these tests: "Well-developed drama training programs or formally organized drama groups for teen-agers."⁵

Hiram House fails these tests, too, but it can, perhaps, be forgiven on the basis of fatigue. The first

¹CPD, Nov. 28, 1926, quoted in Brown, op. cit., 154.
²Brown, loc. cit.
³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 9, 1961.
⁴Loc. cit., 475.
⁵Fiore D'Isidoro, Pauline Drake, and Sophia Wolfe, "Opportunities for Dramatic Expression Offered by the Cleveland Community to Secondary School Students: a Descriptive Catalogue" (unpublished study, Graduate School, Western Reserve University, July, 1960), 58. This seventy-nine page project was prepared for the Community Resources Workshop of the University.
available evidence of theatre work there dates from 1907, and although Irving Brown's assertion that Hiram House drama activities may be taken as typical of other social agencies is questionable, there is no question about primacy and extent. The range and variety of Hiram House's theatrical work is impressively displayed in Brown's study,¹ but it is clear that it never developed beyond the "hobby," or mere "activity" stage. The following, though written about Hiram House, is applicable to the total Cleveland settlement house picture, and puts the significance of the later Playhouse Settlement development into appropriate perspective:

"Persons wishing to form dramatic clubs or to take part in plays this winter will please see Miss Noble or Miss Winter." The statement suggests both the ephemeral and casual nature of the dramatic clubs at the settlement houses and, further, the improbability of the development of large or strong organizations. . . .²

But, like that storied insect who—ignorant of the aeronautical principles which declare that it cannot fly—goes right on flying anyway, drama groups, unaware of that "improbability of development," go right on trying to develop. All through 1920, an idea, a desire, and a need grew in the consciousness of six young men and women at Playhouse Settlement, and one December day they came to the

¹Pp. 150-53.
cottage at 2241 East 38th Street and said to Rowena Jelliffe:
"'We don't know anything at all about theatre, we don't know
if we have any ability, or even any interest in it; but if
you would be interested in exploring this with us, we'd like
to explore it.' And this was the beginning."¹ These six
people were the nucleus of the Gilpin Players and the Karamu
Theatre which were to come.

The group chose the name of Dumas Dramatic Club,
after the French father and son, both novelists and play-
wrights and of Negro ancestry. The first sessions were
talking sessions (many held in the Jelliffes' living room),
for they recognized their need to develop theatre conscious-
ness in an atmosphere where none had existed. "Theatre wasn't
in the air at all" at the settlement, Mrs. Jelliffe has
said. In fact, there was, apparently, not even a "settling
down to say that this was going to be a theatre program."
The six people wanted a dramatic-social club, with theatre
as the "something to do." With Mrs. Jelliffe's guidance,
they would talk, read plays, explore the whole notion, and
if there were shows to do, they would do them--there was no
thought of inviting others, of forming a theatre group."²

The core of the Dumas Dramatic Club was Negro.
These were, after all, people who had been friends and who

²Ibid.
looked for continued social activity as much as for theatre, and they had little or no philosophical concern for interracialism, at least not in the beginning. But part of the talking that characterized their early years as an organized entity (as Gilpin Players as well as Dumas) touched on the need for interracial participation, from both a practical and an ideological point of view. It could hardly have been otherwise, under the Jelliffes. And so,

a readiness was built before we even had white mem-
ers. . . . Enough had been talked about and under-
stood on the general basic philosophy upon which the
group was to go forward, so that I believe that it
is true that when the first white members came in,
they came in comfortably.¹

In the summer of 1921, when the Jelliffes went to
Europe as delegates to the Pan-African Congress, the fledg-
ling Dumas group had had no public performances yet. Their
few "apprentice" months under Rowena Jelliffe had been more
like a theatre workshop in nature, and it was Rose Griffiths
who led them to their first productions. Mrs. Jelliffe was
pleased that she had a Rose Griffiths to direct the group
in her temporary absence, for Miss Griffiths, since Sep-
tember, 1920, the settlement Girls' Worker, was young and
attractive, with a communicable exuberance,² and a recent
Ohio Wesleyan graduate with an English major and a Drama
minor. She had some social work experience (as a recreation

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
worker for the city); prior affection for the settlement clientele ("I got terrifically interested in them as a group. They were some of the grandest people I have ever known"); and best of all, experience and training in the drama—more than Mrs. Jelliffe herself had. All summer Rose Griffiths continued the groundwork activity Rowena Jelliffe had begun, and when the Jelliffes returned from their trip, and observed the success with which the group had met the new director, "we were as busy as could be with other things, so we let them go."2 "Them" refers to Miss Griffiths, of course, and Randall Ruhlman, Playhouse Settlement Boys' Worker, who had unofficially joined her in the work with the Dumas Club. "Mike" Ruhlman "shifted scenery, helped [stage] manage the show, business management, etc.," under Rose Griffiths' direction, and this theatre partnership led to their marriage, not long after their (separate) departures from Playhouse Settlement, in 1924.3

The first public production of the Dumas Club was THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE, a one-act by George Middleton, done at Central High School in the fall of 1921.4 It is a Russian play and

1Interview, April 24, 1961.


3Mr. and Mrs. Ruhlman, interview, April 24, 1961.

4Ibid. This debut play toured to Oberlin College for a single presentation there, setting a touring pattern—particularly to Oberlin—which was to be frequently repeated in future seasons.
provoked a mood that was very captivating to people . . . so that they knew this is a quality quite different from our own. We don't live in this quality. There was a sense of play literature and play production creating a feeling of another world.¹

This comment indicates a philosophy important to Rowena Jelliffe: good plays have a potential for lifting horizons, for demonstrating "what else was happening in the world at that time [of the play], what ideas were getting abroad in the world, what work did men do at that time, how did they play, etc.,"² in short—education. She has always considered content, substance, and the play's "way of looking at life" as important criteria for play selection.

Rose Griffiths' approach, however, was clearly a more popular one. Though her work with the players seems clearly to have been successful, she herself admits it was dramatics without a shaping philosophy: "I wish [I] could say something like that. [I] thought of them as just people with an enthusiasm for the theatre."³ When that enthusiasm got out of hand, and certain members of the group began to get over-eager and self-centered in regard to what Mrs. Jelliffe calls "the nasty little business of 'what part can I do in this play?'"⁴ rather than thinking

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.
²Rowena Jelliffe, "Children's Plays," 55.
³Mrs. Ruhlman, interview, April 24, 1961.
⁴Interview, March 15, 1961.
of the production and the attendant experience as a whole, Miss Griffiths ultimately released them. This decision seems to reveal Miss Griffiths' lack of a philosophy beyond theatre, a philosophy that might have channeled these disgruntled members back into the group.

Rose Griffiths' naïveté in racial matters has been noted,¹ and it seems confirmed by her feeling (at the time) that LITTLE STONE HOUSE was a good vehicle because it was Russian and "in a dim light and with heavy beard makeup--as if we were trying to overcome the Negro casting" (italics mine). She saw the error in this kind of thinking, and as time gave her greater sophistication, she was able to adjust,² though for most of her productions, she made the common mistake of some directors: repeating plays they had done earlier--in her case, at school or at the College Club, a club for women where she acted before joining the settlement staff. On looking over that portion of the cumulative list of plays produced³ relevant to her tenure, Mrs. Ruhlman remarked that "every single one of these was familiar to [her] before" she directed them at Playhouse Settlement.⁴

In the few months between the fall of 1921 and January, 1922, when the group assumed the name Gilpin Players, the Dumas Dramatic Club presented about seven or eight

¹Above, p. 55. ²Interview, April 24, 1961. ³Appendix I. ⁴Interview, April 24, 1961.
different one-act plays. The facts of production are largely undocumented, for no newspaper publicity was sought (as it was later by the Gilpins), and no programs have been found.¹

THE GOOD WOMAN, by Oliphant Downs, seems to have been the second play produced, this time at the East Tech school auditorium. Like many high schools it had "a great big barn of an auditorium and a huge stage."² The same playwright's THE MAKER OF DREAMS followed, at Longwood School. Other productions were by such authors as Frank G. Tompkins, Rachel L. Field, and Stuart Walker³ and, on occasion, a double or triple bill was presented.

Rose Griffiths Ruhlman, some forty years later, summed up the calibre of these productions: "I think the group had some real talent, and did these plays better than so many other groups that I had worked with would have."⁴ She recalled no special problems with her players, felt

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, in the March 15, 1961 interview, said she doubts "very much if we had early programs."
²Mr. and Mrs. Ruhlman, interview, April 24, 1961.
³See Appendix I.
⁴Interview, April 24, 1961. It should be noted that this observation applies as well to the ten or so new plays from January, 1922 to April, 1923 (when Miss Griffiths left)—after the group became the Gilpin Players and, by all accounts, had continued to grow in ability—and not merely to the first seven or eight productions.
that discipline was good, but that only about half of the members were "dedicated" (as opposed to being "social"), perhaps even fewer.¹

Rowena Jelliffe fought for greater dedication through her "extreme interest"² in the productions and through the constant use of discussions, and of playreadings beyond the plays produced, for there "wouldn't have been any carry-over if you had simply been putting on a play." She believed that "play judgment had to be built and laid down, and, in a sense, theatre [had to] become something more than a toy you played with. It was not just a leisure-time thing, but a serious area of literature, and an art [italics mine]."³

This is a philosophy that remains central to the Karamu Theatre. Rowena Jelliffe recognized the "social" threat, the frivolity that could sap a group's merit and purpose, and felt that it was somewhat reflected in the gayer kind of play Rose Griffiths was leaning toward, a preference that made the Dumas Dramatic Club just another little theatre group, with a play list that any other group might use. Also, such play selection would tend to encourage, rather than discourage, exhibitionism and injurious displays of temperament. In Mrs. Jelliffe's basic approach to the group "there was always the attempt to extend education to

¹Interview, April 24, 1961. ²Ibid. ³Interview, March 15, 1961.
those who didn't know what we were about, and there was always the struggle between having a good time and following along the main line.¹ This educational approach was served by the discussion groups and playreading groups, and was indicative of that gradually emerging shift in programming. These subsidiary groups were attempting to construct a firm philosophical foundation upon which the many productions to come might appropriately rest.

That philosophical foundation has endured. It has several important aspects, and a look at them now will help to clarify the historical development of the Karamu Theatre, and should act as a guide to greater understanding of its policy and purpose. There are three main concepts to consider: 1) the Negro and his unique relationship to the arts; 2) the appropriateness of a drama program to a settlement house—that is, the human values of theatre; and 3) the arts as a vehicle for fuller Negro participation in American life. All three of these notions did not develop at the same time nor to the same extent, and the following discussion does not mean to suggest that. They have in common two things: they had their beginnings in these early 1920's, and they remain, though in varying degrees, significant in the Karamu picture today.

The Jelliffes' discovery of superior talent in

¹Ibid.
Negro children, and their feeling that this latent dramatic ability could be tapped in adults as well, found considerable confirmation in the twenties. A distinct belief existed that the Negro's relationship to the arts was unique—a racial inheritance, as it were. One of the foremost spokesmen for this point of view, indeed for almost all serious points of view on the American Negro at this time, was Alain Locke. A Rhodes scholar and a serious student of the arts, Mr. Locke was the driving force behind the Negro Renaissance during the twenties, and responsible for the discovery of many talented Negro writers. He was the editor of a superb, influential anthology of race material, The New Negro,\(^1\) a Professor of Philosophy at Howard University, a voracious reader, and a prolific writer. Langston Hughes, who knew him personally, remembers him as "very influential on many young Negro intellectuals . . . very well known and highly respected and widely read."\(^2\) This capsule biography should justify the rather extensive use of Locke's writings now et passim.

In a lucid exposition of the "movement toward the Negro theatre," Locke declares that it must be "race-representative and race-supported," and that it must be thought of and must become "the best possible self-expression in an

\(^1\)New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925.
\(^2\)Interview, May 6, 1961.
art where we have a peculiar natural endowment [italics mine]."¹ He strikes the same note, amplified, in a later analysis of the Negro in relation to the American commercial theatre. Emphasizing that the Negro brings to drama temperament in acting rather than tradition, Locke characterizes Negro acting as follows:

Interpretative passion, dramatic spontaneity, the free use of the body and the voice as direct instruments of feeling [italics mine]; a control of body plastique that opens up the narrow diaphragm of fashionable acting and the conventional mannerisms of the stage.

......

Pantomime, that most essential and elemental of the dramatic arts is the natural FORTE of the Negro actor, and the use of the body and voice and facile control of posture and rhythm are almost as noteworthy in the average as in the exceptional artist. When it comes to the pure registration of the emotions, I question whether any body of actors, unless it be the Russians, can so completely be fear or joy or nonchalance or grief.²

In the same article, Locke concludes: "For however few there may be who possess it in high degree, it is racial, and is in a way unique."³

¹"Steps Toward the Negro Theatre," The Crisis, XXV, No. 2 (Dec., 1922), 66-68.


⁴Ibid., 116.
Even before the twenties, this racial point was being made in print. Robert Benchley (writing as a critic, not a humorist) praised the dress rehearsal of Ridgely Torrence's Three Plays for a Negro Theatre, writing: "In the Negro, there is a natural beauty of voice, a musical sense of rhythm, a plasticity of pose and emotional richness which can not be equalled in any other race [italics mine]."¹

The great American writer, James Weldon Johnson, for many years head of the Fisk University Philosophy Department, was for the Jelliffes "a real influence during the formative years," between 1915 and 1920,² and a man who, until his death in 1938, was both friend and adviser, helping them "to plan and think twenty-five years ahead."³ Mrs. Jelliffe thinks of him as "more important in a way than Alain Locke was, because of his cordial, more personal feelings." His importance lay partly in his function as a sounding board, fortifying the Jelliffes' belief that Negroes had a noteworthy creative capacity, and checking


²Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe often speak of 1915-1920 as "the floundering years," and describe them as "program-hunting years, when we were really measuring the creative capacity of our people and the qualities of their skills." (Interview, May 6, 1961.)

their early theories on programming that could give that capacity shape and facilitate the Negro's emergence as a contributing American group.¹ The Jelliffes were strengthened by Mr. Johnson's conviction of the "innate capacity" (italics mine) of the Negro to "see and reach for creative things."²

He was a man we enjoyed very much—a wonderful man. It was wonderful to talk with him about anything. But he was good enough to listen, to hear us lay down the things we were wondering about, to [hear us] ask: "Do you think this is in line with what you know to be the character and facilities of Negro peoples? Does this make sense for the future? Does this sound solidly conceived?"³

The feeling of extempore expressiveness as a Negro characteristic is carried beyond drama by Albert C. Barnes, the noted connoisseur and prominent collector of Negro art, when he says that the Negro "lives his poetry. It is a part of his life, not an embellishment laid on from without. When he comes to express his experience in words, the expression is as spontaneous, as harmonious, as full of personality as Life itself."⁴ Mr. Barnes' essay in The New

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¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.


⁴From an address to the Women's Faculty Club, Columbia University, March, 1926. Reprinted in part on a program for a Gilpin Players' special performance of Paul Green's THE NO 'COUNT BOY, May 25, 1926, as part of a section of notes, "The Negro in Drama."
Negro contains a good deal of discussion of this topic, of Negro gifts and Negro rhythms and the Negro's innate "racial" feel for poetry and music and self-expression.¹

Less restrained and scholarly, more a popular observer, George Tichenor² describes and lauds Negro performers, particularly those in vaudeville shows, as possessing "a quick animal vitality" (cf. the idea of "mournlessness" [above, p. 60] and "facile control of body and rhythm" [above, p. 74]) enlivening everything these actors attempt. He speaks of the "easy welling up of the soul" (cf. Locke's "pure registration of the emotions" [above, p. 74]); the "ease with which Negroes laugh" (cf. the "gift of laughter" Sherwood Anderson attributes to Negroes or Rowena Jelliffe's "they have the blessed capacity to laugh" [Sinclair, loc. cit.]); their "love of the grotesque" (cf. the superior ability of the Negro child to give himself to the world of make-believe [above, p. 60]). The community of thought here is nowhere more marked then in Tichenor's use of the descriptive phrase: "emotional tautness," which echoes and re-echoes Locke's "interpretative passion" and "dramatic spontaneity" (above, p. 74) and the Jelliffes' "emotional immediacy." (Interview, May 6, 1961.)

¹"Negro Art in America," 19-25.

That indefatigable chronicler of the theatre, Edith J. R. Isaacs, for a quarter-century (1919-1945) editor of Theatre Arts Magazine and author of The Negro in the American Theatre,¹ speaks in a more reasoned manner, and though she makes this same point in her book, qualifies it.

As a general rule there is no remark that is so disparaging to the Negro actor, singer, musician, as the one--often intended as a high compliment--that he is a natural born actor. . . . It is true that the Negro often carries with him, as gifts of race or environment [italics mine], an unfettered rhythmic sense, both in movement and speech, and a voice of more than ordinary range and flexibility. The impulse to dance and to sing as a group is strong both in his religious and his social traditions.²

Elsewhere, the Negro's success in the theatre is attributed to his seemingly instinctive acceptance of what Edith Isaacs calls "the intimate relationship between the arts."³

The Jelliffes value the thought more than the fact that some $10 to $25 a year comes to Karamu as a small percentage from the royalties of her book, and they emphatically count Edith J. R. Isaacs "a great supporter, friend, and adviser."⁴ It is certainly not surprising, then, to find them thus reflecting each other's theories, as the Jelliffes--in speaking of Negroes' "gifts in the realm of rhythm, a sense of form and color, a rather extraordinary

¹Major portions of the book made up the whole issue of Theatre Arts for August, 1942, which bore the same title.
²P. 79.
³Ibid., 70.
feeling for drama"¹–have reflected those of others who have influenced or corroborated their thinking. And this was all based on their observations "in the field," as it were, and it evolved gradually and with great affection, so that in 1933 Mrs. Jelliffe could describe—with what almost seems like a touch of envy—the Negro's skill at characterization thus: "[He] makes the little tracks along which he finds his way out so easily, so effortlessly, into the creating of another being."²

The second key concept: the pre-eminent appropriateness of a continuing, serious drama program in a settlement house framework, was joined to this belief in the Negro's natural feeling for the arts to provide the essence of the philosophical underpinning of Karamu's theatre. When the third essential is added,³ our clarifying look at this stage of the overall development will be complete.

Drama in settlement houses used to be just an activity, busy-work, on a par with making pot-holders, playing basketball, drawing pictures. Plays were often prepared for occasions: visits of dignitaries or holidays; there was no continuity of playmaking, no sound way of


²"Children's Plays," 54.

³Below, pp. 82-83.
tying the production to individual growth. A serious pro-
gram meant that drama had to better the participant, have
meaning for him, not merely keep him busy—it was education
through production. And it was education that would lift
horizons practically, intellectually, and socially.¹

Russell Jelliffe wrote of this kind of theatre that
it offers "individual expression and social experience as
well," that in addition to skills and interests, it could
provide a "new emotional experience which is, perhaps more
than anything else, the basis for widened tolerance." He
attacked the sporadic, "event-centered" approach to play
production, and stressed the need for continuity by urging
a view of theatre "not . . . [as] an occasional orgy but
. . . [as] a constant, steadily recurring experience."²

A corollary to this approach of education and "horizon-lifting" through production is a particular relation-
ship of the drama program to other activities of the settle-
ment house. Drama should be seen as the "focus of all the
other arts and crafts" in the program,³ as the "vitalizing
means of all the other inter-playing creative fields."⁴

¹For a fuller statement of this approach, see Ap-
pendix II, this writer's "The Human Values of Theatre,"
Nov. 21, 1960, an unpublished essay utilized by Karamu for
general public education on this principle. (Mimeographed,
in the Karamu files.)

²"Weaving a Minority Into the Major Pattern," Pro-
gressive Education, XII, No. 3 (March, 1935), 168-71.

³Rowena Jelliffe, "Children's Plays," 55.

The practice of play production, as all theatre workers know, requires a variety of creative art skills, and if properly and centrally placed in an arts program, drama activity can be the meeting point for all these arts and skills, as well as for "the life experiences and interests of its participants." ¹

It should be apparent that the approach must be a serious one. The high degree of socializing among the Dumas personnel was a weakness, and a good deal of thinking through and talking through took place in an attempt to purge these "social club" aspects.² Rowena Jelliffe recently coined a phrase which characterizes such a large part of both past and current theatre activity in the United States, that it seems valuable. In a panel discussion on community theatre she remarked: "So often theatre and the arts have been a pleasant periphery, and I would like to see some goals established that would make the arts more important, more central to our lives."³

The more serious the approach, the greater the degree of skill that develops. This often followed, even


²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.

³Lakewood Little Theatre, Lakewood, Ohio, April 17, 1961. Recorded and broadcast on Station KYW, Cleveland, April 30, 1961.
though the growth of the participant received greater emphasis than the accompanying skill; and the concepts which evolved at this time were clearly oriented in terms of the developing individual, with the aim of establishing "the individual’s confidence in himself by helping him discover his own creative powers."¹ In the deepest philosophic sense, this approach believes in "the infinite capacity of human beings given the opportunity and impetus to develop their powers."² And the Jelliffes were convinced that the release and direction of these energies and this talent could be the contribution of the arts center to the defeat of "the mass-minded man" who is "one of the results and bogeies of our rapid industrialization."³ When Rowena Jelliffe declares: "The everlasting 'battle' of education must go hand in hand with our kind of theatre,"⁴ the identification, the orientation, and the affiliation of Karamu become abundantly clear.

The third essential in this trio of conceptual bases should clearly reveal their interlocking nature. If the Negro has unique facility in the arts; and if the arts,

¹Mr. Jelliffe, quoted by Dilworth Lupton, Press, Nov. 4, 1942.

²Greetings by Lillie E. Peck (Secretary, National Federation of Settlements) at the 40th Anniversary of Karamu House, Nov. 5, 1955.

³Ibid. ⁴Interview, April 9, 1961.
in a community center program, focused in the drama, can truly free inhibited, unformed, individual creative capacity; then it follows that the Negro's fuller participation in the wider life around him can be achieved through these arts. The historical record through the years is full of references that reveal this aim, each reference adding to our assimilation and comprehension of the theme, and the frequency with which this note is struck reflecting its importance.¹

Art must serve Negro life as well as Negro talent served it. And no art is more capable of this service than drama . . . . Somehow the release of such self-expression always accompanies or heralds cultural and social maturity.²

Relating its largest single constituent group, the American Negro, to the life of its community and its nation as a whole . . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . rather than to divert them into the racial or national by-ways through which too much fine leadership is lost to American life.³

"To further the more complete functioning of the American colored people in the democratic life of the community and the nation as a whole, participating through the field of the arts."⁴

. . . by educating the Negro to become a positive, contributing element in our society.⁵

¹The personal importance to the Jelliffes of relating the Negro to the mainstream has already been noted. (See Ch. II, pp. 14, 16, 18, et passim.)


⁴Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," Press, May 7, 1940. The quotation is anonymous, but is presumably by the Jelliffes.

⁵Eugene F. Gleason, CPD, Dec. 1, 1940.
"make the Negro a functioning part of the democratic whole." 1

It is the story of the Negro told first of all to the Negro, and then through him to all the country. 2

... mature expression of the Negro artists' connection with the American art tradition and his desire to take his place in ... American culture ... evidence that the American Negro has a right to a place ... on the basis of artistic competency and insight into American life not inferior to the white artist. 3

... a policy which, if followed on a national scale, would end the cultural ostracism of the Negro. 4

The arts offer the Negro his best opportunity for self-realization and recognition in the American community. 5

A most graphic way to conclude the development of this third key concept is by the use of two statements, one long and one short. In the short one, Time magazine makes a characteristically succinct, somewhat oversimplified observation of the Jelliffes: "They soon decided

1Mrs. Jelliffe, quoted in Clintie Winfrey, Press, Feb. 26, 1942.

2Sinclair, loc. cit., 106.

3George Baer, The Daily Worker, Jan. 15, 1942. Mr. Baer's remarks were made in reviewing a New York exhibit of the work of Karamu House artists.

4James A. Porter, Modern Negro Art (New York: Dryden Press, 1943), 127. Like Mr. Baer's observation (above, n. 3), this is specifically art-oriented, rather than drama- or arts-oriented as are most of the earlier quotations, but all the more significant for arriving at a similar conclusion.

5John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, March 29, 1957. Mr. Beaufort is the Monitor's drama critic.
that 1) most Negroes are born artists, 2) in their art lies Negroes' best chance for winning a secure place in U.S. society." The long statement is by Rowena Jelliffe, and sums up the Karamu position with that sense of clarity and poetry which often typify her observations:

We came upon the Arts Program through a searching for a way by which the Negro could come to feel that his energies headed straight into the main stream of American living. He needed to escape the sense of separateness which is so wasteful to energy and initiative. So much of his living has gone on in the little eddies at the side of the stream. We were looking for a way of challenging and using his best, not his 8th, 9th, or 10th best, but his very best. And it had to be something real enough and challenging enough to make him feel that by use of it he became a participating part of his community.

The field of the arts was the place where prejudice was less of a handicap for the Negro in making his contribution.

The Negro had obvious creative talents, and in the twenties, America was just becoming aware of the fact that she hadn't a culture of her own and she decided that she would build one. Obviously, the Negro had much to offer in this structure.

And, too, it was a means of telling his story to America. It is not art for art's sake. It is art as it touches the lives of common people, and becomes a means of telling their sufferings, their joys, their yearnings, their aspirations. We see it as a means of enabling the Negro to tell his story, the truths about his own life. Indeed, we have come, through use of this program, to suspect that art forms may be the only way in which we really tell truths. [Italics mine.]

His contributions are recognized in this field. He has a sense of bringing something in hand and putting it before his community and saying, "This is mine, I bring this."

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1"Place of Enjoyment," Feb. 10, 1941, 43.
And that has become a keynote with us. We come to our community, not with one hand out asking for something, but with a gift in hand. The Arts Program enables us to be a part of the growing American culture.¹

¹Quoted in Bontemps and Conroy, op. cit., 211-12.
CHAPTER IV

THE GILPIN PLAYERS, I (1922-1927): "HOMELESS"

The saga of the Negro in the drama and the theatre is a fascinating one, with its roots--in that "growing American culture"--in the late eighteenth century. The road followed by him has been difficult, and the tragedy of his history is that, unlike the non-Negro performer, all of his successes remained perched on the rim of failure, and his progress and his image onstage were directly linked to the white man's notion of him offstage. This is still true today, though the image of the Negro has shifted--since the protest plays of the thirties and forties--from the demeaning stereotype which goes back almost two hundred years, to a more acceptable, more accurate depiction. A play like A RAISIN IN THE SUN may be the forerunner of still another, perhaps ultimate shift, to the representation of the Negro on a par with his white counterpart: as a human being, worthy of dramatic attention and analysis for the ways in which he is at once individualized and universalized, rather than for his symbolism and his exoticism.

The stage tradition of the singing and dancing Negro developed in the 1820's, was popularized through the
thirties and forties, and reached its true heyday in the years from 1850 to 1870. (In talking about the historical development of the minstrel show, one often loses sight of the fact that, as Professor Sterling A. Brown puts it: "Ethiopian minstrelsy was white masquerade; Negro performers were not allowed to appear in it until after the Civil War; it was composed by whites, acted and sung by whites in burnt cork, for white audiences."¹) These minstrel shows retained their popularity until well into the twentieth century, fortified by the vitality and talent of the Negroes who gradually took the form back from the whites (who had originally based it on the songs and dances of the plantation Negroes).

Minstrelsy segued into the Negro musical show early in the 1890's, and a whole generation of performers who had served an apprenticeship in the minstrel shows, became the song-and-dance men and the comedians of a new kind of Negro show. These productions, which gradually broke the minstrel pattern, emerged— in 1898 with Bob Cole's A TRIP TO COONTOWN and a few years later with Cole and Johnson's THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT and THE RED MOON—as Negro musicals with plots, and as true Negro operettas. Bob Cole was a well-educated, talented singer, dancer, actor, writer,

lyricist, composer, and director. J. Rosamond Johnson, to whose first-rate musical talent we owe many of the best versions of Negro spirituals, was the brother of James Weldon Johnson.\textsuperscript{1}

The Negro musical lay dormant in the 1910's, only to emerge in the twenties as the high-spirited revue, laced with jazz (SHUFFLE ALONG, 1921; LIZA, 1923; RUNNIN' WILD, 1923; THE CHOCOLATE DANDIES, 1924). The work of Egbert Austin (Bert) Williams bridged the hiatus. Apparently the Negro vaudeville world would have to be considered a success if it had never done anything but produce Bert Williams. The stories of him, as performer and as human being, are legion, and he was universally praised. The late Archie Bell, drama critic of the Cleveland News, said of him: "In poise and repose he could teach half of the actors on the American stage a valuable lesson,"\textsuperscript{2} and, judging by the record of Williams' praise, this was meant to be taken quite literally. William McDermott called him "a really great comedian, and possibly the best of his time. As a pantomimist, he was in a class with Charlie Chaplin, and he had more warmth."\textsuperscript{3} But beyond his personal

\textsuperscript{1} Isaacs, Negro in Amer. Thtr., 30-32. One of the leading performers of the Cole and Johnson Company, Arthur Talbot, who had played the lead in THE RED MOON, joined the acting group at Playhouse Settlement in 1924. (See below, pp. 149-50.)

\textsuperscript{2} Quoted in Gaz., Feb. 25, 1922. \textsuperscript{3} CPD, March 7, 1952.
talent is the contribution he and his shows made by providing training opportunities for many Negro performers, and charting the route from black-face minstrel to musical comedy to revue to Ziegfeld Follies, from the all-Negro theatre to the white theatre, setting high standards in his art and lessening discrimination for his race.  

This was the musical-theatre picture for the Negro in America up to the 1920's, the "back door," as Edmond Gagey describes it, through which Negro vaudeville entertainers like Bert Williams, Florence Mills, Josephine Baker, and, later, Bill Robinson and Ethel Waters reached Broadway. But what of the drama? The history here is thinner. Minor Negro characters appear in some of the pre- and post-revolutionary plays, and the comic stereotype of the Negro servant appears not long after and--unfortunately--long endures. James Hewlett's African Company performed Shakespeare and the classics in New York City as early as 1821, though not long enough to have any lasting influence except, perhaps, on one of its spectators, Ira Frederick Aldridge (1804-67). This man, whom Edith Isaacs calls "the most remarkable single figure in Negro theatre history," became

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1Isaacs, Negro in Amer. Thtr., 32-42.


3Negro in Amer. Thtr., 20.
known as the "Black" or "American" or "African" Roscius, and was "generally regarded as one of the finest actors of the day."¹ He was honored all over the Continent; "immensely popular in Germany, where he played in English with a supporting cast playing in German";² and seems best remembered for his favorite role, Othello, which he performed often to Edmund Kean's Iago. Aldridge has no important connection with American stage history, but his memory has animated Negro artists for a hundred years, and undoubtedly many more drama groups than the one in Cleveland which did so, took his name.³

In 1852, UNCLE TOM'S CABIN appeared, to remain the most popular play dealing with slavery. "From 1852 to 1931 it never left the American boards, and since then it has been revived".⁴ Slavery plays and plays with the "tragic mulatto stereotype"⁵--none of them well known except for Boucicault's THE OCTOROON (1859)--were the sum of the "Negro" drama for some seventy years, till the turn of the century, and the Negro roles were played by Negroes only in a handful of these productions. In 1910, Edward Sheldon's THE NIGGER was something of a landmark, but it too had no

¹Oxford Companion, 17. ²Ibid.
³Below, p. 104.
⁴Sterling Brown, Oxford Companion, 566.
⁵Ibid., 567.
Negroes in the cast, and few in its audience. Indeed, as Gagey observed:

Serious colored roles were habitually taken by white actors. As late as 1930, Daniel Reed's SCARLET SISTER MARY was played by a white cast in blackface, headed by none other than Ethel Barrymore.¹

"A turning point in Negro theatre history" came on April 5, 1917, with the presentation in New York of Ridgeley Torrence's Three Plays for a Negro Theatre.² This was a "first" for realism in the portrayal of Negro characters, by Negro actors, with Negro audiences who were truly welcome in the theatre. The three plays were THE RIDER OF DREAMS, a Negro folk comedy about a prototype dreamer and his long-suffering wife; GRANNY MAUMEE, a stark one-act play about an embittered blind mother, ready to use the voodoo from her royal African past against the white man who represents the mob which burned her son (this was to become the first Negro play presented by the Gilpin Players, but not until 1925³); and SIMON THE CYRENIAN, a ritualistic play about the black man who carried Christ's cross up the hill to Calvary. The critics were laudatory, and their reviews directly or indirectly noted Torrence's and the actors' achievement as giant steps beyond the minstrel, the burlesque, and the vaudeville of earlier Negro theatrical efforts.

¹Loc. cit. ²Isaacs, Negro in Amer. Thtr., 60. ³Below, pp. 120-21.
Three short years later, another significant chapter was added, as Eugene O'Neill's THE EMPEROR JONES was produced by the Provincetown Players, with Charles Gilpin in the title role. The portrait of Brutus Jones is often "recognized as Gilpin's contribution to the American theatre almost as much as it is O'Neill's,"¹ and since the path of Karamu's theatre touches the theatre mainstream through Charles Gilpin more closely than at any other point up to this time, a longer look at this actor seems warranted.

Charles Sidney Gilpin (1878-1930) sang and danced in music halls, toured as a minstrel, and performed with Bert Williams in his musical comedies. Lest this suggest an atypical continuity of employment for an actor, let it be clear that "there was not always theatre work for a Negro actor of his power and sometimes he worked for a printer or ran an elevator between theatre jobs."² The print shop work was a throwback to his youth, when at the age of fourteen he became an office boy and printer's devil with the Richmond (Virginia) Planet. Later, he moved to Philadelphia with his mother, and worked on the Standard Echo, but "prejudiced reporters refused to work with him and he lost his job," and sought employment in various printing offices.³

¹ Isaacs, Negro in Amer. Thtr., 63.
² Ibid., 61.
Show business followed—"years of obscure Negro stock playing" (as Alain Locke put it)—interspersed with jobs as an elevator operator or itinerant printer. Years later, in a talk to New York's Civic Club, referring to Ira Alaridge, who found his first fame abroad, "Gilpin told of his own early struggles for recognition, how theatrical agents had turned him away, again and again, and [how] he had worked as a Pullman porter between his attempts to get upon the stage." He toured Canada with the Canadian Jubilee Singers in 1904, and again in 1912, and liked the land and the people well enough to consider staying. "But before the final decision, Gilpin grew homesick for his own people and for the theatre, and he realized it was in the blood, never to be given up." In the years after his return to the United States, he made connections with two early Negro groups: the Fokin Players in Chicago and the important Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, where "in 1916 [he] became manager of the first all-Negro stock company." He knew both the blessing and the curse of stock: the variety of roles which exercised and enlarged acting range, and the frustration of stunted preparations for the grind of

1"Broadway and the Negro Drama," Theatre Arts, XXV, No. 10 (Oct., 1941), 745-50.

4Oxford Companion, 321.
week-in, week-out performances. He played in some Negro movies, he played the Reverend William Custis in John Drinkwater's ABRAHAM LINCOLN on Broadway, and he played and became one with Brutus Jones in O'Neill's tragedy.

Gilpin's success in this role was phenomenal. The play continued for three years, with occasional revivals before and after his retirement in 1926 and up to his death in 1930. Moss Hart quoted O'Neill as saying that "Gilpin was the only actor in any of his plays that realized fully [my] inner image of what the performance should be."\(^1\) Hart, who played Smithers to Gilpin's Jones for fifteen weeks in a 1925 revival, concurred in this estimate, asserting categorically that "Charles Gilpin was the greatest actor of his race," unlimited by his range, limited only by his race's opportunities in the theatre.\(^2\) The Oxford Companion entry describes him, quite simply, as "at once powerful, terrifying, and extremely moving" in the role.\(^3\)

But neither his success in the role, nor his subsequent fame could erase the inevitable theatre question: "What next?" Moss Hart recognized the problem when he wrote that "other than the Emperor Jones, there were no parts of any stature that ever came his way."\(^4\) He was

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\(^1\) Act One (New York: Random House, 1959), 96-104.

\(^2\) Ibid., 98.

\(^3\) Ibid., 98.

\(^4\) Ibid., 98.
somewhat the victim of his theatrical success, always thought of as the atavistic ex-porter, fully aware of the high probability of his never getting as good a role again. Rowena Jelliffe remembers that subsequent to his 1922 appearance in Cleveland in THE EMPEROR JONES and his memorable visit to the Dumas players' rehearsal hall on that trip, he never played the first-rate Cleveland theatres again. "It was a long step down for him to play these cheap, shoddy plays in second-rate vaudeville houses. He was, in a sense, demoted." These realizations, plus what Hart called "an already violent and hostile nature," may indeed have driven Gilpin to take "what refuge and solace he could find in alcohol," but no one could (and no one did) take his crown, and he "can never lose the laurels he has gained." Perhaps the last word should be from Alain Locke, whose astute observations on the Negro's past, present, and future in the arts in America, make such stimulating, illuminating reading.

Broadway has not built up as yet what is most essential for Negro drama—a plateau of sustained use and support of those Negro materials, human and

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1Gilpin meant and gave far more to drama at Karamu than his fame and his name, and that additional significance will be taken up later in this chapter.


4Ibid., 102, quoting the N. Y. World's review of the 1925 Gilpin-Hart revival.
dramatic, which, from time to time, it has so significantly revealed and so successfully exploited. Sporadic support and intermittent interest have thus wrought havoc with many of the best possibilities. Good, even great actors have gone to seed.¹ [Italics mine.]

With this view of the Negro in the theatre nationally, at the music-theatre and the drama levels, we now move to the Cleveland scene in the twenties, to complete the background against which we may view the Dumas Players and the Gilpin Players of Playhouse Settlement.

Irving M. Brown's history, "Cleveland Theatre in the Twenties," is a reliable guide, and indicates both the strengths and the weaknesses of Cleveland's (non-Negro) theatre in that decade. Measured against 1960, "we had more Broadway theatre coming to Cleveland than we can conceive of now."² Brown confirms this preponderance of activity between the seasons of 1919-20 and 1928-29,³ and the Shuberts praised Cleveland as a "good show town."⁴ The quantity, however, was somewhat misleading, for throughout the decade much evidence accumulated to the effect that Cleveland preferences were for vaudeville and farce,

¹"Broadway and Negro Drama," 745.
²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
³See his Table 2, 118.
⁴CNP, June 5, 1929. Quoted in I. M. Brown, op. cit., 69.
while worthwhile drama was "discouraged by empty seats."¹

Whatever the preferences in amateur drama, the cumulative evidence is that it too was booming. The Cleveland Year Book, 1922, which had deplored Cleveland tastes in professional theatre, saluted the extent of little theatre activity (attributing it to "a desire to play after strenuous days of war work").² This item is typical of many, and the Cleveland Year Book serves as a reasonably accurate index to this quantity of activity.³ In 1929, Kenneth McGowan, near the end of the nationwide survey that resulted in his Footlights Across America, told Clevelanders that their city "leads the country in dramatics."⁴

Did Clevelanders lead in the quality of their little theatre, too? It would be difficult for anyone to make such a sweeping assertion, and none could logically be expected.

¹CYB, 1922, 233. Also CYB, 1923, 153-54; CYB, 1924, 123; et al. By the end of the decade, the situation had not ameliorated: "The past year has demonstrated more than ever before that the Cleveland public cares a great deal for musical comedies, almost more so than they do for the more serious types of plays." [172 (italics mine).] See also I. M. Brown, op. cit., 121-22, et passim. Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, drawing on their memory of the period, disagree with the observation that serious drama was not well attended (interview, June 26, 1961).

²P. 235.

³See CYB, 1924, 124, which bears out the thesis for 1923 as well; and CYB, 1929, 173.

⁴CYB, 1929, 176.
The overall quality of the work of a large number of amateur groups is a very elusive thing to determine, and comparison between cities is, correspondingly, more difficult. In fact, there are those who minimize little theatre's concern for quality, asserting that activity is the desideratum, and should therefore be the yardstick for success. Despite these difficulties in assessing its quality, the amateur groups get generally high marks in Brown's survey, and his feeling that Cleveland can take obvious pride in both quantity and quality seems clear.¹

What is the background of Negro professional theatre? Needless to say, there was very little, for even nationally, Negro drama activities were not widespread in the twenties. Of antiquarian interest is the record of the first Negro entertainers in Cleveland, at the Star Theatre in September, 1893.² Of more pertinence are the Negro vaudeville troupes, films, and musical revues which played Cleveland with some frequency in the early twenties, generally at the Temple or Globe Theatres.³ But a more important development came in February, 1924, when the Lafayette Players of New York, starring Andrew S. Bishop and Cleo Desmond, and

¹See his Ch. VI, particularly 191-93; and Ch. VII ("Conclusions").
²Rose, op. cit., 548.
³ Gaz., passim 1919-24.
fresh from twenty weeks in Chicago, was engaged for an
indefinite period at the Globe. The pages of the Gazette,
the Negro weekly, tell the story thoroughly, through the
chauvinistic tone inspired by Editor Harry C. Smith,¹ and
a variety of advertising techniques.

There was snob appeal: "An innovation for our
people of Cleveland and one that ought to appeal in the
strongest possible manner to the intelligent, particularly."²
The educational-competitive approach: "The Gilpin Players,
The Vagabond Players, all our local dramatic organizations
and their many admirers cannot fail to be otherwise than
immensely interested in the coming of our most noted and
successful dramatic organization."³ The stern warning:
"It is up to the theatre-goers of this city as to how long
the Lafayette Players will remain."⁴ Sensationalism:

Girls: Do Not Face the World Blindly
Mothers:
Have You any Young Daughters
Learn What To Guard Against
Come and See
What Every Girl Should Know
Not a Moving Picture⁵

The outright threat: "Farewell Week! This is your last

¹Above, Ch. III, 38-39.
²Gaz., Feb. 2, 1924.
³Ibid.
⁴Gaz., Feb. 9, 1924. This from the company's
manager, Bob Davis.
⁵Gaz., Feb. 16, 1924. This in a variety of type
sizes.
opportunity of seeing . . . Lafayette Players in Cleveland, this season."¹ Pity: "The Management has gone to a great expense and has been able to induce the Lafayette Players to remain one more week. In order to do this, they were compelled to cancel an engagement in Philadelphia."² Race pride: "The Lafayette Players as an organization, is a race asset, something we are proud of, something all who believe in promoting racial progress along all proper lines, will delight in seeing and hearing."³ The plays sold by these varied approaches were THE WICKED HOUSE OF DAVID, OVER THE HILL (TO THE POORHOUSE), WHAT EVERY GIRL SHOULD KNOW, A WOMAN'S CHOICE, and WHY WIVES GO AWAY ("Thrilling beyond Anticipation, A Surprising Solution to Age Old Problem in Four Acts"⁴)

The vaudeville shows, revues, and musical comedies whose names sprinkle the newspaper advertisements (IN BAMVILLE, STEPPIN' OUT, RUNNIN' WILD, AFRICANA, et al) seem to have had steadier patronage than even the most popular of the Lafayette Players' popular repertoire. But there was also a limited amateur theatre activity which occupied portions of the Negro community, beyond the work of the Dumas-Gilpin players, and it should be reviewed.

¹ Gaz., Feb. 23, 1924. ² Ibid. ³ Gaz., June 7, 1924. ⁴ Ibid.
Perhaps the most durable of these groups in the twenties was the Vagabond Players, and it seems to have existed for only a little over one year. Although it was mentioned in a newspaper item with the Gilpin Players early in 1924,¹ (which suggests equivalence), no further items appear (which suggests dissolution). It seemed a true community group, and its professed aim was "self-development through study and the production of dramas," and the "starting of plans for a little theatre."² The first production of the Vagabond Players was directed by Joseph Findley, Jr., who headed the group and starred in three out of its four debut plays. (His brother Lawrence starred in the fourth.)³

The implication that Joseph Findley, Jr. organized this drama group out of his desire to act—even star—in its productions is present, and is corroborated by Gazette items that he starred in two out of three one-acts at Central High School,⁴ and repeated LITTLE ITALY, his earlier vehicle, on at least one more occasion.⁵ This notion is more firmly substantiated by the relevant fact that Mr. Findley was the key figure of the dissident group asked to withdraw from Dumas activity by Miss Rose Griffiths for

thinking about what roles they could capture, rather than cooperating with the group in concern for the production as a whole.¹

The first mention of the Charity Players is late in 1923, when it presented a bill of three one-acts at Central High² (thus following the pattern of all the amateur drama groups in their use of one-acts and school auditoriums; other musical groups and social clubs seemed to prefer "epics" and church halls or the Y.M.C.A.). These one-acts were directed by Arthur L. Spencer, who was also associated with the Gilpin Players. He too had been a professional trouper, though not of the same type or standard as Arthur Talbot,³ and Mrs. Jelliffe considered him a "good ham actor." She recalls that he brought some "professional" practices with him to the group which irritated some of the members (the "know-it-all" gambit and the refusal to "give" until performance time), and he had no

¹Above, Ch. III, 68-69. There were three Findley brothers: Joseph, Ralph, and Lawrence, all members of the original Dumas group. Ralph and Lawrence were star scholastic debaters, and Mr. Ralph Findley is today "the first Negro in the history of Cleveland to serve as president of the Cleveland Board of Education." (Focus Magazine, Cleveland: Gillespie and Associates, 1960), n.p. Lawrence Findley was an actor and the business manager of Vagabond Players. Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe remember that despite the rupture, which led Joseph, Jr. to form his own group, future relations were friendly. (Interviews, March 15 and April 10, 1961.)

²Gaz., Dec. 8, 1923. ³Above, p. 69, n.1.
particular philosophy except that doing plays was fun. His talent and his sense of humor helped assuage the difficulty of his reluctance to rehearse properly and to take the philosophical discussions of the Gilpin Players seriously.¹

The Phillis Wheatley Association, a residence for young Negro women, has sponsored dramatic activity from the mid-thirties on. It was there in 1935 that the Aldridge Players² first began their activity, and although there were many directors within a relatively short span of time, the play selection and the endurance suggest a group of some substance and seriousness.³

Other scattered references to miscellaneous groups exist, none of much significance except as a contrast to the more serious, more permanent, better-organized Playhouse Settlement group. The Cleveland Association of Colored Men, the Council of Women, and any number of churches and social clubs sponsored productions, but not organizations. Only one such item seems worth quoting, and that with tongue in cheek:

The Shakespearean Dramatic Club of Gethsemane Baptist Church, presented "Julius Caesar" at the Church, E. 30th St. and Scovill Ave., Thursday

¹Interview, April 10, 1961. ²Above, p. 91.
evening. J. D. Smart, director . . . A. P. Turner 
dramatized the play.\(^1\) (Italics mine.)

Dramatics at the other settlement houses has been 
reviewed,\(^2\) and very little of that activity touched the 
Negro community. First of all, Negroes were not welcome at 
most of the settlement houses (despite the Jelliffes' ef-
forts in that direction), even some in or near mixed neigh-
borhoods. Spokesmen for Goodrich House and Hiram House, 
for example, felt that admitting Negroes to membership 
would lower the standards of their institutions, and these 
well-meaning administrators would refer their Negro appli-
cants to Playhouse Settlement, consciously or unconscien-
tly perpetuating segregation. The Y.M.C.A. would recruit 
in the settlement area, "coming down 37th and 38th and 
39th Streets and take every white boy off the street, out 
of Karamu, into their program--but none of the Negroes."\(^3\)
These attitudes hardened the Jelliffes' determination to 
make their integrated program superior, and in theatre they 
were very soon successful. There were exchanges of produc-
tions between the settlement and the other groups,\(^4\) afford-
ing Negroes and whites temporary glimpses of each other

\(^1\)Gaz., Sept. 2, 1922.
\(^2\)Above, Ch. III, pp. 61-64.
\(^3\)Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.
\(^4\)Above, Ch. III, p. 63.
and their drama work, but little else by way of audience traffic. When Hiram House presented an operetta, LITTLE ALMOND EYES, as part of its twenty-fifth anniversary celebration, the Gazette's appeal to its readers reflected that lack of contact between the racial groups involved: "Our mothers, fathers and friends are most cordially invited to attend and ought to frequent Hiram House far more than they do. It is for ALL people of the neighborhood."¹

Into this kind of background for Negro theatre in Cleveland came Charles Gilpin in THE EMPEROR JONES. His personal triumph in the title part established beyond question, the role of the play and the playwright in the drama of world theatre clearly set forth, the engagement at the Shubert-Colonial Theatre should have been warmly welcomed and well attended by all. But, instead, Gilpin "came to a completely hostile Negro Cleveland,"² and the local Negro press, which had hailed him ten months earlier for his selection by the New York Drama League as one of the stage's ten outstanding performers,³ helped pave the way for this hostility.

A writer in the N.Y. Negro World calls attention to the fact that Charles Gilpin's play, EMPEROR JONES, is very harmful to our people and says that

¹April 16, 1921.
²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
³Gaz., March 12, 1921.
it leaves an impression that the prejudiced South is promoting in various other ways. It is on the order of THE BIRTH OF A NATION so far as the impression referred to is concerned. This is certainly to be regretted, if true.¹

When Editor Smith reviewed the production, he struck the balanced note that had already been sounded throughout the Negro community nationally: praise for Gilpin, damnation for the play.² Eight months later, on the play's third national tour, the editor still editorialized:

While it is a splendid vehicle in which to display his wonderful talent as an actor, the play itself is harmful to the race, we are sorry to say. It is a pity that Mr. Gilpin cannot be starred in something helpful to our people.³

Fearing the worst from the press accounts, violently opposed to any notion that Negro theatre "must be in part associated with African tradition,"⁴ and rebelling even now at UNCLE TOM'S CABIN and the minstrel shows, those Negroes who went to the Shubert-Colonial "went to disapprove. And they came away disapproving."⁵ Many, many more simply stayed away.

But not all stayed away, and not all disapproved. Many Playhouse Settlement actors were among the Negroes who

¹Gaz., April 9, 1921. ²Gaz., Jan. 21, 1922.
³April 22, 1922.
⁴Locke, "Negro and American Stage," 119.
⁵Mrs. Jalliffe, interview, April 10, 1961. Prof. S. A. Brown has noted that "the end of [minstrelsy] came during the second decade of the twentieth century" (Oxford Companion, 566).
went. Hazel Mountain Walker went and was "impressed by [Gilpin's] personality and his achievement, and thought it was worthwhile."¹ Elmer Cheeks went--"nothing ever came here that Elmer Cheeks did not see"²; Arthur Talbot, with his acting background and his seriousness about his craft, went, as did Olive Hale, Rose Griffiths, Randall Ruhlman, and the Jelliffes. And, of course, there were others.

They went because they knew and loved theatre well; to show their "appreciation of [Gilpin's] great art by attending this play,"³ as the ads requested they do; "if for no other purpose than to encourage our one actor, in this day and time, who has 'broken the ice in the legitimate.'"⁴ They went to see a great performer who was at the same time a thoughtful human being, a man who had concerned himself that the "Negro should have justice and opportunity; education for advancement; a voice in the law and disposition of his taxes."⁵ In the light of the Karamu practice and philosophy, they went to see a kindred spirit:

[Gilpin] made a charitable interpretation of the racial attitude toward the Negro in America, and made an appeal for a better understanding of [the Negro] so that he could be of the greatest service to the

¹Mrs. Walker, interview, April 20, 1961.
²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
³Gaz., Jan. 21, 1922. ⁴Ibid.
⁵Gaz., Jan. 14, 1922.
country, and the country could avail itself of his natural talents. [Italics mine.] The greatest handicap of the Negro in America... is the ignorance on the part of the remainder of the people of the great possibilities of the colored race.¹

Although they (and Gilpin) were aware that controversy over his play meant controversy over the man, Mrs. Ruhlman and the Dumas players stopped backstage at his dressing room and invited a "very gracious" Charles Gilpin to visit the Dumas group in rehearsal.² (They were then working on WOLVES, by John Joy Bell, at the Bohemian Hall, 8808 Quincy Avenue.) Gilpin accepted the invitation, and as Rowena Jelliffe, who was present when he arrived, recalls it:

He came into our group with no apologies for the part he was playing, but assumed that it was a tremendous privilege to play it. Something of his not attempting to explain it, or apologize, but simply assuming that this was a great privilege for which he could never be grateful enough to O'Neill, had a great influence on our group. Even those who had been very hostile to him.³

What Gilpin said to the Dumas Dramatic Club that night, after Mrs. Jelliffe called him forward to speak, is a cherished part of Karamu Theatre history. There were no tape recorders, and no one wrote them down, but his words on that memorable visit had far-reaching consequences, and

¹Gaz., March 12, 1921, quoting a March 7 N. Y. story reporting Gilpin's address to the Civic Club.

²Mr. and Mrs. Ruhlman, interview, April 24, 1961.

³Interview, April 10, 1961.
are quite as vivid today as they must have been to that
handful of theatre pioneers in their dingy rehearsal hall.
What follows is, of course, a reconstruction, based on one
source¹ which, in turn, was based on many others: the col-
lective memories of witnesses who were present.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I feel tonight like
the postman that goes for a walk, coming to see a
play after working in the theatre. It was a good
play, and you had a lot of fun doing it. I'm sure
everybody agrees that dramatics are fine and healthy
and enjoyable. But I say, what about it? All over
the country there are little groups like yours, put-
ting on plays and having fun at it.

It seems there are more important things to be
done. Many of you here tonight are Negroes. Where
else in the country can you get up on a stage and
be actors? I ran elevators and swept floors for years
before I got a chance to go into vaudeville as a song-
and-dance man. After more years Mr. O'Neill finally
wrote a play for a Negro, and I got a chance to do
what I had wanted to do all my life. But where could
I act before and where will I act afterward? There
just aren't any theatres where a Negro can learn the
acting trade nor are there any where the Negro story
can be told from the stage.

Tonight you had a good time acting in a play, but
you have an opportunity here to build a real theatre,
an important theatre, the like of which has never been
seen. Why don't you do it?

Look here, you're just fooling. Why don't you
take yourselves seriously and really do something
about it? You can make this a real Negro theatre,
maybe the best in the world. You could do it. If
there aren't any plays get somebody to write them for

¹"The Story of Karamu," a radio script for "Ohio
Story" written by Frank Seidel, based on materials supplied
by the Jelliffes, and broadcast on Jan. 24, 1949, as part
of a Karamu fund-raising drive. Mr. Seidel remembers the
script well, and tells me that it was authenticated and en-
dorsed for school use by the Ohio State Historical Society,
Columbus, Ohio, Dr. O. W. Marsh, (former) Director. (Telephone
interview, June 12, 1961.)
you. Within your bodies and souls lie the immense possibilities of your race, and it is up to you to make successes of everything you essay. Learn to see the drama in your own lives, ape no one, and some day the world will come to see you.

Charles Gilpin then put $50 on the apron of the old stage, and added: "This is to say that I believe in your future," and left Bohemian Hall and the Dumas Club. An animated discussion followed, and it seems safe to say that the supporters of the Negro content play (which others classed with the objectionable minstrel shows) gained adherents that night. Gilpin's "quiet personality rather than his reputation"¹ (Moss Hart on another occasion observed that "he did not permit himself the self-indulgence of showing off, as well he might have done"²), and his $50 gift at a time when a $50 gift wasn't being flung around,"³ were powerful persuaders. Rowena Jelliffe feels certain that "the tremendous respect that they had for that instant of him, . . . went a long way toward erasing the hostility they had felt when they saw him play his role."⁴ The thrilled players hosted Gilpin at a dinner party at the Cedar Avenue branch of the Y.M.C.A. the next night,

³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
⁴Ibid.
after additional discussion and debate, elected to rename themselves the Gilpin Players in his honor. And thus, a new chapter began.

"The name changed overnight, but we didn't change overnight."¹ In this way Mrs. Jelliffe pointed out that the Gilpin visit had short range and long range implications. The group continued doing the standard little theatre plays, the "white" plays, with which it had begun its life: THURSDAY EVENING (Christopher Morley), THE FAMILY EXIT (Lawrence Langner), THE GHOST STORY (Booth Tarkington), SUPPRESSED DESIRES (Glaspell and Cook), and others like them. But the sympathetic regard for the Negro play was growing, stimulated by Gilpin's precept to "learn to see the drama in your own lives." It ultimately took three seasons to overcome the group's indignation "at the very suggestion of doing a Negro play,"² but it was clear that Gilpin's signal visit "crystallized the feeling" on this point, and catalyzed the progress towards the Gilpin Players' "reliance for play material . . . upon their own racial heritage."³

¹Ibid.

²[W. E. B. DuBois], "The Gilpin Players of Cleveland," Crisis, XXXVII, No. 6 (June, 1930), 192. This article is based largely on a letter written by Mrs. Jelliffe to the Editor, large portions of which are quoted.

³E. M. S., C. S. Monitor, Jan. 23, 1932. Charles Gilpin never returned to his namesake troupe, but both maintained contact through an exchange of letters, clippings, programs, and photographs, and the players never forgot him. Today, an impressive portrait of Charles Gilpin, based largely on those photos, hangs in Karamu's Green Room.
Despite the boost in morale through Gilpin's appearance, the sailing for the players was far from smooth. There was opposition to them from a variety of sources, opposition which—albeit in certain of its forms—continues even today. Much of it related to the question: "The Negro play—To do or not to do?"—but there was some on other grounds, too. In an attempt to understand the forces that helped shape them, we must review the sources both of opposition and support for the Gilpin Players.

The concept of the church as mother to drama is as old as drama, and has relevance to Karamu's history in the light of the role of the Second Presbyterian.\(^1\) But religion also plays a traditional historical role in its opposition to drama and theatre, and it is this aspect that somewhat affected the Gilpin Players. Many of the members were active church members, and in some of their churches, though there was no overt hostility, there was a lingering feeling that the theatre was "of the devil." What church antagonism there was grew slowly in proportion as the Negro play policy developed, and preachments against "Karamu's policy of Sunday performances, its dance groups, its Saturday night dances for members, etc."\(^2\) were heard, primarily in the "smaller Baptist churches."\(^3\)

\(^{1}\text{Above, Ch. III, pp. 25-28.}\)

\(^{2}\text{Palva, op. cit., 46, quoting Mrs. Jelliffe, who goes on to suggest that the lag in Negro theatre-going may, in part, be attributed to church disapproval.}\)

\(^{3}\text{Mrs. Walker, interview, April 20, 1961.}\)
(Whatever the somewhat elusive nature of these "Christian" objections to theatre, they lack the directness and the flavor of Harriet Beecher Stowe's nineteenth century example, reprinted on the Karamu Theatre program for the Gilpin Players' February, 1937 production of FRESH OUT O' HEAVEN, a modern reworking of UNCLE TOM'S CABIN:

It is thought, with the present state of theatrical performances in this country, that any attempt on the part of Christians to identify themselves with them will be productive of danger to the individual character, and to the general cause. If the barrier which now keeps young people of Christian families from theatrical entertainments is once broken down by the introduction of respectable and moral plays, they will then be open to all the temptations of those who are not such, as there will be, as the world now is, five bad plays to one good.1)

A second form of opposition sprang from the view: "Art butters no bread," and theatre is no exception. "Practical" programming was useful: sewing, pottery-making, weaving--one could see and touch their results. But a program centered in the creative arts was "artsy-craftsy" or "fancy work." This was a serious form of opposition, and its philosophical base remains a threat to Karamu's kind of program. Many well-meaning individuals who support settlement houses and settlement house programs balk at aiding theatre, or the arts, as if they are, somehow, of less worth because they are less vocational. The Jelliffes,

1Letter to one Asa Hutchinson in 1852, replying to his request to dramatize UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.
only too well aware that Community Chest money supports a portion of the budget of Karamu House, but none of the Karamu Theatre budget, have often concerned themselves with what they feel to be this false polarity. When asked to comment on Irving Brown's observation that Clevelanders in the twenties made no objection to the use of city funds or welfare funds to support drama activities on playgrounds or at community centers,¹ Rowena Jelliffe pointed out that that support was continued only in the context of welfare, and not when the activity was conceived as education and arts-training. Drama programs of the simple activity or "club" nature at other settlement houses in Cleveland are supported by Welfare Federation funds today.

There is a second aspect to this form of opposition, a subtle form of denigration practiced by both the conscious and unconscious opponents of Negro progress. Deliberate antagonism to "giving" Negroes something as fine as an arts program, to bettering their lot, is rarer today than in the 1920's, but it existed. The unconscious form of discrimination was more widespread, however, and it was almost always expressed by insisting that training for Negroes be in manual, practical, utilitarian pursuits. "Why don't you teach these people how to make furniture out of barrel staves instead of doing this theatre work,"

was the way one woman put it to the Jelliffees. And there were others who saw no purpose in exposing the Negro to activity that would give personal "impetus, or that kindled ambition, or that carried the mind along, or related in whatever way to creativity."¹ This form of opposition, like that of other settlements to accept Negroes, had only one effect on the Jelliffees: it increased their determination to succeed in their arts-oriented program, to find out whether it, indeed, could do more than the orthodox settlement house approach.

The Negro press offered some indirect resistance in this period, with a notable exception, Ormond Forte.² There was cooperation on the occasional theatre announcements that begin to appear in print in the mid-twenties, but not much understanding of the uses to which a successful theatre program might be put, to the human values of drama. Perhaps this was too much to expect, this early, and from newspapers whose chief concern was to stay alive in the dog-eat-dog competition which characterized the field.³ Mrs. Walker remembers distinctly that "the Negro newspapers had not been too kind." She too excepts Mr. Forte, pointing to his superior education and background,

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
²Below, pp. 129-30.
³Above, Ch. III, p. 38.
to his intellectualism, and implying that affection for and knowledge of the theatre was simply beyond the grasp of most of the other newspapermen.\footnote{Interview, April 20, 1961.}

Of course, the chief target of their spleen was the Negro play. It is interesting to speculate how much sooner the Gilpins might have embarked on their rewarding course into Negro content drama, if the press reaction had been enlightened. Failure to differentiate between the minstrel shows and O'Neill's early offerings, or many of the sincere, serious Negro folk plays, led to an uncritical condemnation of all. In 1924, the \textit{Gazette} could still editorially declare:

Both of Eugene O'Neill's plays, "The Emperor Jones" and "All God's Chillun Got Wings," and "Welded," were built for the purpose of increasing prejudice against our race. "To show the demoralizing consequences of the marriage of a white and black" and to "present an argument against miscegenation," in the most public manner possible, is the way one leading reviewer of the plays puts it. And yet you can find "Negroes" who praise these plays! \textit{Lord, have mercy!} The value of the plays as artistic efforts, on the part of both author and actors, pales into insignificance, as far as we are concerned, when the harm their presentation does the race is taken into consideration. Then, too, from our standpoint what "demoralizing consequences" result from the "marriage of white and black"? NONE! From the prejudiced white man's standpoint, there is at least one and that is miscegenation strikes a body blow at prejudice, the STRONGEST prejudice, too. Too bad, isn't it?\footnote{May 31, 1924. Repeated on June 7.}

Months later, Editor Smith labored again, and brought
forth EMPEROR JONES, ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS and WHITE CARGO (sic) as

three of the worst prejudice-breeding plays to ever have been foisted upon a long suffering public . . . . Strange that some of our people fail to see this.¹

"When you're climbing a ladder, you don't like to look back until you're at the top."² This philosophy, smacking paradoxically of both meritorious single-mindedness and a reprehensible lack of historical sense and perspective, is a capsule form of the opposition from the Negro audiences. It was an objection to looking back at African origins, at spirituals and slavery, at dialect and degradation, at the meanness of their Southern life, or even at the reality of present-day Northern Negro life, which was far from perfect, far from pretty. The aim and attitude of the drama, the theme, did not seem to matter if it conjured bad memories or unpleasant associations or the primitive past--particularly if it did these things in dialect. Ridgely Torrence, writing years after these mid-twenties, testified that the problem continued unchanged:

In their choice of plays for presentation drama directors in some of the Negro colleges find

¹Nov. 22, 1924.

²This observation was made to me by a well-educated, civic-minded, Negro woman in discussing her objection to Karamu's presenting MR. JOHNSON, the Norman Rosten dramatization of Joyce Cary's novel, in 1956.
themselves greatly restricted by the character of their publics. Not only must they consider the prejudices of the local population, both white and colored, but also they are often hampered by the conventionality and timidity of their own trustees and other authorities.

In addition there is among some audiences in such localities a great reluctance to see or hear certain aspects of reality concerning their own lives. Many of them do not wish to see the Negro in his racial distinction presented at all on the stage. They prefer to see him only playing the part of a white man in classic plays. Others prefer to see him presented only as a hero. The existence of such a psychology reveals, of course, the deep necessity for the very kind of education the theatre affords.¹

Alain Locke, reporting on the struggles of Howard University's Drama Club, and their years of "progressions" upward in various areas of theatre activity, declared: "Hardest of all progressions, strange to relate, [is] that from distant and alien themes to the intimate, native and racial."²

The French say: "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner," though understanding this Negro attitude should, ideally, lead us to a more constructive and less condescending act than merely pardoning it. Mrs. Jelliffe's understanding and recognition that Negro children had the gift of (theatre) imagination³ led her to action; Abram Hill


³Above, Ch. III, pp. 59-60.
and the American Negro Theatre tried to present a true concept of Negro life on the stage because of their understanding and recognition of why some Negroes shunned all Negro plays:

With few exceptions, plays about Negroes have been two grades above the minstrel stage—the cork is missing but the spirit is there. This has created an apathy on the part of the Negro, who is averse to patronizing the theatre which reveals him as a happy-go-lucky race in rompers.¹

GRANNY MAUMEE, one of Torrence's Three Plays, was the first Negro content play performed by the Gilpin Players. The date was January 20, 1925, four years after Gilpin's visit, and still the Negroes who participated were subject to criticism from other Negroes.² Still "in the minds of the group itself there was a stern opposition which said, in part, 'The Negro play represents everything we want to forget!'"³ Hazel M. Walker, who played with great pride the title role in this powerful one-acter, remembered some of the difficulties surrounding the production: rehearsals, not in one, but in various school buildings, poor stage equipment, difficulties with properties, and a hostile audience: "I was almost laughed out of

¹Quoted in Claire Leonard, "The American Negro Theatre," Theatre Arts, XXVIII, No. 7 (July, 1944), 422.

²Just as Irish audiences pelted Irish actors when the Abbey Players mounted their realistic dramas of "shift and shebeen."

³Poulson, loc. cit., 11-12.
court. I have never seen an audience like that. It was a mixed audience, but it seemed that the Negroes came to make it difficult for me."¹ There was both praise and damnation for GRANNY MAUMEE, but for Rowena Jelliffe, for whom the play meant the beginning of a phase for which she had long quietly agitated, "the praise rang more lively."²

Still another source of "damnation" should be obvious. The Jelliffes were strangers in the neighborhood, and strangers are suspect. "There is a doubt. What are they doing here? Why are they here? Here are two young, fine-looking, intelligent white people who have come into our midst. What's their racket?"³ Arthur Spaeth, former drama critic for the Cleveland News, lived in the neighborhood, and participated in Playhouse Settlement activities, and he recalls that the Jelliffes "were met with suspicion, resistance, and even moments of threatened violence . . . . Had there been the faintest flaw of uncertainty in the integrity of character or purpose they would have been finished before they had begun . . . .⁴

¹Interview, April 20, 1961.

²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.

³Mrs. Walker, interview, April 10, 1961. The Jelliffes feel that this particular reaction to them did not endure beyond 1918. They recall suspicion of this variety: "Look out for them, they're just going to write a book and go away [interview, June 26, 1961]."

Whites "doing good" for Negroes usually led to all-Negro institutions, and it is quite obvious that "many scented segregation in its activities when the institution [Playhouse Settlement] was started in 1915."\(^1\) The whole approach of Ormond Forte's CINDERELLA "review" indicates his pleasure at finding the play and Playhouse Settlement well integrated, and he refers to "colored persons who were convinced [Jelliffe] had come to destroy their cherished traditions with a jim-crow playhouse."\(^2\) And the corollary to this fear of segregation is, of course, resistance to integration. Despite the liberalism of Cleveland, there were (and are) many who oppose the racial theories represented by Karamu, and these people "ostracized" the Jelliffes and "persecuted them because of their beliefs."\(^3\)

In addition to the debate within the Gilpin Players on the question of the Negro play, and the use of dialect, there was an added, extremely subtle, kind of "drag" which—if it was not actually opposition—served to slow the group's forward progress. Some of the members were inimical to the settlement house context, for this meant "welfare," and

\(^1\)The Cleveland Call, Feb. 24, 1923. This newspaper began publication in Feb., 1921 and became the Call and Post in 1932. No files are available.

\(^2\)The Cleveland Advocate, Feb. 22, 1917. See above, Ch. III, pp. 53-54.

\(^3\)Mrs. Walker, interview, April 20, 1961.
"welfare" meant the rubber stamp of "lower class." Mrs. Jelliffe remembers that some members were at pains that their names appear only in theatre records, not elsewhere in the settlement house files. There must have been some imperceptible friction as the group widened its membership, too, between the various social classes represented. If "friction" is too strong a word, "patronizing" may better describe these class feelings.\(^1\) Today, many observers find that Karamu's cutting across social and economic lines in the community is almost as significant an asset as its interracial nature. Subtler still was the derogation involved in the terms "Uncle Tom," or "W.M.N." (White Man's Negro), applied to Negroes who were, in the opinion of a hostile few, too close to or too cooperative with the white staff members. When present, this was an "undercurrent thing, never overt."\(^2\)

Lest all this opposition seem insurmountable, remember that there were powerful sources of support, too, national as well as local. A review of some of these sources provides a balanced perspective of the forces affecting the fortunes of the Gilpin Players in these formative twenties.

The frequency with which Alain Locke's name appears

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\(^1\) Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.

\(^2\) Mr. Ruhlman, interview, April 24, 1961.
in this history testifies to his importance, but the significance of his support is nowhere more graphic than in that portion of his "Steps Toward the Negro Theatre" where he writes of a Negro artistic center

where all phases vital to the art of the theatre are cultivated and taught—acting, playwriting, scenic design and construction, scenic production and staging. A center with this purpose and function must ultimately be founded. It is only a question of when, how and where.2

Then, in a brilliant concluding paragraph, he compares music, where Negro progress had been far more extensive, with the drama, and analyzes their relative potential for Negro good.

Music, in which we have so trusted, may sing itself around the world, but it does not carry ideas, the vehicle of human understanding and respect; it may pierce the heart, but does not penetrate the mind. But here in the glass of this incomparable art [Drama] there is, for ourselves and for the world, that which shall reveal us beyond all propaganda on the one side, and libel on the other, more subtly and deeply than self-praise and to the confusion of subsidized self-caricature and ridicule. "I saw Othello's visage in his mind," says Desdemona explaining her love and respect; so might, so must the world of Othello's mind be put artistically to speech and action.3

The encouragement and stimulation which Locke's writings provided for the like-minded in Cleveland must

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1 Above, Ch. III, pp. 73-75, et passim.

2 P. 66.

3 Ibid., 68. The "Othello" reference may have been prompted by Stratford-on-Avon, where Locke wrote this essay on Aug. 5, 1922.
have been great. Because of his reputation nationally, and his scholarship, he was the fountainhead for information on the emergence of Negro theatre activity, and he brought each group to the attention of the others, like reinforcements for beleaguered troupes: the Hapgood Players (1917-18); the Horizon Guild (1920); Howard Players (1921-24); The Ethiopian Art Theatre (Chicago, 1923); The National Ethiopian Art Theatre (Harlem, 1925); and others. He was realistic enough to see that these "projects" ultimately collapsed because they lacked "an adequate and competent repertory,"¹ but he had the discipline to insist that Negro dramatists develop self-criticism and (racial) objectivity lest they turn out a flood of second-rate plays.

Locke was not completely correct in his prediction that Negro drama would grow along poetic, symbolic, "peasant" lines (à la Synge),² since except for the work of Paul Green (a white playwright), the drama of the urban Negro soon dominated the field. However, he was not only correct, but a prophet as well for Karamu and the Jelliffes when he saw drama as a way to break down "those false stereotypes in terms of which the world still sees us [Negroes]."³ The identity of views which the Jelliffes

¹“The Drama of Negro Life,” Theatre Arts Monthly, X, No. 10 (Oct., 1926), 703.
²Ibid., 705.
³Ibid., 706.
had with him is further illustrated by Edith Isaacs' dedication of her *The Negro in the American Theatre*: "To Alain Locke, because he shares the faith that the arts provide a firm and rewarding two-way passage for men of good will of all races, creeds and cultures, everywhere."

Willis Richardson's play *COMPROMISE* was included in Locke's *The New Negro*, though he was not one of Locke's many literary discoveries. Richardson, born in 1889, was the author of "The Hope of a Negro Drama" as early as the November, 1919 *Crisis*, and had written four Negro plays by 1923.\(^1\) He was "a voice in the wilderness,"\(^2\) "urging the retention of the Negro heritage through the arts."\(^3\) Like Andrew Burris, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and still others, Richardson believed that it was essential to capture this Negro material—whether for folklore, poems, plays—or it would be lost. Montgomery Gregory points out that Richardson's play *THE CHIP WOMAN'S FORTUNE* was the chief success of The Ethiopian Art Theatre, founded in Chicago in 1921, and was repeated on Broadway in 1923 when Raymond O'Neil and Mrs. Sherwood Anderson brought

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\(^3\) Langston Hughes, interview, May 6, 1961.
this company they had founded to the East.\footnote{1} In addition to the psychological value of sharing their viewpoint, Richardson reinforced those Gilpin Players who championed the Negro drama. His COMPROMISE was the second Negro play done by them, in February, 1926, one year after GRANNY MAUMEE. It was done "with growing pride and confidence. Ground thus gained was solid ground, and the Gilpins never turned back."\footnote{2}

James Weldon Johnson's support was of tremendous scope and importance;\footnote{3} Eugene O'Neill and Paul Green both offered eloquent support through their plays for Negro players; Montgomery Gregory struck a blow for Negro theatres and Negro drama when he hoped for "the establishment of numerous small groups of players through-out the country who shall simply and devotedly interpret the life that is familiar to them for the sheer joy of artistic expression".\footnote{4}

\footnotetext[1]{1}"The Drama of Negro Life," in The New Negro, 153-60. Raymond O'Neill had been the Art Director of the Cleveland Playhouse from 1918 to 1921, resigning because of "a series of power struggles between the "business" men and the "artists" of the organization." (Irving Brown, op. cit., 179.) The Jelliffes knew O'Neill well, and attended many of the earliest meetings relative to the founding of the Cleveland Playhouse.

\footnotetext[2]{2}Poulson, loc. cit., 12.

\footnotetext[3]{3}Above, Ch. III, pp. 75-76.

\footnotetext[4]{4}Loc. cit., 153-60. This passage was also reprinted in THE NO COUNT BOY program referred to above, Ch. III, p. 76, n. 4. To pursue the "ladder metaphor" of the woman on p. 118, who believed Negroes climbing up shouldn't look back, Gregory declared that Negroes had to look both back and forward.
Carl Van Vechten spoke out forcefully for "Negro-ness," urging producers and actors to "be Negro" in their approach to their art and in their material, and stop imitating white theatrical efforts;¹ and Charles Gilpin helped combat Negro fears about stage stereotypes when he told Archie Bell, Cleveland News drama critic, that he believed his "principal mission on the stage to be to prove to audiences that a Negro need not be a comedian."²

New support materialized as aesthetic standards by which to judge these Negro plays developed and as Negro audiences learned to apply them. The standard of artistic excellence articulated in the following quotation is typical of the position taken by those who advocated the cause of Negro drama.

All these things can be portrayed upon the stage in an artistic way, and if the result is artistic, the play has a right to be given . . . .

¹"Prescription for the New Negro Theatre: Being a Few Reasons Why the Great Colored Show Has Not Yet Been Achieved," Vanity Fair, XXV, No. 2 (Oct., 1925), 46. In Oct., 1926, Alain Locke heartily concurred, declaring that the danger for Negro theatre was "blind imitation and stagnant conventionalism." ("Negro and American Stage," 116.) H. L. Mencken also applauded forthright racialism: "... the Negro spirituals are full of rhythms of the utmost delicacy, and when they are sung properly—not by white frauds or high-toned diphlogisticated Negroes—but by black singers, they give immense pleasure to lovers of music." (Quoted in Gaz., Dec. 26, 1925.)

²Quoted in Gaz., Feb. 25, 1922.
If the picture of Negro life while true enough is incomplete, nevertheless, the measure of success is its artistry and not its completeness.¹

Concurring, Hazel Walker said of her reaction to Charles Gilpin's performance as Brutus Jones: "It was his excellence that permitted me to see it objectively."²

Just as some of the Gilpins objected to the use of Negro play literature, others of the membership advocated it, and much of the players' support came from the enthusiasm within the group. Elmer Cheeks, a Gilpin member,³ once replied to someone who described Negro plays as everything that he wanted to forget, by saying: "It's not the business of the theatre to forget. It's the business of the theatre and has always been the business of theatre to remember and evaluate."⁴ The members read and played with pride in Negro content, dialect plays; argued with fervor the cause of that emerging drama; and wrote letters to the editor defending their theories and their drama program.⁵

The attitude of those editors varied, from lukewarm to cool to hot advocacy. Ormond Forte's interest has been noted, though perhaps not sufficiently underscored.

¹[Theophilus Lewis?], "Dramatis Personae," The Crisis, XXXVII, No. 5 (May, 1930), 162.
²Interview, April 20, 1961. ³Below, pp. 150-52.
⁴Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
⁵Below, p. 189.
As early as 1917 he cast his lot, as it were, with the Playhouse Settlement and the Jelliffes, and dogged by business misfortune and hounded by Harry C. Smith, chief nemesis of all rival papers, he continued that sustained aid.

Here is the result of the work of a young man who pitched his tent in the Central Avenue district, unheeded and unknown. . . . the young man labored on quietly, aye, even unassuming but ardently, and accomplished the thing for which [Negroes] had argued loud and long—just overnight.

Now, come, let us give this meritorious young man, Russell W. Jelliffe, a long pull and a strong pull, and a pull all together, for he practices what we preach.1

Under the heading "We Acknowledge Our Debts" in the Karamu house organ, Karamuse, Mrs. Jelliffe wrote:

As staunch a friend as Karamu ever had was Ormond D. Forte, editor of the Cleveland Advocate, which early espoused the cause of Karamu in days when that cause was less popular than it is today. Later he was editor of the Cleveland Eagle. Born in Jamaica, Cambridge educated, he came to Cleveland in 1916. Throughout the active years of his newspaper editorship he maintained a level of journalism which was high in comparison with the level of the period. We owe a debt of gratitude to this man who knew and sympathized with our goals when there was need of it.2

By and large, the Negro press was neutral, impelled toward assistance by the apparent good and obvious dedication of Karamu, but often withholding that aid out of a combination of suspicion, ignorance of motives, and

1 Cleveland Advocate, Feb. 22, 1917.
2 Feb., 1959. Karamuse is a mimeographed newsletter, begun in June, 1951, and published irregularly, usually several times a year.
timidity concerning its readership's position on theatre and the Negro content play. When the papers departed from this middle ground, it was for specific reasons and for limited periods of time. Sustained support from any paper, white or Negro, save for Forte's, was not yet given.

Spurred on by its opposition, cheered by its support, the Gilpin Players grew slowly, but steadily. By the end of their fifth season (1926) they had performed forty-three plays\(^1\) and claimed thirty active members,\(^2\) and by 1929, seventy plays and forty-five members.\(^3\) Their first slate of officers, listed on the program for the February, 1922 production, contained the names of several who were charter Dumas Club members, since the continuity of the

\(^{1}\text{Appendix I is the complete production record for all adult Karamu productions. In general, throughout this history, only those plays which may be considered "highlights"—significant for one reason or another—will be treated in the text. Information on the others will be confined to Appendix I.}\)

\(^{2}\text{Program, THE NO 'COUNT BOY, May 25, 1926 (special performance). The CPF for May 27, 1926, credits the Gilpins with forty-six productions to date and with fifty members. The program figures would seem to be more reliable.}\)

\(^{3}\text{CYB, 1929, 176. Perhaps these figures have more meaning in relation to total Playhouse Settlement membership which was 1,705 in 1922 (Directory of Civic and Welfare Activities of Cleveland [Cleveland: The Cleveland Foundation, 1923], 284), 1,616 in 1925 (CYB, 1926, 313), 2,487 in 1927 (CYB, 1927, 350), and 1,005 in 1929 (CYB, 1929, 443). Do not confuse membership with aggregate attendance, which ranged in these years from 126,619 in 1922 (Directory of . . . Activities) to 163,150 in 1927 (CYB, 1927, 351).}\)
group's membership was not broken by the name change.

The continuity of their directing was also unbroken for a while after Gilpin's visit. Rose Griffiths continued to direct, or to assist Mrs. Jelliffe in direction, until she left in April, 1923. Later that year, Mrs. Martin (Lillian) Heydemann became coach of the players on a part-time basis, bringing to the troupe the strengths (some appropriate, some not) of her professional background. She was the former Lily Carthew, a professional actress, and had by 1923 begun to establish herself as a well-known figure in Cleveland theatre. She directed or advised several Jewish dramatic clubs, notably the Council Educational Alliance, with whose Five Arts League she staged Philip Moeller's MOLIERE and Lennox Robinson's THE WHITEHEADED BOY, indicating her theatre knowledge and suggesting her play preferences. In 1929, her "Playhouse" was called "one of the most important neighborhood groups of many springing up in all parts of Cleveland."1

Mrs. Heydemann is credited with production direction for the Gilpin Players until GRANNY MAUMEE in January, 1925. On that program Mrs. Jelliffe is listed as "Dramatic Director" while Mrs. Heydemann is "official Coach of the Gilpin Players." After that, and until her departure

1CYB, 1929, 173. Of the five so described, only one, the Shaker Players, is still in existence.
at the end of the 1925-26 season, the programs credit her as
director. (Mrs. Jelliffe was completely in charge of the
overall theatre program at this time, but having hired a
trained dramatic coach for the group because of other de-
mands on her time, preferred to step to the background.)

During the three year period of Lillian Heydemann's
affiliation, from 1923-26 (the third, fourth, and fifth
seasons), the Gilpin troupe continued to produce little
theatre "standards": SUPPRESSED DESIRES (Susan Glaspell
and George Cook), SHAM (Frank G. Tompkins), THE POT BOILER
(Alice Gerstenberg), THE MONKEY'S PAW (W. W. Jacobs), THE
BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS (Norman McKinnel), and others—all
"white" plays; but also produced a group of four Negro
content plays: GRANNY MAUMEE, COMPROMISE, Eugene O'Neill's
THE DREAMY KID, and Paul Green's THE NO 'COUNT BOY. Note-
worthy among the other shows produced were OLD WASH LUCAS,
also by Paul Green, and Shaw's THE SHEWING UP OF BLANCO
PCSNET.

THE NO 'COUNT BOY, which won more widespread appro-
bation than any of the earlier dramas of Negro life, must
be regarded as a real landmark. After its first regular
performance by the Gilpins, in April, 1926, at the Bohemian
Hall, it was given a special performance on May 25 at the

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1Mrs. Jelliffe in [W. E. B. DuBois], loc. cit.,
192.
Cleveland Museum of Art. Archie Bell, Cleveland News critic, wrote:

The Gilpin Players . . . making history in the little theatre movement of the country . . . . came into prominence with THE NO 'COUNT BOY which it presented before delegates to the [Fifteenth Annual Conference of the National Federation of Settlements]. Forty little plays in the course of five years is a record in which any dramatic society can take pride. This group, unless all signs fail, is destined to win a nationwide reputation.1

And another newspaper referred to the special presentation as the year's "highspot" for the Gilpiners.2

The skill of this white playwright in Negro plays has often been noted. The Gilpin Players found his works more than satisfactory, as the production record indicates,3 and a review of Green's Lonesome Road, Six Plays for the Negro Theatre,4 suggests why:

Mr. Green's approach to the negro [sic] combines sympathetic comprehension with an objectivity and a gift for selective emphasis that give his work a rare quality of completeness and authority . . . . Their chief concern is that of all art, an understanding, an illumination of life . . . . Mr. Green has, . . . a keen ear for the flow of sound in idiomatic and poetic speech. He has woven a number of negro songs and spirituals into the body of his plays and he has caught from them and from his familiarity with negro speech a

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1Quoted in Gaz., June 19, 1926.
2Grace Kelley, CPD, Nov. 14, 1926.
3See Appendix I.
sound and measure which if properly rendered on
the stage would add no little beauty to their
performance.¹ [Italics mine.]

The Gilpins certainly responded to that "if," above, at
least with THE NO 'COUNT BOY, for they repeated it at
least twice more in the next three seasons, once at the
Music Hall of the downtown Public Auditorium. It may also
be that this play had an additional "magic," besides that of
its success, for one account, written in reference to THE
NO 'COUNT BOY's first special performance, digressed to say:

A thing that seems to assure the success of the
Gilpin Players is the beautiful generosity dis-
played among the actors. They rejoice in each
others' successes, and step aside to give each
other good parts. So far, nobody seems to have
lost by this generosity.²

There were several revivals given, and several
"special"performances: one at the invitation of the Fair-
mount Presbyterian Church and another attended by the
Association for Colored Community Work and the National
Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Presaging the coming shift to full-length plays were two
productions: LULLABY, by Edward Knoblock, with a cast
of nineteen--indicating their growth in size and ambition--
and with Pearl Mitchell in charge of music; and WAPPIN'
WHARF, by Cleveland Playhouse patron Charles Brooks,

¹Helen Redlig, Theatre Arts Monthly, X, No. 9
(Sept., 1926), 648-49.

²CPD, Nov. 14, 1926.
the first Gilpin Players departure from the one-act pattern.¹

The contact with the Cleveland Playhouse, considered the town's chief theatrical venture, continued. Their memory of the warm interest and wholehearted cooperation for Gilpin Players of Max Eisenstat, Technical Director and one of the Playhouse's pioneers, is cherished by the Jelliffes, who--along with a saddened theatre community--mourned the loss of this invaluable, generous man on August 18, 1956.² Mr. Eisenstat's role in helping Gilpin Players build the stage for their own theatre and design their lighting facilities (in 1927), as well as his "enormous amount of giving" in terms of advice and counseling, is not forgotten by any who knew him.³

Unlike Rose Griffiths, Lillian Heydemann had no staff position with the settlement house which, considering her background of professional touring, must have suited her, for she had no social work orientation. Her directing

¹WAPPIN' WHarf, "a Pirate Play in Three Acts" from Brooks' Frightful Plays, was produced at the old Temple Theatre, and was Mrs. Heydemann's first major effort for the Gilpins. This comedy by the prolific Cleveland playwright had been performed at the Cleveland Playhouse (whose Brooks Theatre is named for him) in the 1921-22 season, but the author and his wife attended this new staging of his play, too.


³Ibid.
methods must have been definite, almost dogmatic, and quite
distinct from Rowena Jelliffe's more "permissive" approach,\textsuperscript{1}
which sought to "give the group a kind of free development,
along lines of their own ability."\textsuperscript{2} In a clear reference
to Rose Griffiths and Lillian Heydemann, though they are
not named, Mrs. Jelliffe wrote:

From both of these people who were devoted to them
and genuinely interested in them, they [Gilpin
Players] gained a deal of valuable experience and
technique. But from my position in the background,
I saw on both occasions that what these coaches were
actually doing was to toss them trick after trick from the well-worn white actors' trick bag. Believing
as I did, that the Negro had his own contribution
to make to drama, I felt that we had better disband
altogether than to deteriorate into a group of mere
posturing performers.\textsuperscript{3}

The Gilpin group did not disband. Rowena Jelliffe
became production director in 1926 and continued in that
capacity until the hiring of a full-time Drama Director
in 1946. From 1915 to 1946 then, she directed, or super-
vised the direction of, all the children's theatre and all
the adult theatre activities; from 1946 until today, she
has left the actual directing to full-time staff directors,
but she retains a lively, knowledgeable, and direct interest

\textsuperscript{1}Above, Ch. III, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{2}Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Taylor, interview, March 30,
1961. Mr. Taylor, not yet married at this time, was a Play-
house Settlement staff member from 1922 to 1943.

\textsuperscript{3}In [W. E. B. DuBois], \textit{loc. cit.} The evidence
does suggest that Mrs. Heydemann is "guiltier" of Mrs.
Jelliffe's charge than Miss Griffiths.
in all the productions and is Executive Director of the Karamu Theatre. We know a good deal about Rowena Jelliffe's life and background; what was she like as a theatre worker?

Several writers have observed that Mrs. Jelliffe had no special training in the arts.¹ This is true, but there were important theatre influences and theatre experiences which were formative. While she was a college student, the Abbey Theatre toured the United States and performed at Oberlin. Not because she "supered" in one of their productions, but rather because of their simplicity, their earnestness, and their total immersion in a heritage different from hers, they made a tremendous impact on her.² She describes her role in college dramatics as a "moderately active" one, participating in several "inter-house and inter-dormitory," student-directed plays. Theatre at Oberlin had no academic standing at this time (1910-1914), but was purely extra-curricular, though faculty members did direct the Junior and Senior plays. She participated in her Junior Class play, SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL (directed by R. Archibald Jelliffe, head of the English Department³), as costumer, in several walk-on roles, and by

¹Clayton Fritchey, "Karamu," Junior Red Cross Journal, XVIII, No. 4, Pt. 1 (Dec., 1941); Hatcher and Durham, op. cit., 208.
²Interview, April 25, 1961.
³See Ch. II, p. 20.
doing "a lot of the organization on it." Also, she and Russell Jelliffe played opposite each other in one play while they were students.¹

Hull House, where they worked after graduation, had what Rowena Jelliffe describes as "a pretty good little theatre that year [1914-15]." Like almost all amateur groups of the time, it performed what might be called the "standard little theatre repertoire," and had an all white, foreign-born clientele. Mrs. Jelliffe feels that the Hull House theatre was not an influence on her, that it did not extend her beyond what Oberlin's theatre work had done.²

The desire to extend her knowledge and skill in theatre and directing—indeed, in all the arts—prompted frequent meetings with Walter Solomon, head of the Council Educational Alliance, during these early years of Playhouse Settlement, and a "very, very devoted friend .... really one of the world's treasures." They met often and hashed over many topics together: programming, mutual assistance, the philosophy of their respective approaches, "and the strengthening of interest and curiosity in the whole creative areas—in music, painting, poetry, literature .... He was certainly an influence."³

¹Interview, May 6, 1961. ²Ibid. ³Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.
But perhaps the greatest influence on Director Jelliffe in the arts was the climate in which her artistic experience matured, the "times." She has always resented the popular image of the twenties as "the flighty flappers and prohibition, and all that," believing that the period is more truly characterized by a flowering cultural activity. She points to creative surges in poetry and the frequency of new poetry magazines, to the founding of symphonies and art museums, and to the burgeoning of the little theatre movement nationally.¹

But beyond the existence of specific cultural forces and institutions, there was a mood abroad in America in the twenties, a quality and standard of excellence. "I think that because this was the period in which we were born that we got the Gilpin Players launched with a certain seriousness,"² that quality which she feels marked all of these cultural phenomena, especially the growing American theatre and drama. There were "greats" in the theatre of the twenties, whose beneficial influence was felt not only by those who knew their work, but by those simply aware

¹Interviews, March 15 and April 25, 1961, and the WJMO interview, May 21, 1961, cited above. Irving Brown quotes impressive authorities to the effect that over fifty little theatres in the U.S. before 1917 grew to 3,000 active groups in 1927. (Op. cit., 35-36.) The Cleveland Symphony was organized in 1918, and the Cleveland Museum of Art was founded in 1913.

²Interview, April 25, 1961.
of their existence and their legend. Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt formed this kind of influence, although Mrs. Jelliffe admits "it is very hard for me to say how much my own contact with [them] had to do with the earnestness with which I was able to launch this thing [adult theatre]."¹

In order better to launch the group, and cognizant of what she felt were the shortcomings of Miss Griffiths and Mrs. Heydemann, Rowena Jelliffe pursued specialized theatre training in New York in the winter of 1925-26. She studied dramatic production under Robert Milton, David Burton, and John Murray Anderson; dancing under Martha Graham and Michie Ito.² With her added technical skill, she could confirm her earlier view of drama as education, as a means for stimulating the growth potential of the participants: a play, she believed, should "return to the people who spent their time on it some education, some learning, some knowledge of themselves."³ Along with this

¹Ibid. ²Interview, June 17, 1961.
³Interview, April 10, 1961. The Jelliffes feel that two very important influences on them, relevant to these ideas, were Smith Ely Jelliffe (Russell's cousin) and John Dewey, whom they knew well through S. E. Jelliffe. From Dewey they grasped the principle of education as the chief means of social change, a fundamental Karamu concept. From Dr. S. E. Jelliffe, one of the country's outstanding early analysts, Columbia University professor, and prolific textbook writer, they gained insights into what "gets into a personality and stays there, what releases tensions in people, what sets people free to live." (Interview, May 6, 1961.)
came the sense of the importance of human values: a play
"must contribute inwardly to them [actors] as human beings". \(^1\)
... "it [drama] teaches the utmost in personal discipline
and mutual respect"; \(^2\) and blending these was the synthesizing
belief that in the best practice of the arts, these concepts:
education and human values, are both well served.

A rather lengthy quotation from Professor Brown's
work seems so pertinent to much of what has been written
here in regard to settlement house drama, drama as art,
drama as social work, etc., that it is cited below. He is
quoting one Fonrose Wainwright, Chairman of the Drama Di-
vision of the National Federation of Settlements at that group's
Nineteenth Conference:

He felt it necessary to emphasize the fact that
drama is an art and should be treated as such.
He described typical settlement house casting as
the process of fitting the number of roles in a
play to the number of people available and decried
such practices as faces peeking through slits in the
main curtain, agonized voices from behind scenes his-
sing stage commands, poor makeup, the absence of
blocking, and the consistently tardy opening cur-
tains. The settlement house worker, he said, con-
siders the individual player rather than the audi-
ence the important aspect of the experience. He
advised the group that the individual will only
benefit as he learns to practice the art form
with skill and pointed out that the selection of

\(^1\)Virginia Carville, "The Key to Karamu House,"
Extension: The National Catholic Monthly, I, No. 10 (March,
1955), 42.

\(^2\)Hugh Harris, "Karamu . . . Prophecy Come True,"
The Schioan (Feb., 1961), 3-4.
good leaders and good plays would help the individuals and improve the general stage of settlement house dramatics.\(^1\)

In terms of play selection, Rowena Jelliffe's tastes have been suggested above, passim. Once the group achieved wider approbation for the Negro content play, which came slowly, but surely, after the staging of THE NO 'COUNT BOY, the problem became one of scripts. But even among those which were available, Mrs. Jelliffe and the players practiced a certain discrimination. In general, they avoided the strictly "'agitaton' plays of race and politics, although [they] did do controversial plays--provocative and stimulating ones."\(^2\)

Negro plays were sought and Negro playwrights encouraged (sometimes by staging their plays though they were below a desired level of quality\(^3\), not solely because of the Negro membership. The potential loss of Negro folklore in the face of increased Negro urbanization and industrialization, was of tremendous concern to Rowena Jelliffe and so many others.\(^4\) They were aware of the rejection of the

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\(^3\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 25, 1961.

\(^4\)In this respect, they "were very much like the Abbey Theatre" (Ibid.), with its corresponding base in the Irish folk material.
Negro spirituals by people for whom they represented serfdom and degradation and "everything I want to forget." They were aware of the yeoman efforts of Fisk University, and George L. White who founded the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and the near "loss" of this musical heritage save for that group's long struggle to sing them, spread them, and collect, publish, and record them. They were aware that reluctance to "look back," and false race pride could separate the people from the literary heritage, and that the former would shrivel and the latter would vanish without each other.

And, in a very real way, in the twenties (and the thirties), "Karamu House was a focal point for the controversy about the Negro play in much the same way that the battle of the Spiritual centered around Fisk University, from 1872 until the late twenties."¹

Beyond the question of Negro content, there were other aspects of play selection for Mrs. Jelliffe as drama director. In general, she preferred the more serious play, shunning frivolous, light-hearted works which may have been fun to do, but which afforded fewer opportunities for

¹Roger Jelliffe, unpublished sociology study, Harvard University, 1950, under Prof. Bayles. This 118-page study by the son of Mr. and Mrs. Russell Jelliffe is an examination of the upward (social) mobility of members of a participating arts-center (Karamu), tested by means of questionnaires and case histories. It is a very interesting, if inconclusive work, representing the sociological approach often taken by observers of Karamu as a social settlement. The title page is missing.
educational or personal advance. This was not easy or popular:

A good deal of difficulty arose at first as to whether they [Gilpin Players] should compromise with their audience, which wanted something hilarious and funny, or produce the more serious drama with few spectators. But the serious drama persisted.\(^1\)

She disapproved (and does so still) of the insincere play and the "too-avant-garde" choice, particularly when Negroes are used for their exoticism, or as a "gimmick." She remembers resenting 1934's FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS because some people felt linking Negroes to the incomprehensibility of Gertrude Stein's work was appropriate, because "they won't understand it anyway, and they can just mimic it."\(^2\)

Discussion groups and workshops, investigating the "currents of theatre moving around us that we had to be aware of," were an important adjunct to Rowena Jelliffe's theatre practice. "We met and talked and met and talked and met and talked."\(^3\) She felt that developing the whole group's understanding was as important as that of the cast, and regrets what she sees as a lessening of these activities today. Many of these sessions were playreadings, not of

\(^1\)From a talk given by Mrs. Jelliffe to The Library Club of Cleveland and Vicinity, March 5, 1930, at the Gilpin Players' production of Sierra's THE ROMANTIC YOUNG LADY. (In the Theatre Clipping File of the Cleveland Public Library, Literature Department.)

\(^2\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.

\(^3\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
plays planned for production, but just to "kind of know what was going on." She remembers particularly the sessions on dialect, which some Gilpin members resisted. Isadora Bennett's plays demanded Gullah speech, which "prevails throughout the coastal section of North and South Carolina and the Carolina Islands,"¹ and Mrs. Jelliffe used the academic approach to minimize the opposition. She urged respect for dialect, noting the concern of scholars for it, and pointing to her experience with dialect problems on her trip to Italy. She corresponded with playwright Bennett about pronunciations and the uses of certain words and phrases, and always stressed the seriousness of the question and the dignity with which it should be treated.²

In concluding this examination of her directorial methods, two observations seem pertinent. Quoting an anonymous player, the Christian Science Monitor reported:

Actually, she does a good deal more than simply direct the plays. By a careful redistribution of roles, she has managed to develop talent wherever she has found it. She has stimulated the creative ability of the players—never making her own interpretation arbitrary.³

Though not himself of the theatre, Arthur Taylor remembers two directing concepts passed on to staff from Director

¹Program, March 21, 1934.
²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
Jelliffe: "Let the people create from within" and "Don't let actors imitate you."\(^1\)

After this look at their director, we turn to a look at key personnel of the Gilpin Players. Rather than an attempt to select a cross-section of the players, only a few will be noted—all leading members of the group who represented its strength. Two of them have already been mentioned;\(^2\) all of them played significant roles in these early, formative years.

Mrs. Hazel Mountain Walker was credited by Mrs. Jelliffe with "the almost first gesture of friendliness and understanding"\(^3\) to the Jelliffes as new arrivals in the Central Avenue district. She has achieved prominence in the educational field, becoming the first Negro school principal in the Cleveland system's history, although her first professional training was in Law, and she passed the bar in 1919. For over a year, during the wartime wave of Negro migration to the North, she worked at Cleveland's Juvenile Court, assisting in the adjustment of these migrants.\(^4\)

A prominent Cleveland and an active public speaker, she has been a member of Karamu's board for almost twenty-five years.

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\(^1\)Interview, March 30, 1961.

\(^2\)Mrs. Hazel M. Walker, Ch. II, p. 19 and Ch. III, p. 30; Arthur Talbot, Ch. IV, p. 89.

\(^3\)CPD, April 24, 1951.

\(^4\)Mrs. Walker, interview, April 20, 1961. Information on Mrs. Walker, unless otherwise cited, comes from Karamu files and this interview.
years, and Chairman of its important Women's Committee.

She was important as an adviser and sounding board to the Jelliffes, and her position in the education field made cooperation with Karamu feasible and valuable. She engaged in a cooperative project with the House from 1939-1941, studying Karamu's "Arts-Education program as a means of stimulating mental and social growth"\(^1\) in a group of forty-two pre-adolescent children from Rutherford B. Hayes Elementary School. This so-called "slow learner's study" established a rise in the I.Q. of these youngsters, a greater degree of participation in group activities, and improved face-to-face relations--after their program of activities at Karamu.\(^2\)

As an actress and Gilpin member, Mrs. Walker was very active. She became President of the group for the first time in 1928, three short years after she joined it and played the lead in GRANNY MAUMEE, an important Karamu "first." Since then, among her many roles, she has performed in three other "firsts": SIMON THE CYRENIAN, one of the trio of plays which opened the first Karamu Theatre, in 1927; THE

\(^1\)Roger Jelliffe, op. cit., 10.

\(^2\)The full report of this project is available in the 157-page Summary Report of the Joint Project of R. B. Hayes School and Karamu House, June, 1941. Prepared under the supervision of Mrs. Beulah Tannenbaum, of the Karamu House staff, and financed by the Cleveland Foundation. (In Karamu files.)
CORN IS GREEN, first Studio Theatre production; and FAMILY PORTRAIT, which opened the new theatre building in 1949. Mrs. Walker is accustomed to "firsts," having been something of a pioneer for the Negro in Cleveland, particularly for the Negro woman. She feels that, in the last analysis, her most significant contribution may be as an example of high achievement, properly prepared for, by proper training.

A second important Gilpin Player is Arthur Talbot. His background was valuable to the Gilpins, for he brought with him the high standards of acting ("way and beyond that which most of the group had") and the seriousness of approach which had characterized the efforts of Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson. His seriousness was particularly important to Mrs. Jelliffe, concerned as she was with the indecision of the nucleus Dumas group as to whether they were a social club or a theatre group. Talbot was a regular theatre-goer at a time when not many Negroes were in the audience at the "white" professional theatres and, having made his mark, carried with him a kind of "authenticity" which engendered respect for his person and his viewpoints. He was "a large, handsome man, with

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1 Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
2 Above, Ch. III, pp. 88-89.
3 Mrs. Walker insists that the growing Negro audiences at the Hanna Theatre are attributable in large part to Karamu. (Interview, April 20, 1961.)
tremendously dignified bearing, and a great dramatic quality about him."¹ Talbot became active in the Gilpin group in the 1924-25 season, serving in a variety of ways, and was Treasurer for at least four years straight, from 1925-1928.² As an actor he was "never difficult to work with. He was a joy for everybody."³

Elmer Cheeks, too, was "very important in the formative years,"⁴ as were Mrs. Walker and Mr. Talbot, and interestingly enough, all three were as, or more, important for their understanding than for their considerable acting talent or theatre ability. "His devotion to the group and its purposes, his awareness of its values, and his determination that it should have meaning in this town, is something that no one can ever adequately thank him for."⁵ Mrs. Jelliffe had reason to be grateful for Cheeks' enthusiasm and knowledge of theatre and dedication, for there was, at times, an indifference, a kind of futility about the Gilpins' future: "What good is it? Where will it get us?" There was opposition and friction, too, in these years,

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
⁴Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 6, 1961.
⁵Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
and "I should imagine that a good many times down through these troublous days, that Elmer Cheeks not only eased many situations, but may have been the saving element. There were a hundred times when we could have gone to pot."  

Elmer Cheeks was personally very excited about working in the theatre, about "selling" it to others all over the city, about being cast or about building a light board—which he did for the first Karamu Theatre, at 3807 Central Avenue.  

"He did anything. He would hold script, help build sets, etc.," said Mrs. Jelliffe of Mr. Cheeks, but she added: "Everybody would do everything at this time!"

He was President of the Gilpin Players during their fifth, sixth, seventh, and tenth seasons, and Business Manager during the ninth season. While a member, "he was instrumental . . . in inviting to Karamu's theatre people of all nationalities and racial groups, and he saw that their contacts there were pleasant and constructive."  

He was an electrical engineer employed as a City Civil Engineer, and

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1Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
2Mr. Taylor, interview, March 30, 1961.
3Interview, April 25, 1961.
4Program, April 30, 1926; Gaz., Jan. 22, 1927; Pro-
gram, March 21, 1928; Program, Dec. 17, 1930; [W. E. B.
DuBois], loc. cit.
5Roger Jelliffe, op. cit., 85. This case history uses the pseudonym "Oscar F.," but is clearly Mr. Cheeks.
he was "reported to have stood first in a Civil Service examination in which 200 others participated, all of the other group [whites]."  

A Gilpin Player for whom the entire company had great respect was Fitzhugh Woodford. He was a highly talented and hard working actor, "certainly one of the very, very best of all," according to the Jelliffes. A handsome, well-built man, he appeared in dozens of roles in Gilpin productions, among them the lead in THE EMPEROR JONES, and received excellent notices. Woodford served as Historian for the Gilpin Players. Cleveland's City Council passed a resolution honoring actor Woodford, after his passing on July 18, 1960, acknowledging Karamu's good fortune in having him among its troupe, and his contribution "to the dignity and cultural elevation of all of Cleveland."

There were many other people in the early history of the Gilpin Players whose names have become meaningful because of their contributions. Olive Hale, now Olive Hale Hackney, was often Secretary of the group, and an exceptional actress whom it was "a delight to direct." She had "a

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1Gaz., April 24, 1926.

2A portrait of Mr. Woodford appears on the cover of Opportunity, VII, No. 8 (Aug., 1929).

3Interview, July 19, 1961.

4Resolution 1869-60, adopted Sept. 12, 1960, signed Thad Fusco, City Clerk.
fine mind . . . [and] comprehension of what the group could do, and loyalty to the group."¹ One of the group who attended the touring attractions downtown, she figured prominently in the theatre's history for some twenty-five years.

George Guinn was the first President of the Gilpin Players and, according to Rose Griffiths, "the mainstay of our group [Dumas Players]."² Less dedicated to a belief in the ultimate potential and value of the group than some of the others, and somewhat less serious in his approach,³ he nevertheless remained willingly and eagerly active for about fifteen years.

Arthur Spencer was another man who, like Arthur Talbot, was an old trouper and directed a local group, the Charity Players, prior to joining the Gilpins.⁴ Like Guinn, he was less concerned with the philosophy of the group, their earnest, educational discussions, and their concern for the Negro play: pro or con. He had a fine sense of humor, and believed "you just did a play because it was fun to do a play."⁵ And, despite some bad rehearsal

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
²Interview, April 24, 1961.
³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
⁴Gaz., Dec. 8, 1923.
⁵Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
habits (a result of, or in spite of, his professional training?) which disturbed some of the other members, his remains a prominent name in the history.

"Jesse Firse should not be passed over." Mr. Firse, twice elected to the Presidency of the group, was active for many years, and performed very well within a somewhat limited range of roles. He was an earnest man, "with a fine mind who contributed a great deal to our group." His defense of the Negro play, in the form of a splendid letter to the Call and Post, will be taken up below.

While these adult performers sparked the Gilpin Players, youth drama activity at the settlement continued. The previous discussion included the children's theatre of this period, but marionettes and puppetry deserve additional coverage as one of the House's subsidiary theatre groups and a theatre-related activity.

The first organized puppetry group was formed in 1925, spearheaded by two young teenagers, Rozelle (Zell) Ingram and Roy Stewart. The group was made up of boys and girls under seventeen, and their skill was such that within

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1Ibid.
2Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
3Ibid.  
4Ch. V, pp. 265-67.
5Ch. III, pp. 52-59.
a few years they received booking offers from out of town and out of state.\(^1\) At home, they practiced and performed regularly, for puppetry was a settlement house activity club. In 1927 they presented THE THREE WISHES, a marionette play based on an early German legend, as a curtain raiser to the Gilpin Players' major production of TAHITI OF EGYPT,\(^2\) and Mr. Jelliffe recalls that "we would do this sort of thing once in a while, . . ."\(^3\)

Although puppet activity was not unbroken from 1925 on, it was never absent for long. It existed as a regular activity in 1949,\(^4\) but has not flourished since.

Russell Jelliffe, in observing that it has had its ups and downs, feels it will return as an activity, when the demand from the membership is great enough and when the timing is propitious. He worked with the puppeteers himself, and recalls with pride that their "star," Zell Ingram, developed "an almost perfect control," which permitted the operator to "walk" the puppets with one hand.\(^5\) This

\(^1\)CPD, April 11, 1929. "Puppetry" and "Marionettes" seem to be used interchangeably in this period, and they refer to the same type of activity: the stringed, rather than the hand, variety.

\(^2\)News, Nov. 6, 1927. \(^3\)Interview, May 16, 1961.

\(^4\)Program, Dec. 11, 1949.

\(^5\)Interview, May 16, 1961. James Porter, in discussing Ingram as an outstanding Negro artist, also refers to his skill in "puppet-making and manipulation," and points out that "through his studies at Karamu House [he] learned to design and build stage sets, and even took part in several plays." (\textit{Op. cit.}, 143.)
same Ingram, when only fourteen, was such a standout at puppetry, and so adventurous, that, with Roy Stewart, he "bought an old Ford for $12, converted the rumble seat into a miniature stage and paid his way from Cleveland to New York and back by giving puppet shows along the road."¹ "A recognized painter and sculptor,"² Ingram today is a teacher with the Children's Aid Society of New York.³

In addition to all of the major theatre and supplementary theatre doings detailed above, a tremendous range of other activity was, of course, carried on at all times at Playhouse Settlement. "At Playhouse Settlement," it should be remembered, often meant anything but in the early years, for these activities were carried on at Longwood, Brownell, East Tech, Central, and Kennard schools (among others), on playgrounds, in the Jelliffes' cottage, "squeezed into a rickety little house, . . . and various other buildings about the neighborhood."⁴ All enrollments far exceeded the early use estimates of the facilities. The Men's Club

¹Henry Beckett, New York Post, Jan. 13, 1942. The Jelliffes gave them a letter of reference to the Chiefs of Police in the towns where they stopped overnight, "introducing" them, saying that the boys presented a fine puppet show, and asking permission to stage it and "pass the hat" afterwards. (Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, June 26, 1961.)


³Karamuse, Sept., 1957.

⁴Walter C. White, Sunday News-Leader, Nov. 13, 1921.
of the Second Presbyterian Church may have intended to open "a small venture. But the neighborhood flew down upon them and swamped them." It was clear that adequate, centralized housing was needed to relieve the strain on the insufficient, dispersed resources of the settlement.

Although the first newspaper announcement of the funds drive for a new home did not appear until early in 1923, planning for a new building, for general expansion, began much earlier. The trustees in 1920 signed the deed taking over the property from the Church, which had continued its ownership of it, even after the Community Chest had assumed financial support of the settlement. The "headquarters"--the house at 2239 East 38th Street--stood about 140 feet north of the Central Avenue intersection, with the Jelliffes' cottage, 2241, behind it. The corner properties

\[1\] Ibid. \[2\] Gaz., Feb. 24.

For much of the following material on the plans for fund-raising, I am indebted to Mrs. Carl Newald, who has very graciously made available to me some of her rough notes for her proposed history of Karamu House. Though her work is not an academic study, and her notes are undocumented, they are based on her examination of Karamu House files and records which were, unfortunately, discarded or destroyed in the general housecleaning when the staff offices were moved from the Theatre building of the current Karamu to the new, community services facilities in 1959. Although newspaper sources on the actual drive are available, her reconstruction of the actions of the Board of Trustees both before and after makes the history quite clear.

\[4\] Bing, loc. cit.
facing Central Avenue looked like good possibilities for expansion, and the Welfare Federation recommended their purchase (there was a saloon building [which became a poolhall after Prohibition] and a tin shop). By 1921, the trustees had architectural plans drawn, but the $288,000 building cost estimate seemed unattainable.

Pressures mounted as attendance grew. These rough figures tell the story: 99,000 (1919-20) to 140,000 (1920-21) to 147,000 (1922-23). School rentals jumped, and the not insignificant inconveniences of putting on plays in the schools began to weigh more heavily. "You couldn't put up a set. I couldn't nail a thing. I would put the scenery up with sandbags on it. You needed a permit for everything. And you had to take the set down immediately after each performance."¹

In March, 1922, the Board of Trustees pledged $100,000 for the new building, and took options on the Central Avenue property. The Jelliffes, who always welcomed advice and counsel, formed an Advisory Board for expansion planning whose interracial composition made it a prototype for later interracial Boards of Trustees. The Advisory Board, anxious to get their drive underway, met constantly in 1922—with the trustees, with committees, and with the Welfare Federation, which had confirmed its approval of

¹Mr. Jelliffe, interview, March 15, 1961.
the corner site. Then, in February, 1923, the Advisory Board, Elmer J. Cheeks, Chairman, announced the two-week campaign, to begin March 1 and to raise $250,000.¹

The pages of the Gazette, at the time a strong supporter of the settlement and the Jelliffes, tell the drive story well, though reluctantly when defeat came.

"The Playhouse" caters to all without reference to class (race) or color, does a much needed work, has served its "apprenticeship" to splendid purpose under its very efficient director, R. W. Jelliffe, and his able assistant, and ought to have what it seeks.²

"Plugs" and advertisements for the drive continued, and contributors and their pledges were listed. The "truly democratic community house"³ earned a $100 pledge from the Council of Jewish Women, $100 from each of the Jelliffes,⁴ $25 or more from thirty-two donors: teachers, club groups, churches, businesses, Hiram House residents, and so on.⁵

But all of these donations paled beside the Second Presbyterian Church's own pledge: $100,000!

On March 10, with four days to go, the Gazette--clearly whistling in the dark--declared that the drive

¹Gaz., March 3, 1923.
³Gaz., March 10, 1923. ⁴Ibid.
seemed to be a success. On March 17, with no mention of having passed the two-week point, new benefits and fund-raising schemes were announced, and the "expectations" were to go over the top. Meanwhile, the three properties on the corner (from 3801 to 3827 Centrall) were bought, and the income from their rental was to form welcome support in the days to come.² March 31 came, and one goal was reached: the $10,000 sought in the neighborhood. A new list of thirty-nine donors was published in the Gazette, and among them: the Gilpin Players, with $310. In the April 7 issue: "The Campaign Is Still On!" In the April 14 issue: "The Campaign Is Still On!" On April 21, the Gazette gave up and the drive gave up. Just over $12,000 was collected, and the Church's pledge was never fulfilled.

Support for the campaign was, of course, not limited to the Gazette. All of the local newspapers, as well as Negro papers in other cities, gave it space. The Press pointed out that only two neighborhood schools were still available for Playhouse Settlement use, and urged replacement of the inadequate main house.³ The Plain Dealer warned that only half of the 1700 members could be accommodated, and that contributors had until March 19⁴ to give for the new building which would house 3,000.⁵

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¹Gaz., March 17, 1923. ²Newald. ³March 2, 1923. ⁴March 5, 1923. ⁵Feb. 26, 1923.
Cleveland Call reiterated the early fear of a segregated activity, but observed that so well has its activities been developed that it served the neighborhood, drawing from each race, a percentage of its attendance.¹ As an experiment in democracy, the Playhouse has merited the moral support of the people of all races in Cleveland, and it is certain from advance assurances of financial aid [to be] wholly successful.²

Faced with the collapse of the drive, the settlement still concentrated on the nagging need for new quarters, and two alternatives were raised. The first: securing other buildings in the area, was dropped when nothing appropriate was located. The second plan was to take over the corner properties and renovate them for use.³ This idea was not only a heartbreaking disappointment to the campaigners who had labored for new quarters, but was out of the question until 1926, when the existing rental agreements expired. Besides, some of the trustees feared that the old, wooden, two-story structures would be unsafe, a fire hazard, when packed with active children and adults. But, new building costs were up again, to $383,000,⁴ and despite a sprinkling of occasional benefits and promises of future pledges,⁵ no real money was to come in.

¹According to Newald, the Negro population of the area (1923-24) was about fifty per cent, but eighty per cent of house membership. Walter White said over eighty per cent of the area was Negro (Sunday News-Leader, Nov. 13, 1921).

²Feb. 24, 1923. ³Newald.

⁴Ibid.

Why did the drive fail? An answer to this question cannot be categorical, for there are too many imponderables. From July, 1921, to July, 1924, America went from trough to trough in a business contraction, and the peak of expansion, May, 1923, was not sufficiently high to produce a flow of dollars except to the "right" charities. Playhouse Settlement was not a "right" charity for all; had it been a segregated institution, as many feared it would be, it might have gained needed additional support. Also, in the early twenties, it was still somewhat obscure, and among some of those who did know it, arguments raged back and forth: Should Negro content plays be done? Were the Jelliffes radicals? Were the Gilpin Players too arty? Would an arts-centered program really work?

The delay, excuses, and failure of the Church to make good its pledge was the chief blow to the drive, of course, and no clear answer is available here as to why. Obviously, there was division on its generally conservative Board; this was some eight years after the settlement was established, and three years after Second Presbyterian had left the area. How many of the 1915 Men's Club were effective forces? Had the ardor for the settlement cooled? People understood charity, contributions to welfare organizations; and people could grasp a campaign for an

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1Kieran, op. cit., 312.
educational institution, but what were they to make of Play- 
house Settlement, which seemed neither fish nor fowl? How 
could one categorize, pigeonhole a settlement house that was 
really an arts center?

Mrs. Jelliffe has said that the failure of the drive 
may have been a "blessing in disguise,"¹ and in order to 
grasp this paradox, it is necessary to examine the kind of 
new center which was proposed. The building was to include 
club and lodge rooms for adults; shops for craft and house-
hold arts; an auditorium with 400 seats for dramatics, for 
children's theatre and the Gilpins; a large, well-equipped 
gymnasium, swimming pool, adjoining showers and locker rooms, 
and game rooms [italics mine].² (Newald specifies "billiard 
room," and adds a bowling alley.)

It seems clear that a building so constituted would 
have arrested the shift to programming in the arts, and 
possibly reversed that trend and re-emphasized standard 
athletics activities. In the light of Karamu's development 
and success, that would have been a tragic loss. In addi-
tion, it is only logical to assume that a new facility would 
have had the effect of keeping the organization in its original 
neighborhood past the optimum time for relocation. Later, 
when Karamu did move to its present location, for a variety

¹Interview, April 6, 1961.
²Gaz., March 10, 1923.
of good reasons jointly determined by Karamu, the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and the Cleveland Welfare Federation,¹ it became even clearer that to have remained—as a new building would almost certainly have dictated—would have been an error. The Jelliffes, writing a report for the National Federation of Settlements Survey in 1945, describe the new Karamu area, and confirm the notion that it was a "blessing in disguise" that their building drive failed, leaving the settlement uncommitted physically, as it were, flexible and free to move:

There is a much higher degree of home ownership in the present area, a generally higher economic level, less condemned and abandoned property, fewer vacant lots due to demolition, a fairly average type of shop, a fringe of large industry but fewer small industries interspersed, a section of night clubs with the usual loafing element, no other social agencies in the area other than a branch Y.M.C.A., no adequate playgrounds, one city bath house, but no other community service center. Several of the better organized and more progressive churches are here .... The area is level, with no artificial barriers, with fairly good transportation facilities and better ones about to be realized. Here live those earlier and former clients of Karamu who have "come up a notch in the world." Here the parents of our children are our former Old Karamu children.²

Chapter V brings us to a new phase in the history of Karamu Theatre: the acquisition by the Gilpin Players of their own theatre, a step of tremendous significance to them, as to any theatre group. This next period is a

¹Roger Jelliffe, op. cit., 10.
²Quoted in Roger Jelliffe, op. cit., 5.
rich one for the group: an unbroken span of twelve years of theatre activity based on seven long years of building, and the artistic assay is high.
CHAPTER V

THE GILPIN PLAYERS, II (1927-1939):
KARAMU THEATRE, 3807 CENTRAL

There is always drama in acquiring a home, and for the long-homeless Gilpin Players there was added drama, because they built their own. Pressed by necessity, and balked by their failure to acquire a new building, they turned to the shabby wooden structure on the corner of 38th and Central and saw—in the mind's eye—its potential. And a labor of love made it into a theatre.

If the "beautiful generosity" and cooperation which—in the eyes of one observer, at least\(^1\)—characterized the Gilpin Players was exaggerated as far as their theatre behavior went, it seemed utterly factual as far as their big community effort in 1926. In the fall and winter of that year, the group completely renovated a "terrible old pool-room, rat-ridden"\(^2\) and built their theatre there. Mrs. Jelliffe wrote, three years later:

Those are heavenly days and nights to remember. We did all our own work. We plastered it, papered it, wired it, installed new plumbing, put a furnace in it ourselves. Far into the night we worked,

\(^1\)Above, Ch. IV, p. 135.


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doing bits of rehearsing while we worked, singing, forgetting that we were tired, growing to love our little theatre in a way that one loves only those things which they have created."

Anyone who has ever participated in building a theatre, however modest, knows this feeling. Community men and women who worked (or sought jobs) by day arrived fatigued after supper, and worked willingly and happily till long after midnight. Lest Rowena Jelliffe's objectivity be questioned, here is what another eye-witness wrote:

... I never saw as much accomplished with so little effort. Dentists and lawyers and mechanical engineers and postmen rolled up their sleeves and took to the hammer and the saw, and they sang as they worked...

If a girl didn't have as much chance for school- ing as another, and worked on an elevator or as a cook, all this crowd asked of her was that she put quality into her work. And so the work went on merrily and with the utmost harmony. The high school boys and the sub-debs were at a dance, or they'd have been there too."

Lumber was acquired from old houses that were being razed, someone gave ten gallons of paint, a keg of nails was donated. "All the material, down to the last nail, was given to the group." The basement was cleared of the accumulated debris of years and years, and a cement floor in good condition was uncovered "two feet below where

1Ibid.

2Grace V. Kelley, CPD, Dec. 15, 1926. This article was headlined in part: Cuff of Pool Room Yield to Theatre's.

we expected the floor to be, which gave us more height for our dressing rooms."\(^1\) The resourceful Zell Ingram cadged five gallon alcohol tins from neighborhood bootleggers and fashioned excellent reflectors.\(^2\) Elmer Cheeks and Max Eisenstat constructed a lighting system with sewer-tile-and-saltwater dimmers. The basement dressing rooms were whitewashed by Arthur Talbot and "Doc" Heywood (with at least one explosion of the pressure whitewasher);\(^3\) Russell Jelliffe, hard pressed for funds, learned that St. Wenceslas Church, on West 14th Street, was disposing of its old pews. He bought them on credit, at $10 a pew, and installed them in the tiny theatre.\(^4\) "The first night performance paid for half these seats; they paid for the other half by the end of that first season."\(^5\)

The question of decorating arose, and it too had to be solved in a community way. When African decorations were suggested, a hue analogous to the cry of the opponents of the Negro play arose: "Not African! We want our

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\(^1\) Mary June Burton, CPD, Jan. 30, 1930.

\(^2\) Sinclair, loc. cit., 103. Mrs. Jelliffe is firmly convinced that no reflectors since have been as good! (Interview, May 5, 1961.)

\(^3\) Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.

\(^4\) Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 25, 1961.

\(^5\) Sinclair, loc. cit. Some of these pews have survived to "new" Karamu, and line the long hall of the present theatre building.
theatre to be beautiful.\textsuperscript{1} Others, more sophisticated in
t heir artistic tastes, championed African art, and proved—
long before many people were so minded—that "African decora-
tions can be artistic and harmonious."\textsuperscript{2} Olive Hale, Hazel
Mountain Walker, and other "talented members spent weeks in
the Cleveland Public Library studying African designs, then
painted the striking motifs on burlap" hangings for the
auditorium walls.\textsuperscript{3} They scoured the resources of the Fine
Arts Department, and found "picture writing, copied from
African caves,"\textsuperscript{4} design motifs from "ancient African tem-

dles . . . one from Central Africa, one from the Congo,
one from Northwest Africa, one from the Niger district, and
one from Abyssinia."\textsuperscript{5} The artist-players used them all.

Lights, suspended from the ceiling, were dramatical-
ly shielded by hand-carved "bowls copied from West African
pottery,"\textsuperscript{6} and they cast soft light on "grey walls, which
are hung in African fabrics and enriched with ceremonial

\textsuperscript{1}Burton, CPD, Jan. 30, 1930. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{3}Sinclair, \textit{loc. cit.} Mrs. Louise Dunn, Curator of
Education at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Paul Travis,
noted Cleveland artist and current Karamu Board member, con-
ferred with these Gilpiners (Grace V. Kelley, CPD, Feb. 25,
1927) and helped create the striking African atmosphere.
This contact with African art and Mr. Travis was shortly
to be an even more fruitful and significant one. (See Ch.
VI, 310-12.)

\textsuperscript{4}Burton, CPD, Jan. 30, 1930. \textsuperscript{5}Gaz., March 5, 1927.

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.
masks."\textsuperscript{1} The grey wooden ceiling was painted with a yellow sun, whose black rays radiated to those grey walls. The wainscoting was also in grey, with stripes of black and yellow and old blue and red. Red and grey stripes decorated the entrance way, too; as Grace Kelley wrote: "They've been smart enough to leave the battered old exterior 'as is' but as soon as you enter the foyer, Africa begins."\textsuperscript{2} This "battered old exterior" was "boxlike and had an iron front, like thousands of small business 'blocks' the country through."\textsuperscript{3} The proscenium was decorated like African doorways, with diagonal stripes, and the panels all around the walls carried the African picture writing.

This African atmosphere was carried out in other ways. The Jelliffes had been in Africa in 1925, and brought relics and native garments back with them: carved and painted spears, which stood, decoratively, in corners; African water bottles, carried by hostess ushers in brilliantly striped, authentic futahs, and wearing African anklets and

\textsuperscript{1}Grace V. Kelley, CPD, Feb. 25, 1927. The "African fabrics" were, of course, brown, yellow, and russet burlap, and meant to resemble the barkcloth from which real African tapestries were made. Some board members were disturbed at spending so "much money on the 'fine tapestries.'" (Fritchey, loc. cit.)

\textsuperscript{2}CPD, Feb. 25, 1927.

\textsuperscript{3}CPD, Oct. 31, 1937. A "brick" front, according to the Jelliffes.
bare sandals as they seated the spectators and distributed programs.  

The stage was very small, with a sixteen-foot proscenium opening, a low ceiling, and some "depth, but little width. Entrances on one side simply don't exist, unless a passage can be made along the wall, to be entered at the back." The house seated 120, though not comfortably, according to several accounts, one in William McDermott's fine-flavored prose: "You sat on pews and were distinctly incommodeed by their inhospitality to the human anatomy." But McDermott was a good critic, as well as a good writer, and he added that one found relief from the "not too soft" pews (as another theatre-goer described them) "only in the vitality and freshness of what was projected on the stage." Russell Jelliffe agreed that the pews were forbidding: "They hit you right in the middle of your thigh."

1Ibid. The June, 1930, Crisis has a cover photo of Naomi Smith, a costumed hostess usher for ROSEANNE, and on p. 192, Fitzhugh Woodford and Elmer Wye are shown carving the wooden bowls used as house lighting fixtures.

2Dalva, op. cit., 31.

3Press, March 13, 1933, describes the problem of staging PORGY, with its two-story setting, on this stage.

4CPD, Oct. 31, 1937.


6CPD, Nov. 27, 1949.  7Interview, May 25, 1961.
Fifteen chairs could be added for adult audiences,¹ and with a children's audience, the house would accommodate two hundred.² There were two elevations, one at row H, and the aisles ran up the sides of the rectangular house³ to the foyer, where there was a single exit to the street. There were three other exits out of the house, one leading to the outside and two to the adjoining two-story building⁴ (which housed the Karamu Day Nursery and the second floor Art Studio).

Despite the time and energy that were consumed in preparing the theatre, rehearsals and performances went on. As Appendix I indicates, in November, 1926, a trio of one-acters was presented at the (rented) Bohemian Hall; and one of them was repeated on December 17 at the invitation of the Fairmount Presbyterian Church. Then, at the height of the work, in December and January, 1927, another bill of three one-act plays was rehearsed, and opened there on January 26. Less than a month later, the theatre officially opened, with three one-act plays.

¹McDermott, CPD, Dec. 4, 1949.
²Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 11, 1961.
³Ibid.
⁴Theatre diagram, found in MARSHLAND (April, 1935) program. This simple line sketch indicated all of the exits for both house and stage, and though it carried the usual "Walk--Do Not Run" admonition, it also assured the audience that "in case of emergency this auditorium can be vacated in one minute."
The problem of a proper name gnawed for some time at the consciousness of the Gilpin Players, because a name, always important, seemed somehow more significant for their own creation, for the pride the group felt in their achievement. Mrs. Hazel Walker, who discovered the word "Karamu" in a Swahili dictionary in the Cleveland Library's John Griswold White Collection, cannot remember the two other members of the committee chosen to nominate a name for the Playhouse Settlement's new theatre; nor can she recall the alternate suggestion she returned to the Players—"I thought, I can't be too arbitrary, I must give them a choice"; but she remembers quite well that she felt the name should be African; and that Karamu ("because of the rhythm of it first, then the sound") struck her immediately.  

Mr. Gordon W. Thayer was, from 1916 to 1956, Curator of the White Collection and more than any other single individual, responsible for its character. His recollections of the committee's search for a name include his suggesting that Swahili might be an appropriate source for an African

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1 This collection, "of Folklore and Orientalia, with more than 50,000 volumes, is one of the notable collections in the country." (CYB, 1927, 272.) The current Library pamphlet on the John G. White Collection calls it "one of the greatest collections of books in the world," with many items unique in the United States, and some in the world. It is interesting to speculate on the naming of Karamu if Cleveland had not had—as many libraries do not—a Swahili dictionary.  

2 Mrs. Walker, interview, April 20, 1961.
name, because of its "international" character in Africa. It is the "second language" for many Central African tribes, giving it status and wider distribution than the local dialects. It is "the universal tongue of the Veldt from Tanganyika to Angola."\(^1\) He recognized, too, along with the committee, that the name must be appropriate, reasonably euphonious, and not variable in pronunciation; and he recalls using the English-Swahili dictionary first when the committee told him of their purpose, then checking possible shifts in meaning and new meanings of the words they found in the Swahili-English.\(^2\)

What does "Karamu" mean? It means "the place of entertainment, or feasting, at the center of the community." This definition is often phrased in a variety of ways: "central place of group activity,"\(^3\) "meeting place,"\(^4\) "a place of enjoyment" or "the center of a community,"\(^5\) "a place of recreation";\(^6\) but each phrase describes the purpose and the idea of Karamu House. Actually, the concept

\(^1\)Paul Metzler, CPD, Nov. 27, 1949. Mr. Metzler is the Art Editor of CPD.

\(^2\)Interview, June 17, 1961.

\(^3\)Marie Daerr, Press, Dec. 6, 1940.

\(^4\)Metzler, CPD, Nov. 27, 1949.

\(^5\)Carville, loc. cit., 20.

\(^6\)Hon. Frances P. Bolton, Congressional Record, XCVII, No. 156 (Aug. 23, 1951).
of locale, or place, has come along recently, in a logical linguistic development. The activity has given its name to the location where that activity is held, which, in Africa—since feasting and entertainment bring people together in a community celebration—is at the center of the village. Africans visiting Karamu, as well as returning American travelers, all speak of the existence of the "karamu" in many African villages.¹

So new and newly-named Karamu Theatre, in the center of its community, opened on February 24, 1927. The program consisted of OFF NAG'S HEAD, by Dougald MacMillan; THE MEDICINE SHOW, by Stuart Walker, which was on the very first Gilpin Players bill; and SIMON THE CYRENIAN, one of Ridgely Torrence's Three Plays for the Negro Theatre (one reviewer, J. Parker Harrison, felt that "the acting was especially good in this play, as the deep-rooted religion of their race came out in the presentation."²); and among the thirty-one cast members were Hazel Walker, Arthur Spencer, Elmer Cheeks, Olive Hale, Zell Ingram, Arthur Talbot, Fitzhugh Woodford, George Guinn, and Pearl Mitchell. It was, quite obviously, a landmark, and a memorable occasion.

Someone has called Karamu Theatre a "theatre of the

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, June 17, 1961.

spirit,\(^1\) and this story of its creation seems to confirm that praise. There were no funds for renovating and decorating, and had there been, obviating the need for such a communal approach to the work, there might have been no "cementing factor\(^2\) to provide the new cohesion the group found. So, perhaps once more, poverty was a "blessing in disguise." Someone else wrote that the Gilpins were "conscious of possessing a cultural heritage that they have every reason on earth to be proud of,\(^3\) and without the opportunity to express the African atmosphere so vividly in their new home, the awareness of this heritage might not have come so forcefully or so soon to some of the members. Someone summed it all up: "It is beautiful. We love it. It is ours.\(^4\)

This growing sense of pride within the group itself, and in the new plant, had important ramifications in solidifying the Gilpin Players' commitment to the Negro content play. Prior to their first production of Paul Green's \textit{Abraham's Bosom} in their seventh season (1927-28), they had mounted fourteen Negro content productions (of nine plays), and the number was to more than double in the next seven


\(^2\)Mrs. Jeliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.

\(^3\)Kelley, \textit{CPD}, Feb. 25, 1927.

\(^4\)Mrs. Jeliffe, in [W. E. B. DuBois], loc. cit.
seasons. Their success with this work, and the respectful attention its Negro content received from the public—critics and audience alike—facilitated the acceptance of the later Negro plays, and helped earn prestige and national attention for the organization.

This was "the first production outside of New York," and that label was increasingly to become a characteristic of Karamu plays. The Gilpins were, naturally, anxious that their production match this Pulitzer Prize-winning play so, late in their rehearsal schedule, they travelled to Detroit to confer with Frank Wilson, Rose McClendon, and Richard Huey, former cast members of the original production, then performing on the road in PORGY. Whether it was their talent, their direction, their hard work, or their Detroit "research," the Gilpins' version of the Paul Green play was a great success. They had scheduled their production for a week's run at Karamu rather than for the usual four nights,¹ and a week after they closed there, S. W. Manheim, producer of the (professional) Little Theatre downtown, booked them for a two week run, a unique thing for an amateur group, but "a logical reward of merit" in the eyes of one paper.²

The flood, relatively speaking, of newspaper coverage on IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM gives us one of our best, early

¹CPD, May 25, 1928. ²Cleveland Call, June 7, 1928.
opportunities to judge the community's reaction to both the Gilpin Players and this Negro content play. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* called it an "amazingly smooth and sympathetic performance," and added that "the Gilpin band plays with a freedom and an accuracy not often found in semi-professional acting circles."\(^1\) The *News* referred to the Gilpins' "native artistry," and "innate talent for acting," and declared that these had helped transform a Central Avenue poolroom into "a colored playhouse which ranks high among the art theatres of the country." The reviewer added, in a tone of praise, that the Gilpin Players were giving Clevelanders an opportunity to see Paul Green's play "about their own people, acted by their own people."\(^2\) The *Press* man declared himself "surprised" as well as "impressed." He made it clear that though the group's acting was at times, below the "professional standard," there were other times when it was equally high above it, and he took cognizance of the community theatre nature of the group, noting that most of the actors work at trades or in business.\(^3\) A *Christian Science Monitor* correspondent wrote a sensitive review of the production, praising the performances, especially that

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\(^1\)W. Ward Marsh, June 12, 1928.

\(^2\)Don Muir Strouse, June 11, 1928.

\(^3\)George Davis, June 11, 1928.
of Olive Hale as Goldie McRanie. It is worth quoting in part:

... an arresting and unusual performance ... In addition to the expertness of the acting, there was a naturalness and spontaneity not often seen with "professionals." These players seem to be sighting the elusive goals of all artists where form and mood are not touched by the superficial or factitious, but are, on the contrary, happy counterparts of the original patterns. It was evident that under this production was a foundation of sound dramatic comprehension, and behind it, annals of hard work and patience.¹

It is significant that each of the "white" reviews quoted above makes certain points which the others repeat, and which become more or less "standard" precepts, forming a pattern of criticism in the subsequent reviews of this group's efforts. These critical observations may be simplified as follows: 1) surprise at the high level of quality in a non-professional group, 2) reference to natural (Negro) ability, and 3) spirited, "free" playing which surpasses cold technique and polish. Variations of these concepts occur and re-occur, and their persistence is evidence for the accuracy of the Jelliffe's earlier, corresponding convictions: 1) "When there is interest, when the materials are at hand, and when very well trained and skillful teachers are at hand, talent has a way of growing. Sometimes that talent becomes great";² 2)


²Mrs. Jelliffe, Speech at the Peoples' Arts Center, St. Louis, March 4, 1954. (Mrs. Jelliffe's personal files.)
Negroes have "racially the wherewithal from which to give abundantly to the art [drama];"[^1] and 3) "permissive" directing, which stimulates an individual creativity not "contaminated by the western theatrical manner"; and purposes to "develop and use dramatic technique but never to be submerged by it."[^2]

The Negro press was enthusiastic, though it is hard to detect any discernible pattern of criticism. First of all, with the exception of the Gazette, Negro papers were struggling to stay alive, and if they succeeded, there was still no guarantee of regularity of appearance. None of them had staff reviewers, and one or another—all through the years—was lacking in understanding and appreciation of Karamu Theatre's purposes and goals.

Editor Harry C. Smith, who was later to break so sharply with the settlement and the Jelliffes, was a booster for IN ABRAHAM’S BOSOM. He urged all people of Cleveland, "especially ours," to patronize the production.[^3] The Cleveland Call printed a release from A. W. Newman, managing director of the Little Theatre, who called the Gilpins "the leading Negro dramatic group in the entire world," and added (rather gratuitously if his praise is sincere and literally meant), that they had "earned the right to a

[^2]: Ibid.
[^3]: Gaz., June 9, 1928.
real public appearance [sic] in a real downtown showhouse."¹
Newman assured the public that though "there have been times
. . . when the theatrical work of the Gilpin Players was
the same as that of any other group of amateurs," this
presentation of Paul Green's play was not one of those
times.² The well-known writer, Charles W. Chesnutt, was
a Clevelander, and his reaction to IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM led
him to call the company "veteran actors instead of a semi-
amateur organization." He singled out Fitzhugh Woodford
(Abraham McCranie) for particular praise, saying he "needs
only the proper opportunity to rank with Charles Gilpin
and Paul Robeson as an ornament of the American stage."³

If it is true that "this was the play that, more
than any other, brought national fame to the Karamu,"⁴
a belief confirmed by Rowena Jelliffe,⁵ then it is not
surprising to find it revived, not once, but twice, by the
Gilpins. The first revival followed two seasons later, in
1929, and only one of the original cast members had to be
replaced.⁶ The program for the second revival, in 1932,

¹June 7, 1928.  ²Ibid.
³The undated clipping from which these quotations are
taken is from Karamu files. It is a Negro paper from June,
1928—probably the Herald.
⁴Stan Anderson, Press, Aug. 8, 1950. Mr. Anderson
is currently the Drama Critic for the Cleveland Press.
⁵Interview, May 17, 1961.  ⁶Program, Oct. 16.
showed nine of the previous cast of twelve repeating their roles,¹ suggesting both the continuity of the group and their affection for this particular play. The 1932 production played Finney Chapel in Oberlin, under the auspices of the College Dramatic Association, eight months after it opened at Karamu—in effect, another "new" production.

In looking back at the play, Mrs. Jelliffe felt that it would have to be considered one of the five or six most important Karamu plays, although she qualified this by observing that "importance" can, and did, mean different things to the group at different times. In addition to enhancing Karamu's reputation nationally, the play accomplished several more significant ends: 1) it set and demanded a high standard of production, "challenging the very best that actors could give";² 2) crystallized for the players certain convictions about themselves and their purpose as a group;³ 3) welded the group together through the play's success and its frequent revivals;⁴ and 4) elicited a "tremendous reaction of sympathetic understanding"⁵—

¹March 9, 1932. The number of "repeaters" might have been even higher, but for several roles for youngsters whose normal growth might eliminate them for casting in a revival.

²WJMO interview, May 21, 1961. Russell Jelliffe's set met this high standard, too. Though simple, it was "excellent, extraordinarily beautiful," and was frequently applauded. (Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, June 26, 1961.)

³Interview, May 17, 1961. ⁴Ibid.

⁵WJMO interview, May 21, 1961.
not merely approval and applause— from its audiences.

Another link in the chain of commitment to the race heritage through the drama was forged with SCARLET SISTER MARY. This play by Daniel Reed, adapted from Julia Peterkin's best-selling novel, was presented by the Gilpin Players as the fifth and sixth productions of season eleven (April and June, 1932) and the first production of the twelfth season. In order to understand the role of this play in shaping the company's perseverance with regard to Negro content, it is necessary to go back two years, to the Cleveland tour of the New York professional company of this play, with Ethel Barrymore as Sister Mary. Here is what William McDermott wrote:

The really formidable thing that stands in the way of this play, the thing that devitalizes it, is something that nobody connected with this generally courageous and honorable enterprise can help. That thing is the relative impossibility of getting white actors to give reality to Negro characters or to create the illusion of Negro life.

Authors, producers and actors in this case are up against an inexorable and perhaps childish but nevertheless, powerful convention and that convention is that a white actor blacked up looks like a white actor blacked up. That is, he looks comical and obviously fraudulent. If he cannot even succeed in looking like a Negro how can you expect him to project the inner feeling of a Negro or to express, as is necessary in this case, the poetry and the vibrancy and the peculiarly Negro graciousness and simple kindness of a way of life among a certain remote group of Negroes? . . . Theatregoers when they see a group of white actors in blackface on the stage expect to be entertained by a minstrel show and go to sleep if they aren't.
I asked Mrs. Peterkin yesterday whom she originally visualized to play the role of Sister Mary. She answered "Ethel Waters, the Negro singer." And all this despite the fact that there were nine Negroes in Miss Barrymore's company.

Mr. McDermott and Mrs. Peterkin never "got" Ethel Waters, but they did get Frances Williams and the Gilpin troupe. McDermott's review was headed *Barrymore Play Without Burnt Cork*, and it speaks for itself:

Well, these local colored folks make that eminent company look, in retrospect, pretty foolish. It isn't merely that they give a better performance. Acted by illustrious white brethren in burnt cork, it was fraudulent and artificial. Acted by these local players, it rings with sincerity. Such a performance is enlightening. It suggests how important the illusion of reality is to the proper presentation of a play and how little the illusion is due to art and how much to the emotional and physical fitness of the players to their roles. I didn't really know how good the play was, or how much of the true essence of the novel it had distilled until I saw these colored players act it.

Three years later, Jesse Firse, veteran Gilpin Player, wrote a remarkable letter to one of the Negro papers, answering criticism of the group's "specialization in Negro plays." This letter will be covered later; it is

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3*CPD*, April 30, 1932. It is interesting that, despite McDermott's feeling about "the illusion of reality," his interest in and support for the Karamu group extended well into the period of mixed racial casting. The question of the compatibility of interracial casting and good theatre is taken up in Ch. VIII, 388-90.

mentioned here because it adduces SCARLET SISTER MARY as proof of the group's "pride of race," compares the Barrymore and Karamu productions, and reflects firm accord with Mr. McDermott's position.

The first Isadora Bennett (wife of playwright Daniel Reed) plays produced by the Gilpins, the world premiere of DEEP DARK and COASTWISE (on a single bill), preceded SCARLET SISTER MARY,¹ but cannot be said to figure as prominently in terms of creating a more favorable climate for the acceptance of the Negro folk play. All of her works taken together, however, plus their unique speech and locale, and Miss Bennett's close relationship to Karamu Theatre, give her—and her plays—relevance and significance.

Again, the observations of William McDermott provide the insights needed to sense the growing importance of the Gilpin Players and the direction of that growth. He calls the Karamu "a refuge for intelligent and interesting drama," and likens the Gilpin Players to the Cleveland Playhouse in terms of unearthing really worthwhile drama.² He also struck the chords alluded to earlier: "Not all of them

¹See Appendix I.

²The Cleveland Playhouse, though no longer in its "art theatre" phase (according to I. W. Brown, op. cit., 179), had been producing what can only be called a "heavy" schedule of literary plays, "startlingly superior to that of any organization... in the area": Pirandello, O'Neill, O'Casey, Shakespeare, Chekhov, Andreyev, Anderson, Rice, Shaw, et al. (Ibid., 180-82.)
[actors] are completely professional, but some of them are"; and a declaration that their performances had "naturalness and spontaneity that you will rarely see among white amateurs."

GOD'S OWN, like COASTWISE, a comedy, was the third Gullah Negro play of Isadora Bennett's to be produced at Karamu Theatre, and her next production there was the world premiere of THE SOON BRIGHT DAY, which opened the fifteenth season, on October 6, 1935. The emphasis as well as the praise in the newspapers fell on the story of the play (particularly on the peculiar "second burial" custom of the Gullahs), and on its language, rather than on the production. The script (written for production by the Gilpin Players) was "forceful stuff," had the "strength and ring of authentic poetry," and "an emotional validity and a simple, earthy beauty that is equal in quality to FORGY and THE

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According to program notes (Dec. 12, 1934 and April 24, 1935), the Players had planned the show for Feb., 1935, and then for June, but neither production came off. Mrs. Jelliffe speculates that casting difficulties may have delayed them. It seemed important to have actors who could master the Gullah dialect (interview, April 25, 1961; see above, Ch. IV, p. 146, for reference to the accent question); although one critic wrote of the revival production of the play that the only evidence of Gullah dialect came from "Hazel Walker in a very creditable way." (Andrew Bishop, C&P, May 13, 1937. For more on Mr. Bishop, the "Stage Folk" columnist, see below, 263–54.)

McDermott wrote that the dialect had "the rhythm and apt imagery of Elizabethan English," and was "the natural poetry of humble and unspoiled people." This latter quote, so reminiscent of J. M. Synge (whom, in fact, McDermott mentions), recalls Alain Locke's notion that Negro folk drama would move from the realistic to the poetic and symbolic (from Willis Richardson and Paul Green to Synge and the Yiddish theatre), and helps us see the Bennett play in perspective relative to the historical development of Negro play literature.

Miss Bennett, who with her husband founded the Town Theatre in Charleston, South Carolina, one of America's first regional theatres, visited Karamu to see her "drama being tested by Gilpiners," and returned, two years later, to see the revival. While in Cleveland for the premiere, she wrote a long biographical article for the Plain Dealer, and her remarks about the Negroes she knew "on the plantations of friends" are worth noting. She said at one point: "No one could come in contact with the archaic and simple grandeur of the high type of southern Negro without being profoundly affected by them"; and concluded the article

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1 Ibid.  
2 Ibid.  
3 "Drama of Negro Life," 705.  
4 CPD, May 2, 1937.  
5 CPD, Nov. 3, 1935 and May 6, 1937.
with this description of the Negroes of whom she writes:

They have, first and last, the child's mind. That is sometimes said disparagingly. I don't say it so. Where they can be found in their unspoiled and un-harlemized state, they have that mind in all its original clarity and beauty.\footnote{Nov. 3, 1935.}

Whether or not the condescension in remarks of this kind was intended or not, some Negroes took offense, and placed themselves in opposition to the Gilpin Players on this score of the Negro folk play.

In support of the Gilpins, however, was the fact that an experienced playwright had selected them "as the logical medium"\footnote{CPD, Nov. 3, 1935.} for her play's first performance, and that meant that the developing uniqueness and the specific character of Karamu Theatre were emerging with more clarity than they had before. William McDermott referred to the "purpose" of the Gilpins, of the steadiness with which they pursue that purpose, and of their establishment as a "definite cultural asset to the community."\footnote{Ibid.}

The play ROSEANNE, by Nan Bagby Stephens, deserves mention here not merely as one of the early full-length Negro plays; or because it was the Gilpin Players selection for the Theatre of the Nations (in which section below\footnote{206-209.} the play will be fully discussed); or because it, too, like IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM had a professional engagement downtown;
but because its production engendered criticism from a portion of Cleveland's Negro clergy—criticism which gave the group an opportunity, collectively, to express its philosophy on the Negro folk play and its support for folk art as "a sound basis for our racial development." In a long letter signed "The Gilpin Players," they take their stand that

we are a group of forty people sufficiently removed from the peasant [italics mine] phase of our race to look back upon it, recognize its beauty and wish to interpret it as beautifully as possible for the general public. This, we believe, reacts for the ultimate best of our race.  

Alain Locke's use of "peasant" throughout his essay, "The Drama of Negro Life," is recalled, and the emphasis on folk art seems like sound aesthetics. Dr. Charles Johnson, Director of Fisk University's Department of Social Sciences, praised Karamu for this very service: "The preservation and re-interpretation of the folklore of the Negro." And Edith Isaacs has observed:

For our [white] theatre has never learned what painters and sculptors learned centuries ago, and musicians generations ago—that every art must go back to the soil for refreshment from time to time. That is why today's theatre is so undernourished. We continue to build on a base with little folk foundation, and almost no peasant drama of the kind from which a "cultural" theatre would normally grow. And that is the main reason why, in music and dance, in rhythm and comedy and pantomime, we borrow so

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1CPD, Feb. 19, 1930.  
2Ibid.  
3News, Jan. 18, 1939.
freely from the Negro theatre which has been developed from the earth up.¹

Despite the opposition, the folk-art commitment grew more vigorous, but that strength did not eliminate the opposition and, in fact, created a new and serious problem: the lack of proper scripts. The problem was circular: there were very few Negro plays because there were very few Negro playwrights, because there were very few opportunities for Negroes to get dramatic training, because there were very few theatres for Negroes, because there were very few Negro plays.

The Gilpin Players, particularly in the 1927-1939 period, finally became firmly and happily engaged in the business of producing Negro plays, but they were handicapped by this absence of Negro playwrights. As late as 1940 they could still say: We feel dependent "almost entirely upon the output and promise of four [Negro] playwrights: Zora Neale Hurston, Shirley Graham, Owen Dodson, and Langston Hughes."² The Negro playwrights produced between 1930 and 1940 were not writing regularly, or turned to other media: Andrew M. Burris, Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen, William DuBois. Those from 1920 to 1930? Only one: Willis Richardson, whose COMPROMISE was produced in 1926, and whose output consisted of one-actors.

¹Negro in Amer. Thtr., 15. ²Houghton, op. cit., 102.
Even if Negro playwrights had been available, the odds against their plays meeting Gilpin Players' standards were high. Another vicious circle was operating here and as New York's American Negro Theatre found to their regret: scripts by would-be Negro playwrights lacked skill in preparation and finish due to the lack of workshop opportunities, due to the lack of Negro theatres to organize workshops, due to.... etc., etc.¹ And in cases where Negro theatres did exist, as in some of the more progressive colleges and universities, for example, we have Ridgely Torrence's observation² that frequency and type of Negro drama were limited by conventional, timid authorities. Certainly the realistic urban play of Negro life, or the folk play, would be curtailed in that kind of stifling atmosphere.

Appendix I shows that during the 1927-1939 period, there were twenty-seven Negro content plays by white playwrights produced (not including revivals), and only seven by Negro playwrights other than Langston Hughes. So there was one source of Negro folk plays--from the white playwrights--though this was hardly meeting the obligation and concern of the Gilpin Players: to uncover and stimulate Negro playwrights and playwriting, to enable Negro writers to take their place in the cultural mainstream as Negro

¹Leonard, loc. cit., 422.
²Above, Ch. IV, pp. 118-19.
performers were doing, in greater and greater number. For it was clear, as one historian in the field put it: the Negro playwright, writing for amateur groups, has not kept pace with the Negro actor.¹

Since so many of these problems are related, hence somewhat circular in their effect, let us consider one more: the real difficulty of getting plays "honestly telling the Negro story." This is Rowena Jelliffe's phrase, as she ponders this problem that puts any group producing Negro content material between Scylla and Charybdis:

The average white playwright is apt to confuse the bizarre with the dramatic in Negro life and so present a distorted picture. Usually he must write with far too limited knowledge . . . . The Negro playwright, on the other hand, is apt to be handicapped by too much knowledge, with so myopic a view that he loses perspective of dramatic values within his own knowledge and experience.²

If there are no playwrights, and no proper plays--create them! There are two ways to "create" playwrights: 1) provide an outlet for their plays, and 2) teach people playwriting; Karamu had been doing the first for some time when it decided to try the second. Prior to the late 1920's, interest in playwriting was informal, which is to say, unorganized, and sporadic. Mrs. Jelliffe had done "occasional" counselling on playwriting,³ and the Gilpin

²"Karamu, 'Place of Enjoyment,'" 15-16.
³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
Players announced a plan to "launch a one-act playwriting contest for colored persons."\(^1\) But about 1927 or 1928 there were new developments which had ramifications for the future of playwriting at Karamu.

The next regular production of the season will be OSCEOLA, an historical drama in three acts by Clara Lederer and Florence Bundy. This will be the first of the Gilpin plays written expressly for them by two Cleveland girls. This play will be produced April 18th, 19th, 20th & 21st.\(^2\)

A second announcement of OSCEOLA's forthcoming production appeared three weeks later,\(^3\) but OSCEOLA was never produced. The play's authors were active in an informal playwriting group, which organized, a year later, as the Playwrights Study Group, under "Mrs. John Cornwall, Constance Fisher, Louise Cheeks, and Mrs. Florence Wright."\(^4\) The Gilpins' enthusiasm about doing an original script of two of their own members, as well as the script's early promise, explain the premature announcements, but the writers "just couldn't go anywhere with it," and it fell short of the Gilpin Players' production standards.\(^5\)

Despite OSCEOLA and the failure of the Playwrights Study Group to produce a usable work for production, there were important benefits from this type of activity, and a

\(^{1}\text{CPD, June 24, 1925.}\quad ^{2}\text{Program, March 7, 1928.}\quad ^{3}\text{Program, March 21, 1928.}\quad ^{4}\text{Newald.}\quad ^{5}\text{Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.}\)
wise administrator could sense them, even in failure. These attempts extended the range of theatre activity practiced, established the feeling that "playwriting had a place here," and gave the Gilpin Players an increasing awareness of playmaking and their responsibility to an author.¹ The Study Group provided fragments of works, of course, kept interest and valuable talk at a peak, and was the forerunner of major playwriting activity to come.

The first such development took place early in 1939, with a precedent-setting grant by the Rockefeller Foundation to Ridgely Torrence, to conduct, in residence at Karamu, a study of the Negro theatre in relation to the American drama scene.² Attention from the Rockefeller Foundation was, clearly, a "breakthrough" for Karamu, for it carried with it the hope of setting a pattern of influential national attention and support for Karamu's education-via-the-arts program. Frederic Ridgely Torrence, whose Three Plays for the Negro Theatre was such a signal contribution, was born in 1875 in Xenia, a southern Ohio town which developed, prior to the Civil War, a large, relatively prosperous Negro community and strong abolitionist tendencies. Like Cleveland and Oberlin, Xenia had become a station on the "Underground Railway." Torrence had frequent contacts with Negro speech and religion and song, at school and at

¹Ibid. ²CPD, Jan. 19, 1939.
church, and these are reflected in his trio of plays.\textsuperscript{1} He had been a librarian at the New York Public Library from 1897 to 1903, editor of \textit{The Critic} and associate editor of \textit{Cosmopolitan} to 1907, and poetry editor of \textit{The New Republic} from 1920 to 1934.\textsuperscript{2} He was sixty-three when he came to Karamu.

There seems to be no question about Torrence's absorbing interest in the Irish dramatic revival, about the Abbey, and Synge's folk plays, but there is some difference of opinion about the extent of those influences on his \textit{Three Plays}. Rowena Jelliffe recalls Torrence's descriptions and impressions of his three-year visit to the Abbey Theatre, and of his "clear wish to do a similar thing with Negro folklère on the American scene."\textsuperscript{3} Edith Isaacs is not specific, but raises the question and answers it inconclusively by saying:

\begin{quote}
It has been assumed that Mr. Torrence was led to write his plays under their [Synge and Irish revival] influence. What actually happened was that as he read about the amateur players and the folk audience at the Abbey Theatre, he decided that Negro folk players and a folk audience--in a barn in his home town of Xenia, if necessary--were the solution for his own problem.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

Padraic Colum, one of the seminal forces in Irish dramatic

\textsuperscript{1}Isaacs, \textit{Negro in Amer. Thtr.}, 55.
\textsuperscript{2}Press, Feb. 27, 1939. \textsuperscript{3}Interview, April 25, 1961.
\textsuperscript{4}Negro in Amer. Thtr., 55-56.
and theatrical history, and in Irish folk drama, knew Mr. and Mrs. Torrence, admired his work as a lyric poet (the basis of his literary fame until the Three Plays), but declares that he was never at the Abbey. Torrence himself makes no mention of the Abbey, or the Irish folk parallel to Negro drama, in his "Some Notes on the Negro Theatre," written after his Karamu stay, but at least two of his Three Plays (GRANNY MAUMEE and RIDER OF DREAMS) underscore that parallel. What emerges from all this ambiguity, however, is an analogy, if not a parallel, between the peasant literature and the vitality of the early Irish drama, and the folklore basis of the Negro plays produced by the Gilpins. Una Ellis-Fermor might have been writing of Negro performers when she described the acting of the Abbey amateurs as "that of a naturally dramatic people unspoiled by the conventions of the European stage." And Langston Hughes expressed, point-blank, "the hope that the Gilpin Players will become the Abbey Theatre of America."

Torrence, aware of the "racial flowering" in the fields of music and the dance, felt that there were specific indications of a growing, significant contribution from the Negro drama and the Negro stage. His aim was to examine

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1 Interview, April 21, 1961.  2 Oxford Companion, 388.  3 Quoted in CPD, Feb. 13, 1942.  4 Loc. cit.
what had been done at Karamu (over 120 different plays had been produced since 1921), and "to encourage and direct new talent."¹ He became the leader of an existing playwriting group—activity of this kind was, after all, one of the reasons for Rockefeller Foundation interest in Karamu—and "within a short time several lively plots were developed and worked at with an ingenuity that was most encouraging."² He mentions no specific plays in his "report" in the National Theatre Conference Bulletin, and the hard truth is that no plays were written as a direct result of his Karamu residence. ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE, "the first play ever to be written by the Gilpin Players" and produced by them on February 1, 1939, was underway before Torrence came, and his name is not included in the program note that explained the genesis of the comedy.³ But several writing

¹CPD, Jan. 19, 1939. This article speaks of "140 plays" and Torrence in the N. T. C. Bulletin article says 160, but these figures must include revivals, and therefore refer to numbers of productions—in which case, a more accurate figure would be 170, through June, 1939.

²Torrence, loc. cit., 14.

³"The central idea originated with Grace and Roland Mulhauser, who jointly drafted the first outline. On the basis of discussion in which Festus Fitzhugh, Rayner Smith, Rowena Jelliffe, Roland Mulhauser and Jack Stewart participated, the plot was revised and characterization outlined. Festus Fitzhugh, Rayner Smith and Rowena Jelliffe wrote subsequent drafts. Ethel Henderson, Grace Mulhauser and Jack Stewart assisted with criticism and incidental lines. Joseph Zenz suggested its title. The final draft was assembled and correlated by Rowena Jelliffe."
groups were activated by his presence (one of them enduring at least until 1941-42),¹ and the lack of produceable scripts is by no means the measure of Torrence's contribution.

In June of 1939, Torrence called Karamu not only the country's "oldest legitimate Negro theatre of continuous activity," but "also the freest."² Its corps of sixty actors and its production record, he said, were unique, nationally. Two of the plays by a Negro "produced recently by the Karamu are as good comedies as have ever been written by an American, white or colored" (a clear reference to Langston Hughes), and Torrence added that "during the last half-dozen years several Negro playwrights have produced works far superior to any who preceded them." But he warned that the Negro theatre needed "more educated audiences," guessed that more and better plays would help supply them, and observed that touring visits by theatre companies like the Gilpins (who had developed appreciative audiences for their offerings) would not only build audiences, but might convert those Negroes who were repelled by the contemporary Negro drama.³

Just as the communal building of the theatre at 3807 Central, the swelling affirmation of policy in favor of Negro plays, and the establishment of a precedent by the Rockefeller Foundation playwriting grant, were all

significant landmarks in Karamu's history, so too was the beginning of serious attention from the press, and particularly from the dean of Cleveland critics, the late William F. McDermott of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Irving Brown devotes almost seven pages to "Mac," saying that his arrival in Cleveland in 1921 "marked the beginning of a new and brilliant era for dramatic criticism," and quoting Frederic McConnell who described McDermott's as "one of the best critical minds in the country."\(^1\)

**SAZUS MATAZUS**, by Laurence Eyre, was the first Gilpin production to be reviewed by William McDermott.\(^2\) It was the second production of their tenth season, opening on December 17, 1930, and McDermott acknowledged that the visit was his first, saying: "Procrastination seems the more inexcusable after you have observed one of the Gilpin plays on the home grounds." He was disappointed in their vehicle, calling it a "faded example of the white man's playwriting art," and wished that the Negro players had "something with more pungency, earthiness and bite." But a weak play at the Karamu Theatre did not, apparently, overly disturb McDermott, for on this occasion as well as later, in retrospect, he found adequate compensation. In 1930: "Even with such a play as this they [the players] yield a most fetching and unusual evening in the theatre."\(^3\)

\(^1\) *op. cit.*, 52-58. \(^2\) *CPD*, Dec. 19, 1930. \(^3\) *Ibid.*
In 1942: "Even if the play was not particularly good, there was always a flavorful, individual acting performance to be enjoyed, an amusing personality, a general sense of liveliness, a love of make-believe, a natural aptitude for the theatre." ¹

"A natural aptitude for the theatre." This note: the Negro's affinity for performing, is sounded with sureness in McDermott's very first Gilpin Players review, as are its "standard" corollaries: the spontaneity of colored casts, and surprise at the degree of their (amateur) skill:

It is demonstrable, I think, on the basis of such a performance that the Negro has a native feeling for acting deeper and surer than his white brethren. Even when these actors are generally amateurish they will surprise and delight you again and again by reading a line so perfectly, or by expressing an emotion so truly and vividly, that they make professional white actors seem, by comparison, clumsy and ineffective. They are extraordinarily successful with comedy. Give them a comedy line and they will get into it a buoyancy, a sense of spontaneity, a natural joyousness, that is like nothing in the Caucasian theatre.

If that seems far-fetched take a look at the two pickaninny actors in this play. Children of five or six years, neither one of them, I suppose, has ever stepped on a stage before. They haven't the slightest suggestion of that timidity and self-consciousness which characterize white children of the same age under the same circumstance . . . . Some of that natural delight in play-acting and that instinctive feeling for the theatre exhibits itself in the performance of almost every role in "Sazus Matazus."

Nine years later he wrote: "Most of them are skilled at

¹CPD, April 19.
miming, but even when they are not, their instincts are sure.\footnote{1}

A review of McDermott's writings reveals these concepts noted above, but also indicates his concern for upholding and elevating standards in drama.\footnote{2} He had nothing against entertainment per se, but would not settle for it alone. As Irving Brown puts it: "He did not believe in giving the public what it wanted, but rather what was good for it."\footnote{3} McDermott was an enemy to the "slick" in theatre, and was very good at detecting it. He had a superb prose style and great erudition, and he used these talents to range over a wide area of theatre (and non-theatre) interests. The Jelliffes' eulogy for "Mac," as Karamu knew him, acknowledged his role in acquainting and interesting the larger community in their theatre, and saluted his awareness of its purposes:

He saw our group as a part of the unfolding growing American Theatre with important contributions to make. It was he who spoke of our theatre as "the greatest single democratizing force in the city of Cleveland." Our story could not be told without a chapter on William F. McDermott.\footnote{4}

\footnote{1CPD, Nov. 25, 1939.}

\footnote{2In addition to the Karamu reviews, see also The Best of McDermott: The Selected Writings of William F. McDermott (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1959). This volume, published posthumously, contains a great deal of non-theatre writing as well.}

\footnote{3Op. cit., 56.}

\footnote{4Karamuse, Feb., 1959.}
The practical corollary to William McDermott's importance in helping to shape the philosophical and historical definition of the Karamu Theatre, was his role in developing audiences. He was well aware of the difficulties Karamu faced in building attendance, both from the white community and among Negroes. He wrote of the public's timidity "about exploring Central Avenue," and said that it was "too bad the general public isn't a little more aware" of what a cultural force Karamu is in Cleveland.\(^1\) And when the Gilpin Players performed in the Brooks Theatre of the Cleveland Playhouse, he called it a "civic benefit" to bring Karamu "to the attention of a wider public,"\(^2\) which he knew would be the case at the other, more socially-acceptable, theatre.

In the very earliest years of production, when Dumas and Gilpin plays were produced in the public schools and rented halls, the audiences were largely Negro, and "consisted almost entirely of friends and relatives of members of the cast."\(^3\) Mrs. Jelliffe confirmed this, and added that the average audience was about 150.\(^4\) After the new theatre was built, however, the white audiences began to grow. As early as 1930, William McDermott observed that

\(^1\)\text{CPD, Oct. 29, 1939.}\quad \(^2\)\text{CPD, Nov. 25, 1939.}\quad \(^3\)\text{G&P, March 25, 1935, in a letter to the editor from D. J. (Jesse) Firse.}\quad \(^4\)\text{Interview, April 25, 1961.}\quad
the audience at the Karamu was preponderantly white and of the sort usually described as fashionable. The kind of audience that goes to polite plays at the Play House, or visits the Theatre Guild dramas, but is never seen at popular comedies or revues.

The Negroes in the audience were relatively few but seemed, in that gathering, conspicuous.¹

One observer recalls many "Heights" patrons around 1929 and 1930, and remarked on the dressy nature of the ushers, no longer in African garb, and the audience.² This was the so-called "carriage trade," whose interest sprang from the increased attention the white newspapers were giving the group's productions,³ and from the charm and interest of their plant.⁴

In the opinion of one reporter, there was still another stimulus. In reviewing the Gilpin-created play, ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE, he wrote:

They [Gilpin Players] have attracted considerable attention before, but I don't recall seeing such a large and fashionable carriage-crowd as last night's . . . .

I suspect, . . . that the Rockefeller Foundation's recently-publicized interest in the Gilpins' activities was . . . responsible for the traffic jams of chauffeur-driven limousines in front of the Karamu Theatre . . . . They

¹CPD, Dec. 19, 1930.

²Mrs. Dan Levin, joint interview with Mr. Levin, April 7, 1961.

³There were twelve "white" reviews between the 1927 debut and the end of 1930, which is better than one every other production. Prior to the new theatre, there were two "white" reviews.

⁴Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
apparently came out of curiosity, to see what it was that inspired a Rockefeller survey of Negro drama.¹

They were not "slummers," according to Rowena Jelliffe,² and she firmly believes that they attended out of proper motives and not—as some viewed it—to make fun or to "sight-see" in what McDermott called the "flimsy, slum-environed box-like theatre on Central Avenue."³

The Negro press, however (at least that segment which opposed Negro folk drama), felt otherwise. The chief basis for their often scurrilous attacks on Playhouse Settlement, Karamu, the Jelliffes, and the Gilpin Players, was their conviction that whites were forming—or confirming—derogatory opinions of Negroes because of the content and characterizations in the plays presented. Perhaps one or two examples will help make the point: "Stay away from the Karamu until it ceases to stage 'nigger' plays for the edification of the poor whites who go to see them. Show that you have race-respect and self-respect";⁴ "Theatre patrons are most largely poor white people who love to see Negroes make monkeys of themselves."⁵

¹Glen Pullen, CPD, Feb. 2, 1929.
²Interview, April 25, 1961. ³CPD, April 19, 1942.
⁴Gaz., Jan. 25, 1936. A routine reaction, probably prompted at this time by PÚRGY revival. The article goes on to compare Atlanta University's Negro actors, who were staging THE CHERRY ORCHARD, not a "nigger" play!
⁵Gaz., April 3, 1937. Probably in response to Langston Hughes' JOY TO MY SOUL.
Some Negroes may have stayed away because they believed these allegations, but a more accurate explanation lies in the fact that education for the appreciation of theatre by Negro audiences had to be developed, just like any other acquired cultural taste. Mrs. Hazel Walker recalls an incident in which a white member of the audience asked an usher: "When are the Negro nights?" because there were so few Negroes in attendance. And she observes that economics played a key role in keeping Negro attendance down, and so did the lack of a background which many European families had for the theatre, but which did not exist for the American Negro.¹

In their concern to stimulate Negro attendance, and to share what they felt was an important learning experience with the community, the theatre established what they called "Neighborhood Nights." These were performances when residents of the immediate area who could not afford admission and who were not already subscribers attending on other nights (which was, of course, encouraged), were admitted free.² The institution of Neighborhood Night represents an awareness of the community, a rootedness, which is an ongoing characteristic of the Karamu Theatre, and is one factor which accounts for its longevity and strength. These

¹Interview, April 20, 1961.
²Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
nights were far from routine for the actors, for the reactions of an unsophisticated, inexperienced, uninhibited audience, can be distressing. Mrs. Jelliffe sensed the actors' opposition to the Neighborhood Nights, and thinks of this as the rare occasion on which she abandoned her normal administrative policy of "let the group understand the need," and pushed the idea upon them. ¹ A white actor in this period speaks of the fascination he felt in playing on Neighborhood Nights, precisely because of the audience comportment and the reversal of values which often took place in their reaction to a play's racial situations.²

Karamu Theatre's participation in the Cleveland Plain Dealer's Theatre of the Nations was also a landmark for the Gilpin group. It meant attention beyond their usual clientele and the experience of playing "away," and--in the case of ROSEANNE, their 1930 offering--it meant a professional engagement as a result of their one night stand at Cleveland's Public Hall. The Theatre of the Nations project hoped to acquaint Clevelanders at large with the valuable cultural contributions in the drama of the city's many nationality groups.

¹Ibid.

²Dan Levin, interview, April 7, 1961. Mr. Levin, a popular writer and a novelist, was an actor in Gilpin productions circa 1937-38.
Thirty-six nationalities were represented on the advisory committee of the Theatre of the Nations, and of these, twenty-nine participated in the twenty-two productions given in the first season. 1289 people took active parts in the performances and an attendance of 20,000 was recorded during the course of the series. The box office receipts in each case, went to the group sponsoring the production.1

The premiere presentation was by the Cleveland Syrians, who mounted Schiller's THE ROBBERS on January 12, 1930.2 Three Sunday nights later, February 2, the Gilpins put on their entry, ROSEANNE, by Nan Bagby Stephens, with a cast of twenty-six. The morning paper front-paged its rave review, headlined it Gilpin Players Thrill Crowd, and took the opportunity to make some pointed comments for its white readers:

... written by a Negro, played by Negroes, the offering of the Negro population of Cleveland, the majority of the crowd who saw it last night and was thrilled by it were not Negroes ... .

Here on the stage were intelligent men and women. Five of the women school teachers. Two of the men students at Cleveland College. One of the actresses a social worker. And in the audience, two Negro councilmen, Negro lawyers, doctors, ministers. And one said: "the hardest job in working up this play was to teach the cast the proper southern dialect."3

The following Wednesday, ROSEANNE opened "at home," and the lustre of their Theatre of the Nations appearance earned the Gilpins sold-out houses, as well as an offer from "a usually hard-headed source" for a week's booking at the

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1CYP, 1930, 130.  
2Rose, op. cit., 883.  
3Roelif Loveland, CPD, Feb. 3, 1930.
Ohio Theatre downtown, which they accepted. They were followed there by Mitzi, in SARI, and by William Gillette's "Farewell Appearance" as Sherlock Holmes.

Only one sour note marred the proceedings, causing nothing worse than acute embarrassment, however. "Written by a Negro"; "written by a member of the race"; "outstanding Negro playwright of her time";--all these phrases appeared in the play's advance publicity or in its enthusiastic reviews. Shortly after the flurry of excitement over the success of their production, the Gilpin Players read the following letter in "The Post Box" of the Plain Dealer:

In recent issues of the Plain Dealer there appeared publicity regarding my play, "Roseanne," produced by the Gilpin Players. The articles stated that the author of the play is a colored woman. In some of the publicity, I believe, it was stated that the author is a "highly respected colored teacher in Atlanta."

I have the chair of playwriting in Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. I hope I am highly respected. But I happen to be a white woman.

As a southerner as far back as there has been a south, my people having lived in terms of sympathy and affection with the colored folk about us, I feel it a tribute that the Gilpin Players considered my play a true enough picture to have been drawn by one of their own.

The director of the group is greatly embarrassed by the discovery that I am white. It was her

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1McDermott, CPD, March 12, 1930. He is referring, of course, to the "commercial theatre."

2Program, Ohio Theatre, Feb. 5, 1930.

3Loveland, CPD, Feb. 3, 1930. 4Gaz., Feb. 8, 1930.

5CPD, Feb. 2, 1930.
intention and that of her group to produce a play by a colored playwright for the Plain Dealer's Theater of the Nations. My play was secured through my New York agent and neither party knew that the other was deceived. I knew nothing of it beyond the advice from my agent that the play was to be produced in Cleveland.

[signed] NAN BAGBY STEPHENS

In 1931, the second year of the Theatre of the Nations, the Gilpin Players entered O'Neill's THE EMPEROR JONES, with Fitzhugh Woodford in the title role. Again, they received excellent notices, one of which called the production "equal or better than" that of S. W. Manheim's recent (July, 1928) professional staging of the play, with Charles Gilpin, at the Little Theatre. The curtain-raiser for EMPEROR JONES was SERMON IN THE VALLEY, by Zora Neale Hurston, and this same double bill was staged at 3807 Central a week after the Theatre of the Nations performance.

SERMON IN THE VALLEY, "using spirituals, shouts, and

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1CPD, Feb. 26, 1930. Nan B. Stephens attended the Ohio Theatre opening of her play. The actors feted her at a banquet (though it took conscious courage on her part to dine with this largely Negro group, for she was "Atlanta aristocracy" and, at first, extremely hesitant) and she became a warm friend of the Gilpins and the Jelliffes. In her enthusiasm for them all she later wrote a laudatory play called KARAMU, and sent it to Cleveland for production. Unfortunately, it was not of acceptable quality, and was not produced.

2Lawrence Hawkins, CPD, March 30, 1931. Do not confuse the Little Theatre, the professional house, with The Little Theatre of the Public Auditorium, a public hall, where the Theatre of the Nations performances were given.
chants,"¹ is a kind of dramatized rural Negro sermon. Rowena Jelliffe staged it simply, with "someone for the preacher to preach to, and someone to respond in the appropriate fashion," and she describes it as "the most beautiful assembly of English words I ever knew."² It consists merely of a twenty-minute sermon by Brother Ezra, interspersed with the responses in words and sound of the congregation, and with songs which seemed to arise logically and spontaneously from the breaks in his preaching.³ In lauding the singing of the spirituals and the "devil dance" in EMPEROR JONES, the Plain Dealer reviewer said: "There is something about the singing and dancing of the colored race, something fine and superior, that we 100% Nordics can never hope to attain."⁴

O'Neill's THE EMPEROR JONES received the anticipated roasting from Harry Smith's Gazette (though the production of the Gilpin Players was praised): will not "prove helpful to and elevate the race in the slightest."⁵ This jungle tragedy seemed to be the Gazette's âtele noir, for it pursues it assiduously: "Creates wrong impressions of the race in the minds of members of other races who witness the play";⁶ a year later: "Emperor Jones is only less

harmful to the race than Griffith's miserable Birth (Rape) of a Nation'; and, finally, a slap at Paul Robeson for venturing to play Brutus Jones. When the Negro groups at Negro colleges with Negro directors began to stage O'Neill's play, the Gazette continued its comments. To Hampton Institute: "The play ought to be consigned to the scrap heap by Afro-Americans everywhere. Its presentation anywhere does not do our people any good"; the play is harmful—"someone should wire this fact to the Atlanta, Ga. University Summer Theatre."

In 1933, the Plain Dealer sponsored its Third Theatre of the Nations series, and the Gilpin Players entered FORGY on March 12. The evening was a sell-out for the nearly seven hundred seat house, and built up interest in the coming runs at the Karamu Theatre: the first on March 15 and the second on April 26, each for five performances. McDermott's tributes to the Gilpins continued in the same vein (and again, as with THE EMPEROR JONES, favorable comparisons with professional productions were made):

The instinct for acting seems to occur with greater frequency among colored folk than among whites. At least one sees it more commonly among amateur colored players than among their paler brethren. The director's difficulty in managing colored players is to restrain their natural disposition toward over-emphasis. When this is offset by

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1July 10, 1937.  
2June 17, 1939.  
3Dec. 10, 1932.  
4July 10, 1937.
long experience in acting, as it is with most of these Gilpin Players, the result is a performance that can be equaled only by professional players of the highest class.¹

McDermott declared that the PORGY production alone was sufficient justification for the whole Theatre of Nations program, and that "it is perfectly safe to say that there is no local organization in the United States that could rise to the occasion as completely as these colored Gilpin Players did."² Archie Bell, drama critic for the Cleveland News made the "prophet-is-not-without-honor" point: "As I have remarked before, Cleveland has been slow as usual in according due recognition to this group of Negro actors at the Karamu theatre, although national publications have given them much praise."³

When the play was staged at 3807 Central the technical crew faced the reverse of the difficulties they had mastered in setting up in the larger theatre of the Public Hall. The problem of the low ceiling was overcome in a direct way: Designer Elmer Brown simply knocked out the ceiling, eliminating a small room of the building's second floor, and set up the two-story Catfish Row setting.⁴ The production was "no light assignment for any theatrical organization."⁵ There was a cast of fifty, including a

¹CPD, March 13, 1933. ²Ibid. ³March 16, 1933. ⁴Press, March 13, 1933. ⁵McDermott, CPD, March 13, 1933.
band composed of eight school boys,\textsuperscript{1} and not including Porgy's goat, which presented additional problems. Choreography was by Festus Fitzhugh, whose devil dance in THE EMPEROR JONES had been highly acclaimed, and whose role in the dance program at Karamu was to become so prominent. Mr. Fitzhugh corroborated the "innate-native talent" approach so often used by the reviewers of Gilpin productions, when he declared that the stage movement in PORGY (as well as SERMON IN THE VALLEY), which was praised by the reviewer, was "the natural movement of the actors."\textsuperscript{2}

Perhaps the outstanding production of the 1927-1939 period, if measured in terms of newspaper coverage, was STEVEDORE, although it was not so much a theatrical event as a cause célèbre.. It all began routinely, as the Gilpins announced that the Paul Peters and George Sklar play about Negro and white stevedores in New Orleans would open on Wednesday, February 27, 1935. On the 28th, the morning paper carried its review,\textsuperscript{3} observing that the "wildly melodramatic text" offered "dynamite" and "good red, dramatic meat," but that the cast "underplayed rather than overplayed" the "grievances and frightful injustices" of the play. In passing, the reviewer suggested cutting "half the profanity" in order to tighten the play.

\textsuperscript{1}Program, March 15, 1933. \textsuperscript{2}Interview, April 1, 1961. \textsuperscript{3}W. Ward Marsh, CPD, Feb. 28, 1935.
In another quarter, a complaint arose against all the profanity. Editor Harry C. Smith of the Gazette found it hard to believe that "Russell W. Jelliffe and wife . . . would lend themselves to anything" like putting on STEVEDORE, the language of which "is too vile--insulting, derisive, abusive and ROTTEN--to print or use in any but the lowest dens of iniquity."\(^1\) He accused the Jelliffes of staging plays "for the purpose of raising money for some purpose or other,"\(^2\) and he repeated the charge that Karamu catered "to a class of poor whites who enjoy seeing and hearing our people ridiculed, derided or 'made monkies [sic] of.'"

This time, however, Harry Smith did not stop with attacks in print. On Tuesday, before STEVEDORE opened,\(^3\) he registered his complaint to Cleveland Mayor Harry L. Davis, "twenty-five of our leading local ministers,"\(^4\) the three white dailies,\(^5\) and the Chief of Police,\(^6\) and the

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\(^1\)March 2, 1935.

\(^2\)This seems to be a reference to the Gilpin Players Art Scholarship Fund and the African Art Sponsors Fund, both of which at times received contributions from the receipts earned by Gilpin productions, especially those staged at the Theatre of the Nations or professionally.

\(^3\)Presumably Smith learned of STEVEDORE's "obscenities" from New York, where the play was first produced by the Theatre Union in 1934, or from Chicago, where the Union toured it in Jan., 1935. (Program, Dec. 8, 1937.)

\(^4\)March 2, 1935.  \(^5\)March 9, 1935.

\(^6\)March 2, 1935.
Chief sent a delegation consisting of a policeman, a policewoman, a detective, Assistant City Law Director Charles W. White, and Assistant Police Prosecutor Perry B. Jackson, to see the "ROTTEN play" on opening night. Despite the Gazette's efforts, the small house was packed, as it reported, "with a morbid crowd of poor whites, among whom were about 10 or 12 'Negroes.'"

The next day, the delegation, as well as the Jelliffes and some of the STEVEDORE performers, were assembled in the Police Prosecutor's office, and the reporters were asked to leave.

When the door opened next the scene in the inner office resembled the breaking up of a tea party. The Gilpin delegates seemed gay. They were leaving by another door. The police were leaving too. Prosecutor Picciano stood behind his desk. He said it had been decided that the strong language was really necessary to the proper depicting of the life and characters the play dealt with.

"There was no pornographic intent," he said.

He revealed what some of the (objectionable) words were... "Shakespeare... used the word 'slut' in 'As You Like It.' We decided that it is not obscene, lewd or blasphemous. About the word 'slut,' it just means a pig, anyway."

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1White is now Judge of Cleveland's Criminal Court, a member of Karamu's Board of Trustees, and more than once, its President.

2A prominent Cleveland jurist, Jackson was Municipal Court Judge from 1945-1960, and is now Judge of the Domestic Relations Division of the Common Pleas Court.

3March 9, 1935. Note the use of "Negroes" in quotation marks.

4CPD, March 1, 1935. 5Ibid.
Victory for Karamu and freedom of expression seemed conclusive, but Harry Smith continued to agitate for support among the Negro clergy (whom he had once attacked as ineffectual).\(^1\) A committee from the Baptist Ministerial Alliance, joined by a second committee, from the Interdenominational Alliance, re-opened the issue on Monday by once more appealing to the mayor to close the show, threatening to resort to the courts.\(^2\) They opened the battle on still another front by complaining to Community Fund authorities as well, for Playhouse Settlement, the parent organization of the Karamu Theatre, was a recipient of Community Chest aid.\(^3\) The position of some of these ministers, who had spoken from their pulpits on Sunday, March 3, against the play, was not merely that it was "indecent, obscene, and profane," but that "the story is not true to life and creates racial hatred and interracial discord . . . . [and] it casts reflections on colored churches and the clergy."\(^4\)

(Some weeks later, when Russell Jelliffe spoke to the Literary Forum of the St. James A. M. E. Church, he made the points which are obvious in the play: rape charges against Negroes to justify lynching are often lies; the

\(^1\)Above, Ch. III, p. 33.  
\(^2\)C&P, March 9, 1935.  
\(^3\)CPD, March 5, 1935.  
\(^4\)CPD, March 1, 1935, quoting the Rev. Charles H. Crable, Local pastor; Pres. of the Baptist state convention, and Chairman of the joint Ministerial committee.
Negro is cheated of his wages; there are Negroes who stand up and resist in every community; and workers--white and colored--must fight racial discord and "get together if they are to attain anything."¹ The Gazette, in reporting the talk, was not satisfied. Smith accused Jelliffe of sidestepping the issues and failing to justify "so vile and blasphemous a production on any public stage in any respectable community."² The presence of Harry E. Davis [not to be confused with the Mayor, Harry L. Davis] on the platform was noted, and he was criticized, as a Negro, for speaking in support of Jelliffe, the settlement, and the production.)

Then the "battle of the writs" began, as each side tried to enlist the courts on their behalf. Russell Jelliffe recalled that during this period the settlement often kept a car, with the motor running, at the curb near 3807 Central, so that if and when he received word that the ministers' group had taken out an injunction (which they would try to do late in the afternoons), he could reach City Hall before 3:30 or 4:00 P.M. when the courts closed, to obtain a counter-injunction.³

The Mayor, under continuing pressure from the joint ministers' committee, passed the buck to the Police Chief, ordering him to censor the production, despite the earlier

determination by the Police Prosecutor that there were no grounds for a closing. The Police Chief, one Matowitz, requested a warrant from Michael Picciano, the Prosecutor, but Picciano refused, presumably aware that the failure of the earlier effort to censor was a clear precedent. The Jelliffes, however, knowing that the police had suggested deletions, remained uncertain as to what course of action the police might take. On Thursday, the 7th, a deputy fire warden and two policemen (one of them Detective James Hogan, who had been a member of the first delegation which attended the premiere) visited Karamu Theatre and declared it a fire hazard, but upon investigation, it was determined that City Hall had issued no orders for such an inspection.¹ (Frederick Bond [somewhat removed from the scene] laid the blame for this "unauthorized" visit upon city officials,² and held them responsible for the threat "to stop the show tonight,"³ but this judgment does not appear to be conclusive.) Common Pleas Judge Dempsey granted Karamu's attorneys⁴ a temporary injunction protecting them from both the "fire-hazard" threat and the indecision of the police, and permitting the play to go on Thursday, and to continue running pending further legal action.

³CPD, March 8, 1935.
⁴One of them was Randall W. Ruhlman.
Such action came swiftly. Foiled by Judge Dempsey's order from interfering with STEVEDORE on the "fire-hazard" charge on Thursday, having failed to enlist the Mayor's aid, Reverend C. Lee Jefferson, President of the Ministers' Interdenominational Alliance, began another legal action on Friday. Calling the play "indecent and against public morals," Reverend Jefferson filed a suit enjoining the Gilpin Players and Russell Jelliffe from presenting the play, in which "the word God is used profanely many times," and charged violation of section 13390 of the Ohio General Code. His petition also recited, in some detail, the language of the play which had precipitated the controversy.¹ At the same time, while the ministers were attempting this new approach, attorneys for the city and the Gilpin Players reached an agreement: "arrest" Rowena Jelliffe.

Mrs. Jelliffe's "arrest," a technical one, was designed to furnish an appropriate test of STEVEDORE's propriety under the relevant section of Cleveland's Municipal Code, and secure the run of the play, which was now conditional upon the extension of Judge Dempsey's injunction. Believing that

all the questions of profanity, morals, art, race prejudice, and communism raised in the controversy would be tested under the section of the Municipal Code prohibiting "the acting, exhibiting, showing or performance of any indecent or blasphemous play,

¹CPD, March 9, 1935.
farce, opera, public exhibition, show or entertainment of any kind whatever, "1"

the Judge approved a continuance of his restraining order, the play continued, and Rowena Jelliffe went to court and won vindication for STEVEDORE and freedom from censorship. 2

Stung, perhaps by their legal failures, perhaps by counter-attacks from the new Negro weekly, Call and Post, asserting that the would-be censors "have permitted themselves to be misled," and that "not a one of them has seen the play or read the book," 3 the ministers' group withdrew from overt legal action. They persisted, though, holding meetings, agitating to halt performances which "were encouraging a race riot," attempting to alienate the Community Fund's support from the settlement, 4 and seeking balm for their defeat in Harry Smith's ongoing fight against all who had opposed him.

All through that fight, there existed forces of support for the play, the Gilpin Players, Playhouse Settlement, and the Jelliffes. Charles White, at City Hall, agreed with the position that there be no deletions; Perry

1CPD, March 9, 1935.

2In the aftermath of the victory, Karamu was invited by the Ohio Theatre to bring the production downtown for a month's run. As Russell Jelliffe put it: "We refused, because we didn't want to be guilty of capitalizing on the incident." (Interview, June 26, 1961.)

Jackson was friendly, and spoke of the play as "powerful, dynamic"; and Councilmen Payne and Bundy, Negroes whose aid the ministers' group sought, preferred not to join the anti-STEVEDORE fight. Aroused by the Gazette's buckshot charges against the play's political tone ("the rotten proletarian (communistic) play"; "a Communist [sic, no longer "communistic"] play"), the Vigilance Committee of the Young People's Progressive League "protested any interference with the production." Dr. D. L. Rodgers, a militant Twelfth Ward politician spoke forcefully, supporting the play even if the profanity were present—as long as it expressed the "desires and wishes of the Negro":

If a few profane or curse words will give the Negro backbone and cause the white man in this country to give the Negro his rights, let him curse; let him use profanity. I contend that a few profane words are a lot cheaper than the shedding of human blood.

The NAACP refused to support Editor Smith; Winsor French called the Gazette's attack "so silly it is actually amusing".

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3March 9, 1935. 4March 16, 1935.
5CPD, March 8, 1935. As it later developed, the YPPL was, in fact, determined to be a Communist "front" organization.
8Press, March 13, 1935. For his pains, Mr. French was called "willfully dumb" by Editor Smith. (Gaz., March 23, 1935.)
and there were other people, white and colored, who kept their sanity and their perspective in the midst of these harsh attacks that so quickly spread from the play to the playhouse.

As might be expected, William McDermott was one of these sane people of wise perspective. His attempt to determine the validity of the suppressors' point of view is a thoughtful analysis of the play and the charges made against it. Heading his piece *STEVEDORE (and the matter of Censorship)*, he concludes that "the nub of the complaint" could not have been profanity, because—though profane—the play is no more profane than other current dramas such as *FRONT PAGE* or *TOBACCO ROAD* (or even *Shakespeare*). He again demonstrates the breadth of his theatre background when he dismisses the charge of Communism by observing that dramas more "expressly Communist" had been produced at the Cleveland Playhouse, and were also fashionable in New York where they failed "to cloud the brows of a single policeman."

Some of the ministers had objected to *STEVEDORE* as stirring up bad racial feelings, and McDermott is unwilling to follow this line of reasoning. He feels, on the contrary, that the play has beneficial effects, creating sympathy for the oppressed and arousing one and all against iniquity, and that the play, therefore, is "a lively entertainment
and an intense and bitter human record . . . . good and socially useful."¹

A major defender of the Gilpins during the STEVEDORE fracas was W. O. Walker, Editor of the Call and Post. It would have been natural for Walker, with a new newspaper, to take opposite sides from the older, entrenched Gazette on any issue, and this may have been a factor in the Call and Post's decision to support the Jelliffes and the play. Walker's articles, however, reveal him to be ideologically committed to the ideas of the play, to its content, and to

¹CPD, March 14, 1935. Aside from McDermott's analysis of the opposition to the production, his criticism of the performance has strong interest for us. He attended the play subsequent to its opening (the Plain Dealer's W. Ward Marsh had covered the premiere)—something he did with some frequency—and always wrote a "follow-up" piece after the official review. One paragraph from his STEVEDORE article follows:

"Oddly, these Negro players have an especial facility for this faintly Russianized kind of drama in which the individual tends to be subordinated to the group. White players are usually at their worst in group scenes. These dusky mimes come most vividly alive when more than a dozen of them are on the stage at the same time. Whatever they do, or say, as members of a crowd seems natural and spontaneous.

They summon the peculiar spirit of crowds, their changeability, their intensity of feeling, their contagiousness of mood whether of anger or laughter or just an irrepressible notion to sing or dance. Robert Mantell, in all his many years before the Roman forum, never had crowd scenes like these." (Edith Isaacs had made a remarkably similar observation: "So Negroes seem to fall naturally into an acted group scene, giving a sense of the whole and yet retaining an individual characterization, as Russian actors have been trained so admirably to do." (Negro in Amer. Thtr., 79.)
its point of view, and his support for the Karamu Theatre, at this time, seems genuine. In a two-column editorial on March 16, he wrote of his regrets that more Negroes had not seen the play. 1 He saw the importance of the play's message of interracial unity among Southern workers, and its attack upon lynching, and he defended it vigorously as to language as well. He wisely saw it as a "new-generation" play, and sadly noted that it was the South which needed it, but couldn't get it. He concluded with a clear reference to the Ministerial Alliance and Harry Smith (who had admitted that he did not see STEVEDORE2) and all of the bigoted who participated, actively or passively, in the witch-hunt: "My greatest and only regret about Stevedore is that the people who should have seen it, did not." Elsewhere in this same issue of the Call and Post appeared the following capsule verdict: "The play is probably the greatest preaching vs. lynching that has been produced in this decade. It will mean to a great extent, to lynching, what "Uncle Tom's Cabin" meant to slavery in this country."3

1 Harry Smith had gloated that ten or twelve Negroes on the opening Wednesday night had dwindled to eight on Thursday and six on Friday. (Gaz., March 9, 1935.) Although he may have been exaggerating, and his reasons were obvious, it is clear from the earlier discussion on audiences and from Walker as well as other sources at this time, that there was no significant number of Negroes in attendance.

The Gilpin Players themselves, and the Jelliffes, were vigorous defenders of their play, of course. The Negro cast members, who were more often subjected to face-to-face criticism for their participation in STEVEDORE than were the Jelliffes, demonstrated their loyalty well, arguing their beliefs, writing letters to the papers,¹ and sustaining an unusually long run of fifteen performances. The Jelliffes fought back vigorously, despite their genuine fears of violence, particularly arson. They both remember stationing cordons of men around the theatre to prevent bomb throwing or incendiaryism from passing cars.² Rowena Jelliffe's statement to the newspapers called the play "among the Negro's most powerful weapons for speaking his cause," and observed that, "unmolested and highly acclaimed" in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, the play had the "hearty commendation of the most intelligent Negroes and whites of the nation."³

Perhaps the Jelliffes' most important contribution to the whole STEVEDORE episode was their recognition that the issue was freedom of expression for the theatre, not merely the fate of a single play. They have always felt that the Catholic Legion of Decency prompted Harry Smith's crusade, and that to retreat in the face of this kind of

censorship would be to abandon principle as well as the theatre.¹

"Stevedore" in book form is to be found in the Cleveland Public Library, Mrs. Jelliffe said, and if consistency is to be maintained the police should take action against the library and leading Cleveland book stores that are selling the volume. She said also that other plays in Cleveland at present came in the same category as "Stevedore" as to language used.²

The legacy of bitterness from the STEVEDORE battle took a long time dying in Harry Smith, and he persisted long after the heat of this battle passed its peak. In an attempt to smear public servants Perry Jackson and Charles White (both Negroes), he suggested that they had permitted showings of the play because of "political influence," and urged that it be a long time before that be forgotten or they be forgiven.³ "If our people of this community were to do their duty by the JELLIFFES, CHARLES WHITE, AND PERRY JACKSON, they would make them leave the city pronto."⁴ The Gazette printed photos of Jackson and White, not once, but twice, captioned: "They will not soon

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, March 28, 1961; Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe, joint interview, May 16, 1961.

²CPD, March 8, 1935. The reference to "other plays" was also noted by I. R. Morris, counsel for the Gilpins, who asserted that the police were not bothering anyone else, and that "most of the objectionable words in our play are in Mary of Scotland," then playing at the Hanna Theatre. "It is not an issue of this play alone," he said, "but one of freedom of speech." (CPD, March 9, 1935.)

³Gaz., March 9, 1935. ⁴Ibid.
be forgotten by the self and race-respecting Afro-Americans of this community."¹ Smith urged election fights against Mayor Davis and Councilmen Payne and Bundy, on the grounds of their failure to support the anti-STEVEDORE drive.²

Smith reserved his most vicious remarks and insinuations for Russell and Rowena Jelliffe. He referred constantly to their staging of "nigger" plays, presented at their "behest,"³ and "using misguided young members of the race."⁴ He urged the Community Fund to exclude the Neighborhood Association,⁵ urged the public to boycott it if it did not,⁶ and was certain that the Community Fund would withdraw their support from the settlement if they would only see the play.⁷ His chauvinistic appeals to race make it easy to understand Marjorie Witt Johnson's observation of the Jelliffes: "Those people have been crucified many times."⁸ On March 9, 1935, Smith wrote: "Mark you, they are making their living at the E. 38th St. Playhouse for 'Negroes.' Lord, have mercy," and a month later he informed his readers that the Jelliffes earned $3,000 each

¹Gaz., March 23 and March 30, 1935.
⁴Gaz., Sept. 21, 1935. Note date.
⁷Gaz., Dec. 11, 1937. He was now referring to the Karamu revival of STEVEDORE, which had opened on Dec. 8.
⁸Interview, May 17, 1961.
for conducting Playhouse Settlement "for colored people."\(^1\)

In 1937, goaded, apparently, by the STEVEDORE revival,\(^2\) he returned to the attack: "The Gilpin Players . . . are still directed by Russell Jelliffe and wife . . . holding well paid positions that should be filled by members of the race."\(^3\) A year later, after praising the city administration of Chester, England for its injunction against WAITING FOR LEFTY, he recalls Cleveland's "failure" in—as he puts it—the Jelliffes' "Stevedore stunt,"\(^4\) and again urges their replacement.\(^5\)

Perhaps the most scurrilous of the Gazette's defamatory gestures toward the Jelliffes was their printing and circulating of a narrow, yellow broadside all through the Negro neighborhoods, and those who did not receive one

\(^1\)Gaz., April 13, 1935.

\(^2\)Dec. 8-13, 1937. At the time of the revival, strong support for the play came from another Negro paper of the period, Ormond Forte's Eagle. On Dec. 3, it editorialized: "Those of us who want to be stirred to the depths by a powerful message will crowd the Karamu Theatre to the doors!" On the 9th, Helen Conard Keeseecker offered STEVEDORE as a remarkable example of the effective way in which theatre can relate to life:

"It is an interesting fact that when this play was done on the New York stage there was no Jim-Crowing. Negro and white actors shared dressing rooms; Negroes sat everywhere in the audiences; and those who asked for seats apart from Negroes were told that such a request was contrary to the policy of that theatre."

\(^3\)Gaz., Dec. 11, 1937. \(^4\)Gaz., April 13, 1935.

\(^5\)Gaz., Dec. 31, 1938.
were urged to "secure same at the Gazette office."¹ On this handbill, Harry C. Smith listed a whole series of short phrases--phrases taken out of context from the dialogue of the most foul-mouthed, the bitterest Negro-hating white dock wallop in STEVEDORE²--and he headed them: "This is what the Jelliffes think of our people."³

By far a happier chapter in Karamu Theatre's history is the Langston Hughes "decade." Although the first play of his produced by the Gilpins, LITTLE HAM, had its world premiere at the Karamu in 1936, his impact seems somehow to dominate the thirties, for six plays of this former Karamu youngster were produced in four years. The Karamu opportunity--development of creative talents and an entree for the Negro into the American mainstream--is perhaps nowhere more dramatically illustrated than in Langston Hughes, described as the "most remarkable man to emerge out of Karamu's talent hunt."⁴

Hughes, whom Dr. Charles A. Beard picked as one of

¹Gaz., March 9, 1935.
²The character is Al Regan, and his lines all seem to consist of variations and combinations of "black," "nigger," "bastard," "son-of-a-bitch," and "goddamn." This writer has played the role.
³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 6, 1961.
⁴Ray Gillespie, CPD, May 17, 1959. Mr. Gillespie is a member of Karamu's Board of Trustees.
the twenty-five "most interesting Americans,"¹ lived "right around the corner" from Karamu on Central Avenue, near 36th Street, and while a Central High student, in 1917, was asked by Rowena Jelliffe to teach (as a volunteer) art to the settlement youngsters. He taught lettering and block prints, both of which he was taking at school, and was told by his "very wonderful teacher," Clara Dieke, that he had talent in these areas.² Apparently the Jelliffes shared his art teacher's opinion, for they sent him to Council Educational Alliance for additional art training,³ but Hughes remembers staying only a short while, and coming more often to Karamu.⁴

A few things about Langston Hughes, the man, and his relation to Karamu, should be noted. His sense of humor is strong,⁵ a weapon he uses to keep back the hurt the world holds for his race. The bitterness in his early writings never prevented his clarity of vision, never tarnished the "wonder at the world," which Rowena Jelliffe

²Interview, May 6, 1961. He recalls that some of his own block prints were sold at a Cleveland Urban League art auction not long ago, and "they got about $10 apiece."
⁴Interview, May 6, 1961.
⁵So strong that it has, on occasion, run away with a poem, or a short scene. Again, evidence of Hughes' lack of concern with formal plotting, in favor of entertaining.
calls the outstanding thing about him. She recalls him as a youngster, and speaks of the debt she and her husband and the whole Karamu program owe to him and the other children of his period, whose lives were searched and interpreted to find the right way to meet what the Jelliffees felt was the basic need—a search and an interpretation which shaped Karamu.¹

Poet, novelist, biographer, historian, lyricist, essayist, editor, translator, and dramatist, Hughes (born in 1902) has scores of works to his credit in a thirty-five year writing career. He has been called "the O. Henry of Harlem" and the "Negro Poet Laureate," and has received many, major awards, fellowships, and honors. He is an inveterate lecturer, a newspaper columnist, and a recording artist. More important, he is an alert, aware citizen, a Negro who is an American, and an American who is a Negro. He is a friend of Karamu's and this writer's, and both think of him as a magnificent human being.

The tone of much of Langston Hughes' early writing was militant, often caustic, in its basic condemnation of America's racial attitudes, but in LITTLE HAM the tone is that of a "flavorous, earthy, highly-individualized

¹Based on the rough notes for a talk given by Mrs. Jelliffe on the occasion of a 1947 program honoring the publication of Langston Hughes' fifth book of poems, Fields of Wonder. (From Mrs. Jelliffe's personal files.)
entertainment."\textsuperscript{1} This comic "representation of a light-hearted, volatile, careless, fun-loving Harlem folk life ... by the ordinarily sober-minded Negro poet,"\textsuperscript{2} misled many observers, however, who declared that Hughes "leaves all serious purpose behind,"\textsuperscript{3} who found "no social purpose in the play,"\textsuperscript{4} who considered it "a play without a serious reason for being. It is just to laugh and in laughing to be happy."\textsuperscript{5} The play, about life and the "numbers" racket in Harlem, has a definite purpose and theme--beyond laughter--precisely because of the "numbers" and what that social phenomenon represents to the poor, cramped, marginal, second-class citizenry of any "Harlem." To give up the hope that tomorrow may be better--that is tragedy; to live cheek-by-jowl with tragedy, but still to dream--that can be comedy. One writer observed accurately that "underlying all that laughter you can hear at the Karamu, there is the terrifying and tragic thread of life where there is no hope,"\textsuperscript{6} and another felt that the greatness of Hughes and the resilience of his race are revealed in the playwright's ability "to laugh at what is in reality stark

\textsuperscript{1}McDermott, CPD, March 25, 1936. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{3}C&P, June 4, 1936. The second Karamu revival of LITTLE HAM had opened on May 25.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid. \textsuperscript{5}Program, March 24, 1936.

\textsuperscript{6}Noel Francis, News, March 26, 1936.
tragedy."¹ A third referred to the "undercurrent of frustration" in it that gave it the quality of a "Harlem Modern Times."²

The very act and art of laughter are, of course, serious. Humor in its purgative and critical functions is well known, and it is only the wise and sophisticated man who can indulge in self-laughter. Abram Hill, of the American Negro Theatre, responded to Negro criticism of a play which laughed at Negro pretensions by saying: "When a race can laugh at its own foibles, it has really become civilized."³ The author of the Negro folk comedies JOY TO MY SOUL, WHEN THE JACK HOLLERS (co-authored with Arna Bontemps), SIMPLY HEAVENLY, et al, has said, quite succinctly: "Of course there is a serious undertone in LITTLE HAM. There is in all my plays."⁴

The forty-three cast members, the "small jazz band on the miniature stage,"⁵ the "capacity business every performance,"⁶ and the variety of locales--shoe-shine parlor, night club, beauty parlor--must have taxed the limited

¹David H. Pierce, C&P, April 2, 1936.
²Charles Schneider, Press, March 24, 1936.
³Quoted in Leonard, loc. cit., 423.
⁴Interview, May 6, 1961. ⁵CPD, March 25, 1936.
⁶C&P, April 9, 1936. The date is a typographical error, and should read "April 2."
facilities of the Karamu, but the Gilpins apparently doted on such "strain." One critic spoke of "the great amount of talent which Mrs. Jelliffe has unearthed," while another summed it all up as "hilarious comedy." The presence of Hughes, himself, and of Maxim Lieber, his New York producer, added to the excitement, and if additional thrills were needed, they were provided by the cast's blending of life and art, as they "took to playing the numbers mentioned in the play. Mostly they won, some as much as $100." The Gilpin Players revived LITTLE HAM that same season, three months later, and once again in May, 1938.

Dimly, through the liveliness of the production and the warmth of the public acclaim, the Gazette's Harry Smith was heard. With even less critical perspicacity than usual, he likened LITTLE HAM to "the communistic conglomeration of Rot known as Stevedore," and continued to call attention to "the Gilpin Players ('Negroes') led by the Russell W. Jelliffes (white) [who] are giving one of the latest 'nigger' plays, "Little Ham"--SHAME!"

WHEN THE JACK HOLLERS, a comedy about Negro sharecroppers, was a collaboration between Hughes and Arna

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1 C&P, April 2, 1936.
3 CPD, Oct. 31, 1937. 4 March 28, 1936.
5 June 6, 1936.
Bontemps, whose *ST. LOUIS WOMAN* was a joint effort with Negro poet Countee Cullen. The Cullen-Bontemps play had been given by the Gilpins in June, 1935, and the Hughes-Bontemps comedy looked promising, especially after the success of *LITTLE HAM*. It opened in April, 1936, with Hughes present at the premiere, but it was not a successful production, despite its "gay humor and theatre values."¹ One critic, heading his notice *Comic Tobacco Road*, said: "He [Hughes] said there was editing yet to be done, and we agree."²

The criticism that Hughes' work needed re-working had been made before, and would be made again. It should, however, be seen as the occupational hazard of the playwright, as it were. Cleveland's Karamu was Hughes' New Haven and Philadelphia--five of his world premieres were given at 3807 Central in a thirty-two month period--and he was anxious to supply the demand which the Gilpin Players represented. ("We had been decrying the fact that there weren't any Negro plays to do, and we had been bothering people to do them."³) McDermott spoke of *LITTLE HAM*'s "not quite following through, . . . it drifts off at

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¹Isaacs, *Negro in Amer. Thtr.*, 96.
³Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961.
the end,"¹ and Mrs. Jelliffe has referred to "getting Langston to finish up a play."²

When asked to comment on this "weakness," Mr. Hughes admitted that his plays are rarely, if ever, "well-made, in the conventional sense."³ He is aware that his SIMPLY HEAVENLY and SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM were criticized in this manner, but "if you entertain, what does it matter?" He writes, he says, in terms of story only, rather than form, "and when I get what I want on paper, then I divide it up into acts, because you do have to have intermissions somewhere." Hughes notes that off-Broadway is characterized by "almost formless" works which are altering this passé rigidity in dramatic form. For him, "it doesn't matter if a play is turned upside down, as long as it holds the audience, and you are able to say what you want to say."⁴

The world premiere of Hughes' TROUBLED ISLAND opened on November 18, 1936. A large cast of Gilpin Players represented sixty-five characters, and Karamu's dance group was spurred into even greater activity and growth by their

¹CPD, March 25, 1936.

²Interview, May 6, 1961. From personal experience with Mr. Hughes on two of his plays, I can add that he is completely cooperative and eminently willing to permit editing changes in his scripts, and when I considered a revival of LITTLE HAM and urged him to revise and update it, he gave me carte-blanche to do so myself.

³Interview, May 7, 1961. ⁴Ibid.
participation in this historic drama of the Haitian slave-emperor, Dessalines.¹ McDermott called the evening "an exceptionally interesting theatrical occasion, a creditable new play by a distinguished Negro dramatist done . . . by what is probably the oldest, and the best, organization of colored actors in the United States."² Five months later, aware of the possibilities inherent in the spectacle of the "royal splendors of the black court with its curious mixture of the French minuet and the savage rhythms of a voodoo dance,"³ Hughes was enroute to Los Angeles to collaborate with the composer, William Grant Still, on an operatic version of his play.⁴ The opera, performed at New York's City Center, took and retained the title TROUBLED ISLAND, and the play, revived off-Broadway recently under the title, THE EMPEROR OF HAITI, has also been known as DRUMS OF HAITI.

A new Langston Hughes farce, JOY TO MY SOUL, had its world premiere on April 1, 1937. The play was set in Cleveland, in a fictional hotel very much like the Majestic, on

¹TROUBLED ISLAND may have been motivated by a feeling Hughes later expressed in his "The Need for Heroes": that Negro literature was characterized by "defeat and panic, moaning, groaning, and weeping," and that the need was for stories of Negro heroes who triumphed over their times, like Frederick Douglass, who "left a flaming pattern for the youth of all ages and all countries." (The Crisis, XLVIII, No. 6 [June, 1941], 184.)

²CPD, Nov. 19, 1936. ³Ibid.

⁴C&P, April 22, 1937.
East 55th Street and Central Avenue. The atmosphere and humor were reminiscent of LITTLE HAM, as was the play's success. Another large-cast show, JOY TO MY SOUL, dramatized the simple story of a Negro oil man from Texas who came to "The Grand Harlem Hotel" to marry the girl he had wooed through a Lonesome Hearts column. It gave Langston Hughes another opportunity to create the raffish, farce characters he was so adept at creating, and though Glen Pullen of the Plain Dealer said the play was a "little potboiler" (and the Gazette quoted his estimate with pleasure!\(^1\)) and "not Hughes at his best,"\(^2\) the News called it a "rollicking farce"\(^3\) and the Call and Post acclaimed it as "finest by Hughes."\(^4\) Pullen also described it as "amusing" and "boisterously slangy,"\(^5\) and a "lusty, lightly diverting burlesque."\(^6\)

FRONT PORCH opened the Gilpins' eighteenth season, November 16, 1938. It represented a change of approach and subject for Hughes, though not as sharp as that between MULATTO (soon to be produced by Karamu, though written some ten years before) and LITTLE HAM. FRONT PORCH dealt with the problems of the college-educated Negroes of the North, who own their "front porches," and disdain to acknowledge

\(^1\)April 3, 1937.  \(^2\)April 1, 1937.  \(^3\)April 1, 1937.
\(^4\)June 1, 1939.  \(^5\)April 1, 1937.  \(^6\)May 25, 1939.
the "'swing' and policy-number-minded Harlemites,"¹ the LITTLE HAM--JOY TO MY SOUL characters. The Plain Dealer noted "more restraint" than in the four previous Hughes plays premiered by the Gilpiners, and felt that this Hughes play represented a "unique hewing to Caucasian standards."

Despite that fact, the reviewer added: "No matter how naive the simple story may seem, you can't help sensing the warmth and sincerity behind it. And no group could be more sympathetic than the Gilpin Players."² The Press said that the play was "adroitly written," and "intelligent fare," but it, too, noted the "restraint" and the shift of style, saying: it "seems tepid and non-descript compared with former Karamu successes."³ The Gazette sounded its one note: "Another of Langston Hughes' 'nigger' plays"; and sneered that "few 'Negroes' are attracted to the Karamu (store front) theatre,"⁴ except Hughes himself and "a few misguided members of the race."⁵

The opportunity to question Langston Hughes on this so-called "shift" in style arose on his last visit to Cleveland, to see performances of his SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM, then running in the Karamu Arena Theatre, and the musical, STREET SCENE (for which he wrote the lyrics), showing in

the Karamu Proscenium Theatre. He senses no conscious change in approach to any of his plays, believing that in intent and purpose they are all identical. The treatment, of course, may vary: melodramatic, comic, lighter, more serious—and depends, for him, largely on the characters about whom he is writing. A Jesse B. Simple, for example, dictates a treatment different from that of the mother in MULATTO.

I could write a serious play now if I had in mind a subject about which to write in a serious manner. It is not a conscious aiming at the public when I write humorously; I just write what I have in mind at the moment that I want to write about.

It is interesting how similar this explanation is to Mr. Hughes' answer to the question: Do you think of yourself as a poet or a playwright? "I don't think either way. I just write because I like it, and so whatever I am termed, it doesn't really matter. If I had a play in me this week, I would write a play—or a poem—or whatever."

MULATTO was not a Karamu world premiere. The play, written during 1929-30, was produced on Broadway in 1935 by Martin Jones, "and its run was the longest on Broadway enjoyed by any play of Negro authorship up to that time."
Its reviews helped attain that run, of course: Percy Hammond, of the Herald-Tribune, called MULATTO a "stirring story of evils unredressed and insults avenged"; and Brooks Atkinson wrote in the Times that "after a season dedicated chiefly to trash, it is a sobering sensation to sit in the presence of a playwright who is trying his best to tell what he has on his mind." But it is quite likely that something else accounted for the play's popular success—the (unwelcome) additions of the producer, who put his name on the script as Hughes' "collaborator."

What Langston Hughes discovered as a novice playwright in the Broadway jungle in 1935 sounds like a collection of dramatic clichés today, and indeed similar experiences have since formed the basis for plays and books. His MULATTO was considerably distorted—ininserts and changes were made and new portions were written—"without [his] knowledge or permission while [he] was not in New York and production. (Durham [No. Car.] Herald, Aug. 31, 1941.) He also played Cal in Bankhead's production of THE LITTLE FOXES. Marriott had performed all through the late twenties and the early thirties, as Porgy and in EMPEROR JONES and in the world premiere of BRAINSWEAT (Mrs. Jelliffe changed the title from NOTHING BUT TROUBLE), and he was called to audition for that show when, on the strength of the Cleveland reviews, playwright John Charles Brownell secured a Broadway production. He failed this audition, but stayed on in New York where "theatre has been a good life" for the man Mrs. Jelliffe supposes "has been more consistently employed in theatre than any other Karamu person." (Interview, May 16, 1961.)

1Quoted in George Davis, Press, Oct. 30, 1935.
unaware of the fact that the play was even to be done"; Mr. Hughes intended MULATTO as "a poetic tragedy"; a Cleveland reviewer later described it as a "hard hitting, sharp pointed attack on the social structure of the South"; producer Jones saw it as a sex melodrama of miscegenation, "and he wanted to make it into a sensational play like WHITE CARGO which he had previously produced." Although the lurid overtones and embellishments displeased Hughes, he admits that from the commercial point of view the changes were sound. The Broadway production toured for eight months and was revived for subsequent New England and other eastern road tours. It was banned in Baltimore, and in Philadelphia the Mayor closed it, saying: "There's no excuse for such a play on any grounds . . . . I will not permit such plays to be shown." The near banning in Chicago on "grounds of obscenity and sex" delighted the producer, because it produced publicity and the subsequent rush to the box office by people who thought "they were going to see a dirty play, which is the last thing I had intended."

There is one interesting irony in the history of the

1Hughes, interview, May 7, 1961.
3Hughes, interview, May 7, 1961.
4Ibid.
6CPD, Feb. 9, 1937.
7Hughes, interview, May 7, 1961.
MULATTO script. Hughes offered it to the Gilpins early in 1930, after Jasper Deeter of Hedgerow was unable to cast it. (Most of the good Negro actors he had hoped to use were then engaged in New York\(^1\)), and the Gilpins were "unwilling to accept it."\(^2\) It is not clear why. Hughes says: "I don't remember at all why Karamu refused it. Perhaps they considered it too controversial."\(^3\) The 1930-31 season at Karamu was made up almost completely of Negro content plays, it is true, but it is the first season in which such plays were the rule rather than the exception. As Appendix I indicates, the trend for Negro content plays begins from 1925-26 on, but these were folk plays, more or less free from any contention save whether to do this type of play at all, but without any really polemical topics beyond that. This includes the Torrence, Green, and Stephens plays, which are a far cry from the factious and disputatious plays scheduled from, say, the 1934 season on: STEVEDORE, PEACE ON EARTH, TURPENTINE, DARKER BROTHER, etc. So perhaps Langston Hughes was right: the philosophy of play selection was not yet precise enough in 1930 to withstand as controversial (as it must have seemed to the Gilpins) a play as MULATTO.

\(^1\)Ibid. Probably in THE GREEN PASTURES, but possibly also HARLEM and Ethel Barrymore's SCARLET SISTER MARY, the white production in blackface, with some Negroes in the cast.

\(^2\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.

\(^3\)Interview, May 7, 1961.
At any rate, in 1939, the Gilpins were ready for it, and they planned to use the original version, free of the sensationalism and lurid theatricality of the Broadway version which had played Cleveland's Hanna Theatre in 1936, with James Kirkwood. Langston Hughes helped with the editing, and shaped the script until it "was more nearly like the original version of the play." (The following example of the kind of changes involved is from an informal tape-recorded interview [transcribed verbatim] and gives perhaps as much of the flavor of Hughes, as of the facts of MULATTO.)

For example, in my version the girl goes away to school and doesn't come back in the first act. And in the Broadway version, the beautiful daughter runs all through the show, and the producer's reason for that is that you need a pretty girl running all through a show--so you have her miss the train. And so at the end of the first act, she has missed the train and comes back home. So I said, "What will you do with her at the end?" And they said, "Well, we decided to have her raped." So, in the third act, at the very end, she got raped. So that is what they do occasionally on Broadway with young authors and their plays!\(^1\)

Opening night was March 8, 1939, and it was well prepared for by numerous advance items in all the papers, white and Negro. Almost all of them stressed the "original script" idea, so it was not surprising to find the reviewers taking up that theme. Arthur Spaeth headlined his notice, *It's Still No Mammy Song* and, comparing the Karamu and professional versions, said he could understand Hughes!

\(^1\)May 7, 1961.
"unhappiness at what Broadway did to his play."1 Warfel of the Press used this headline: Gilpin Players Excel . . .
MULATTO is Sordid but Moving, and is Played Well by Cast,
but unlike the News, declared that the Karamu version "proved
to be quite similar to the revised showing."2 Warfel also
wrote (perhaps shedding some light on the Gilpins'
earlier refusal to accept it for production):

Produced as Mr. Hughes intended it to be produced,
"Mulatto" remains a disturbing story containing
dirty, itching situations. Author Hughes does not
employ subtlety in narration. The imagination is
not intrigued. It's overwhelmed.3

Glenn Pullen of the Plain Dealer also called the Gilpins'
MULATTO "not subtle."4 But subtle or unsubtle, revised or
unrevised, a new storm soon arose.

MULATTO was apparently fated to cause controversy
in Cleveland as it did in its New York history, and al-
though it was no STEVEDORE (though Harry Smith's Gazette
labelled it "one of the most objectionable 'nigger' plays
in existence, . . . almost as rotten as Stevedore"5 [ital-
ics mine]), it revived some bitter feelings against the
play, the playwright, the cast, Russell Jelliffe, and
Karamu. The biggest attack came in the form of an anony-
mous letter after the Gilpin Players' run was over, and

1News, March 9, 1939.  2Press, March 9, 1939.
3Ibid.  4March 9, 1939.
5March 11, 1939.
was published—though not approved—by W. O. Walker, Editor of the Call and Post, in his personal, double-columned
"Down the Big Road." It is quoted exactly as written:

March 21, 1939.

In regard to the great play writer which is better known as Langston Hughes. Who is suppose to be an intelligent man of our race to enlighten them and teach our future generation of the New Negro and not that slaveryism that we are ashamed of. The play "Mulatto" is a play or supposed to be a play but to the people that know anything about plays know that that particular one is rotten to the core, a disgrace to the race and the entire cast that in reality is only belittling themselves.

Mr. Russell Jelliffe, who has said that he is helping the advance of the Negro in the community, is only allowing the white people to create race prejudice and allowing them to get a good laugh. The characters are giving them something to laugh at which is really their talent and time and hard labor for absolutely nothing. It happened that I was in the Karamu when Mulatto was being acted, and the fun and remarks that the white people made of the Negro people and even those in the play was a disgrace. Do you think that this is enlightening our race to have them make fun. Surely there is other plays that can be presented without making fun of us. We know that we can't support the show, but we would rather not have anything than to keep creating race prejudice and being laughed at like monkeys and we don't appreciate it.

All Negroes are not Langston Hughes type, and we are striving to progress and not go back. White people look down on us enough without ridiculing ourselves. And our Civic leaders who belong to such an organization, who are suppose to be leading us forward, are in reality still in 1862, their minds if not the body. Such a show should be shut down or burn down. White people come down with the chauffeur and they see such plays as Mulatto will go back to their homes and really mistreat their servants in their home. Please investigate such trash. Not only this play but all other plays to come. The cast in Mulatto is not well thought of, or intelligent as they are suppose to be, but belong to Uncle Tom's Era which the white
people wants to stay. Please don't leave this letter go to the waste basket, because as a Negro citizen it hurts in our hearts and hurts our pride to see such plays. I am sure that I am not the only one that feels this way.¹

It was signed "A Citizen."

Although one might question Walker's motive and judgment in going against his declared policy of not printing unsigned letters unless the writer's identity were known to the Call and Post, he argued the case well. He observed somewhat ruefully that many Negroes disapprove of plays that deal with characters living "on the borderline of poverty and social ostracism." He pointed out that the alternative—if Negro writers wanted to please their own people—was to deal only with "happiness, achievement, and beauty."

This view he rejected completely:

The level of the Negro . . . is the status of [his] lowest class. Therefore, if we are to improve our general condition we must expose the wretchedness, the suffering and depravity of those who occupy the lowest level. Naturally, such plays or books cannot be studded with scenes of beautiful homes, gay children, and well-to-do people.²

He invited Jelliffe to reply, hoping that since the subject matter of "A Citizen's" letter had been debated for some years, the airing of the controversy might lead to better understanding (as well as increased circulation).

Two weeks later, Russell Jelliffe replied for the Gilpin Players, and Walker published the letter. Wisely

¹March 30, 1939. ²Ibid.
refusing to be drawn into a controversy with an anonymous opponent, Jelliffe bluntly pointed out that the Gilpins had been producing plays in Cleveland for over eighteen years, and that "most people interested in the Karamu Theatre, know where to find the Gilpin Players or me."¹

In the light of "A Citizen's" complaints, Harry Smith's diatribes pale. Almost mournfully he writes of MULATTO: "Strange our local ministers seem uninterested,"² recalling no doubt the days of his leadership in STEVEDORE, when over a score of ministers did battle at his bidding. But now, with the tone of a leader so far in front of his army that he is all alone, he repeats his request that the Jelliffes be replaced by Negroes, saying "it is high time our people were backing [such] an effort,"³ and again, specifically urging the ministers' group to "take on" Russell and Rowena Jelliffe.⁴

Another implied form of action against the Playhouse Settlement was a persistent, haunting thing: "Such a show should be shut down or burn down." In the two weeks since that phrase appeared in the Call and Post, "two fires of incendiary origin have done much damage to the property of the Neighborhood Association."⁵ Everyone

¹April 13, 1939. ²Gaz., March 11, 1939. ³Ibid. ⁴March 25, 1939. ⁵C&P, April 13, 1939.
deplored the gangsterism. The Call and Post asked for "a return of sanity" from the person or persons responsible, urging a meeting with Jelliffe and the Gilpins, to "talk the matter through" and settle their disagreements in a reasonable way.¹ But no amount of reasonableness and sanity can still fear, and the specter of fire was to reappear at Karamu.

MULATTO was the end of the Langston Hughes "decade," but not the end of his "era." He remains the "king" of Karamu playwrights, with more of his works produced there than those of any other writer. JOY TO MY SOUL was revived shortly after MULATTO, in May; the musical version of STREET SCENE, in which Hughes shares credits with Elmer Rice and Kurt Weill, was produced in the third spring of the new theatre, in 1952; SIMPLY HEAVENLY was the spring show in 1959, closing Karamu's thirty-fifth season, and opening its thirty-sixth in a September revival; there was a revival of STREET SCENE in April, 1961, and SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM was a hit in the same month. For one reason or another, Karamu has never yet performed his opera THE BARRIER, made from MULATTO;² SOLD AWAY (DE' SUN DO MOVE);³ his

¹Ibid.

²Hughes would like Karamu to do this, feeling that its concern with prejudice and segregation is very timely. (Interview, May 7, 1961.)

³See below, Ch. VI, 301-302.
unfinished MULEBONE—earmarked for production and worked over by Hughes and Rowena Jelliffe—cancelled because of the squabble over authorship with Zora Neale Hurston;¹ TAMBOURINES TO GLORY, his adaptation from his own novel, awaiting Broadway production by the Theatre Guild early in the 1961-62 season; DON'T YOU WANT TO BE FREE;² and a few others.

As a writer, Hughes has been criticized by Negroes because he did not depict the Negro with his best foot forward. Mrs. Jelliffe replies that Langston Hughes has a deep conviction that "either foot is very good indeed."³

¹See Hughes' autobiography, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), 331-34, for his version of the "Mulebone episode." In our May 6, 1961 interview, he adds an amusing sequel. He tells of finding a working manuscript of Zora Neale Hurston's at a mutual friend's home, where she had been working on it: "So just out of devilment, seeing as how she once rubbed my name off of MULEBONE, I took the page out of the script and put it in the typewriter, and typed 'By Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.' I put my name at the top. I never knew what she said when she saw it, but I imagine she laughed, because she has a very good sense of humor."

²Hughes founded the Harlem Suitcase Theatre (a forerunner of the American Negro Theatre) in 1937-38 to put on this play, which ran for 135 weekend performances—the longest consecutive run of any play in Harlem. In Jan., 1939, he founded the New Negro Theatre in Los Angeles, and its premiere effort was also DON'T YOU WANT TO BE FREE. He laughingly says that every time he wanted a production, he founded a theatre. (Interview, May 6, 1961.)

³From notes for talk given by Mrs. Jelliffe cited earlier (1947 program honoring publication of Hughes' Fields of Wonder).
Certainly Hughes views the proper function of art as revealing the truth in life, and seeing that truth as wonderful and beautiful. He wants a theatre to relate strongly to the community in which it resides, and to program plays which pander neither to poor taste nor to narrow minds. In the case of the Negro theatre—and he sees Karamu as the "very nearest thing" to a "primarily serious colored theatre"—the scheduling of folk plays should not be deferred because of the fear that the "intellectuals in quotes are ashamed of such material." The intellectuals will "come around," though perhaps not the first time they read or see a play.

Karamu "was immensely valuable" to Hughes, as he was and is to Karamu.

I probably would have started a Karamu somewhere if there wasn't one to do my own plays. I wanted to see them. I wanted to see how they looked done live, and I wanted to experience learning from them. As you know, a play on paper is one thing, and a play in the theatre is quite something else. And a playwright in a theatre can learn a very great deal through production. In fact, that is practically the only way you do learn because speeches on paper look short and on the stage they may sound long; or if they are long on paper, if they are good speeches, they may sound short onstage. You have no way really of judging until you see a thing come alive through action and direction.¹

Though well established today, Karamu still offers him the "opportunity to see [his] work more frequently than

¹Interview, May 6, 1961.
[he] otherwise might.¹ His sole reservation about Karamu lies in the sad fact that with some twenty million Negroes, America has no colored theatre. It has no place devoted completely to the presentation of the plays about Negroes or by Negro playwrights, "who find Broadway insurmountable and off-Broadway almost insurmountable if they have a play with a largely Negro cast or on a Negro theme," and who might grow and develop to major stature if they could see their plays as Hughes saw his at Karamu.

I would like to see this theatre be what a regional theatre might be in Texas or Oklahoma—what the folk theatre was—primarily for the Negro playwright or for people writing plays about Negro life or the problems of the Negro in relation to American democracy. It doesn't mean that there would be an all-Negro cast all the time by any means; but I simply see no reason why Karamu or any other theatre primarily in a Negro neighborhood would do rehashes of Broadway plays which the Playhouse in Cleveland does—which come on tour here anyway.²

Of course, Karamu does not do Broadway rehashes or plays like those of the Cleveland Playhouse, as a glance at the play schedule (Appendix I) will confirm. But Hughes' point is that though he has no objection to Negro actors appearing in "Shakespeare or Shaw or anything that develops them and is worth doing," there is such a scarcity of outlets for Negro subject matter, that he is reluctant to see one such outlet—Karamu—divide its energies. He feels Karamu would profit by making an intensive

¹Ibid. ²Interview, May 6, 1961.
effort to develop the Negro playwright.

I don't say Negro plays exclusively by any means. I think it is most interesting that Karamu has done such a variety of productions, but I do feel that for this reason: for the lack of such a theatre anywhere else in America or the world—a theatre that could do superb productions of material primarily American Negro in origin or orientation, ought to do so.¹

He lays great stress on the neighborhood—the ethnic-regional base:

I would think that since Karamu is located primarily in a Negro neighborhood, and its whole growth has been from the Negro community upward and outward, that the more responsibility it has towards its original ethnic base—regional base (in terms of the urban community)—the better, because there are no other agencies doing that anyway. What Karamu can do nobody else does!²

But, again: "Not one hundred per cent, because one should not be limited—in anything one does."³

The question Mr. Hughes raises goes to the point of play selection, and beyond it to philosophy. There is no real quarrel, save perhaps in degree; for though Karamu welcomes—indeed is eager for—Negro playwrights and plays, and will continue to produce them, it is soberly aware that 1) "it has two theatres to keep active. It would be very hard to find that much material," as Langston Hughes himself observed,⁴ and 2) plays and playwrights must be qualified, or the public base of support for Karamu is jeopardized.

¹Ibid. ²Interview, May 7, 1961. ³Ibid. ⁴Interview, May 6, 1961.
Also, a real question arises as to whether it is fair to anyone to present less-than-meritorious work. "You never in the wide world would do good social work with poor art" is something Karamu believes in. On the other hand, it may be that ways must be found (perhaps through expanded laboratory and workshop activities?) and a greater effort expended in the direction of developing Negro drama writing. Karamu takes responsible criticism on this point seriously, though whether it could support itself as a "regional Negro theatre" is problematical. We are at a social point when Negro absorption into the American mainstream means, ultimately, fewer "Negro" plays and more "American" plays with Negroes; i.e., with integrated casts in integrated situations. It seems sounder to stand astride the commingled streams of Negro and white dramatic culture, to provide the broadest range of the most excellent opportunities available--for actors and playwrights alike--rather than take steps which might appear to permit the withdrawal of a theatre--essential to the peoples of the world at this moment as an example of successful integration--into a racial uniqueness and isolation, which deny cultural homogeneity.

If Langston Hughes was the Negro in Karamu's Theatre in the thirties, he was not--except for MULATTO--the Negro in the American professional theatre of that period.

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At this point, we can step back for a moment from the Karamu picture, and review the frame—the national background of the period—seen as a supplement to this material on the Gilpin Players and their play literature.

The Negro on the national theatre scene had scented liberation from stereotype and the hope of fuller participation with Torrence's *Three Plays*, and he had reached one plateau with Gilpin and *THE EMPEROR JONES*. O'Neill provided a second, too, with *ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS* (1924). Edith Isaacs says the play marked the end of an era "when the Negro's contribution . . . was limited to the comedian, the dancer, the composer, the popular singer."¹ It was a significant event, but not so much as drama as for its intellectual by-products. The provocative story let loose a flood of controversy, and the "Negro Renaissance" was there, in the mid-twenties, to discourse and debate, and attempt to arrive at some clarification.

The issues ranged from "Is the Negro an artist or a 'natural'?" to "Do Negroes possess the requisite technical discipline to act and write for the theatre?"; from "Can the Negro relate to the drama mainstream of America?" to "How realistically should Negro characters be portrayed?" Many of these issues arose in the foregoing discussion of the Gilpin Players from 1927-39; light was shed on these

¹Negro in Amer. Thtr., 77.
questions by the professional theatre of that period, too.

IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM (1926) not only won the Pulitzer Prize for drama, but provided a superior example of ensemble acting from Frank Wilson, Abbie Mitchell, and the great Rose McClendon--none of them "happy naturals." PORGY (1927) was important for its humanity, despite the emphasis on the picturesque, but even more so for its role in giving Negroes what Gagey called "a firmer foothold in serious drama,"¹ (and certainly for giving George Gershwin something to build on).

Another such "foothold" came with THE GREEN PASTURES, in 1930, and shook some of the doubts of the efficacy of Negro theatre. The production, with the late, great Richard B. Harrison was, of course, a gigantic success, on the screen as well. It did not suit all of the most sensitive Negroes (it did please almost all whites), though Professor Sterling Brown, always a champion of race pride and a member of the Negro intelligentsia, was pleased with it, and said it had "profound reality."² A Negro playwright's version of Negro religion followed GREEN PASTURES by some three years. RUN, LITTLE CHILLUN (1933) was by Hall Johnson,


the famed choir leader, and it was "the first successful play of Negro authorship on Broadway."\(^1\) Though less well known than Marc Connelly's opus, it is evaluated by the discerning as at least equal to it, and probably superior. Professor Brown says it "unquestionably has the authenticity of the inside view," and that its best scenes "had greater verisimilitude" than THE GREEN PASTURES.\(^2\) Isaacs calls this little-known work an "important milestone in this theatre history."\(^3\)

By now it should be clear that the pioneering breakthrough in the Negro theatre is complete. This listing of plays above adds some significances to the achievements noted in Chapter IV: the solidification of the use of Negro performers in dramas, and the sheer quantity of Negro dramatic literature. The latter point is confirmed by the statement that for every known Negro play of this period (such as the ones immediately above), there are two or three "unknowns," some of above-average merit: GOAT ALLEY, BROTHER MOSE, BLACK BOY, NEVER NO MORE, SINGING THE BLUES, SAVAGE RHYTHM, BRASS ANKLE, THE HOT IRON, THE END OF THE ROW, POTTER'S FIELD, POTEES GAL, EARTH, BLACK SOULS, et al. And this condition prevailed to the end of the thirties, too, as plays like THEY SHALL NOT DIE, STEVEDORE,

\(^1\)Sterling Brown, loc. cit., 569.

\(^2\)Ibid. \(^3\)Negro in Amer. Thtr., 89.
MULATTO, PORGY AND BESS, and MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS occupied the spotlight; while a host of lesser known dramas crowded the 1934 to 1939 years: HYMN TO THE RISING SUN; ROLL, SWEET CHARIOT; WHITE MAN; MARCHING SONG; A MIGHTY WIND A-BLOWIN'; JOHN HENRY; WALK TOGETHER, CHILLUN; THE CONJURE MAN DIES; THE TRIAL OF DR. BECK; THE CASE OF PHILIP LAWRENCE; THE NATURAL MAN; BIG WHITE FOG; BATTLE HYMN; TURPENTINE; et al.

That first point—the solidification of the position of the Negro performer—is amply attested to in the words (written precisely in 1939) of Ridgely Torrence:

My own experience, early and recent, has shown me with striking contrasts the progress of the Negro in the theatre. When I wrote my first Plays for a Negro Theatre more than two decades ago, I and my associate in production, Robert Edmond Jones, were confronted first with the difficulty of finding colored actors. There were no trained actors for serious Negro plays because there had been no such plays. We searched the Negro population of Harlem, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington in our effort to find possible material and we were at last obliged to develop our own actors.

Even after having arrived at the final rehearsal our actors were made extremely nervous by the conviction that they would be laughed at, hissed, and driven off the stage for daring to suggest that Negroes be taken seriously by a Broadway audience. Few of the company would allow their relatives or friends to attend the first night lest they be witnesses of the disgrace they felt to be certain. Not until the second or third night did they feel free of this fear.

The situation today is very different.¹

This difference lies not only in the fact that

¹Loc. cit., 13.
Negro performers are available, but in the roles they are called upon to play, which have come a long way from the days of minstrelsy. William McDermott put it this way: "It is only within the past few decades that colored artists have had any real opportunity to display the range and depths of their talent for the serious theatre." He recalled that when he began his career as a theatre critic, "nearly forty years ago, the Negro was popularly accepted only as a comedian." The topics of the "nigger" play, Negro characters, Negro content—these remain, however, throughout the thirties as matters of concern nationally, and are worth another look, especially in terms of the motion pictures, and the conflict revealed there vis-à-vis the stage.

The Oxford Companion refers to the gradual degeneration of black-face minstrelsy into a "fantastic artificiality." Far more serious than this decline of the minstrel shows, was their perpetuation of an unfortunate stereotype of the Negro which, to an incredible, albeit varying, degree, permeated American thought, vaudeville, stage, and, ultimately, radio and the screen. The most succinct description of that stereotype this writer has ever found, follows:

... the shiftless, lazy, improvident, loud-mouthed, flashily-dressed Negro, with kinky hair and large lips, over-addicted to the eating of watermelon

\[1\] CPD, March 7, 1952.  \[2\] Sterling Brown, 566.
and chicken (almost always purloined), the drinking of gin, the shooting of dice, and the twisting of language into ludicrous malformations.¹

Modern movie audiences are more familiar with this shiftless, happy-go-lucky Negro type than are theatregoers, and often fail to realize that his portrayal is merely the obverse of that of the rapist in The Birth of a Nation, and others like it. Archer Winsten, the noted movie critic of the New York Post, criticized this stereotype (as often portrayed by Stepin Fetchit, Louis Beavers, Hattie McDaniel, et al), and referred to it as chicken-stealing, voodoo, Father Divine stuff.² He was not alone in this type of criticism, which proliferated through the years, propelled by that growing sense of Negro pride protesting vigorously against these characters and situations on stage and screen. A Negro news agency syndicated a lengthy letter criticizing Louise Beavers for her role in the movie Rainbow on the River, and spoke of the affront of "the coon-hunting, dice-throwing scenes" and the "mammy type of woman."³ Another film with Louise Beavers, Imitation of Life, got similar critical treatment. A Negro editor in Cincinnati called the film

... propaganda, pure and simple, that can only

¹ Ibid. ² Quoted in C&P, June 3, 1937.
³ C&P, March 18, 1937. The letter is from a Mrs. Carrie Pembroke, then Head of the English Department at Lane College, Jackson, Tenn.
tend to lower us in the estimate of those who already think too little of us in every way except as laborers and humor producers. The worst impression it conveys is, that all blacks are just crazy to slave for whites, all mulattoes just crazy to be white.1

It is apparent that there were major differences between the opposition to Negro material in the field of the drama and in the films. For one thing, the degree of excellence was higher in the drama, and that permitted many Negroes to accept the otherwise unacceptable. The great questioners of the "Negro Renaissance" applied searching, intellectual standards, and looked objectively at emotional material: "What do we want . . . ? A picture of ourselves as we would like to seem? A picture of ourselves as some of us are? Or a caricature of Negro life as today it certainly is not?"2

A second difference lay in the fact that, soon, Negroes were writing plays for the theatre, while the Negro in the films continued to be seen through the white man's eyes. Also, Negroes in films were likely to be secondary, even minor characters in a white world, susceptible to quick stereotyping,3 while in the theatre, there

1W. P. Dabney, quoted in Gaz., March 16, 1935.

2[Theophilus Lewis?], loc. cit.

3It is noteworthy that the all-Negro film of Green Pastures, made in 1935, was, generally, well-received by many Negroes who were opponents of the Negro drama in the same period. Even King Vidor's Hallelujah (1929) was not totally condemned.
were plays of Negro life, plays centered on the Negro. The letter quoted just above asked angrily:

Will the general public ever get an idea of the "soul of Black Folk" by the roles Negroes play in the movies? Does the great American public know of the heart hunger and the longing of the Negro for the higher and nobler things of life? There is talent in the race, and we should like to see it used more fully.

The theatre could say "yes" to the questions raised, and point to another difference in the reference to talent, which, for the Negro, certainly, was then more the property of Broadway and the theatre than Hollywood and the movies.

A third difference resided in the nature of the media and their audiences. Theatre-goers were largely white, had a more extensive arts background, and were dealing with an older, more sophisticated art form. They would tire of stereotyped Negro characters just as quickly as of any other dramatic cliché. The "talkies," a far newer medium, delighted, with greater ease and with less demand, a more democratic audience. Critical standards, in general, were lower for the films, developed more slowly, and a definite cultural lag existed between stage and screen. It may be that the Negro in the films faced what Alain Locke called a "double handicap," more often than his fellow actor in the theatre: "On the one hand, wet-blanketing direction toning down the spontaneous, improvising character of true Negro acting; the same direction exaggerating, on the other hand, the superficially theatrical
and supposedly 'typical.' The Negro stereotype in the films lingered till the early forties, and vanished with the war years and the general democratization of that time; such a blatant stereotype never existed in modern theatre periods, and the stock stage Negroes were pretty well doomed after Torrence and O'Neill.

But for some die-hards, the "reasonableness" of the stage in dealing with the Negro, as detailed above, meant nothing. Time, education, and changing circumstances alone would alter their position. Karamu, as a primarily Negro theatre, continued to be the local barometer of attitudes toward the stage. And considering the nastiness of some of the opposition, the Gilpin Players could only have progressed if support for them was building steadily, which, of course, it was in the thirties. For the opposition did continue, in one case from a newspaper columnist who founded what he hoped would be a rival group to the Gilpins. He was the former leading man of the Lafayette Players, and his choice of play literature is known. Andrew Bishop organized the Richard B. Harrison Players in March, 1936, and held his meetings in the Republican Club headquarters.

1"Broadway and Negro Drama," 746. As indicated here, Locke was willing to put aside the myth that the Negro is a "natural born actor." He concluded: "The Negro actor certainly needs direction, and before that training . . . " (747).

2Above, Ch. IV, 101.
of the Eleventh Ward. Clevelanders were assured he would not feature "nigger" plays "as the Gilpin Players do under the leadership of the Jelliffes (white). In a short time, Bishop and the Harrison Players ought to make the people forget the Gilpin Players."  

Bishop wasted little time attacking the Gilpines from his "Stage Folk" column in the Call and Post, W. O. Walker's paper. Admitting that he had been asked why he did not review Gilpin productions, he replied: "The themes of practically all of their shows, to me, are so uncle tommy, that I never thought them worthy of mention in a sepia sheet"; and he specified that the theme of SOON BRIGHT DAY was "a little revolting to my race." On one occasion he wrote a very revealing phrase: "Unless you are forced through financial circumstances to Uncle Tom . . . ." The clear implication is that the principle holds for amateurs, but if you are a professional actor--go ahead! Other references, passim, suggest this approach to the philosophy, perhaps understandable in terms of the Negro's attempt to break through the economic barriers of society.

PEACE ON EARTH (because it was "a Communist play"),

1Gaz., April 18, 1936.  
2March 25, 1937.  
3May 13, 1937.  
4July 15, 1937.  
DARKER BROTHER,¹ and ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE² felt the Gazette's wrath, but FORGY, a much earlier play, despite its successful production, received the worst brunt:

In spite of the fact that the play Forgy with its "nigger" and "damn niggers" references is a STENCH IN THE NOSTRILS OF ALL LOYAL AND SENSIBLE MEMBERS OF THE RACE, the Gilpin Players of this city and their sponsors (white) had the effrontery to again present THE GROSSLY INSULTING PLAY . . . LORD, HAVE MERCY! Again we ask, WHETHER ARE WE DRIFTING? The fact that persons of other races regard Forgy as an "artistic" work does NOT in the least justify or excuse members of OUR race for its presentation anywhere at anytime. Does a little or more education or intelligence rob some of our people of all SELF and RACE RESPECT? It would seem so. SHAME, 0, SHAME!³

Time did not heal the wound for another Negro columnist, Marjorie Drexel Ison ("The Social Ladder"), nor did the loss by the Gilpin Players of their 3807 Central Theatre, in which they had performed for twelve years, soften her free-wheeling attack. She spells out in detail the key fear: "What will the other group think?":

Of all the years the Gilpins have been playing why on earth have they most consistently stuck to those handkerchief head, Charlestoning, Hallelujah, illiterate lowdown Negro plays? They were all right for a time, OK, but why continue degrading the race? There are no two ways about it, everytime such plays as Little Ham (It's really a Little Slam on the Group), etc., are seen by the opposite group it impresses on their minds all the more that the play is representative of Negro life, not just one, but all.

While sitting in the Karamu Theatre one evening,

and being keenly interested in comments—of the other group—(for it has been complained Negroes are not patronizing the Karamu). But why should we—most of us have big enough inferiority complexes to have to pay 75 cents to increase our squeamishness—to continue—We overheard this remark—a particularly hilarious scene in which the actors were gyrating, twisting, and pulsating about the stage in the height of ecstatic glee—"Isn't that just like a 'darky'? Did they mean all 'darkies' including you and me? ..."

The point is going to come up: We must study, develop and stick to our culture—keep our own. Well, if 'it's better fo' to eat' or what have you have to be the basis of our language and culture, if fighting, cussing, femmin', ignorance, poverty, stabbin' and backbiting have to be the basis of my culture I'll have no part of it. 'Nuff said. (Our Irish blood is up today.)

A moderate tone and far deeper understanding were sounded in another quarter, from an old friend and supporter, Ormond Forte. Now editor of the Negro weekly, the Herald (the Gazette called it "a campaign sheet"), he reviewed COAL DUST and said:

Say what you may about the type of plays presented by the Gilpins, America's premiere Negro drama group, the fact remains that there is serious business in everything the Gilpins do; and the sheer art of their dramatic interpretations leaves you in a sort of dither as to whether you have heard a sermon or witnessed an entertainment.

But perhaps the warmest kind of support was that which came from within the group itself. Jesse Firse, long active in the Gilpins, sent a long letter to the Call and Post.

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1C&P, March 21, 1940. The "it's better fo' to eat" phrase is a reference to Dorothy Paxton's play, IT'S BETTER FO' TO SING, written for the Gilpin Players, and presented by them at the Brooks Theatre of the Cleveland Playhouse, on Nov. 24, 1939.

2Nov. 8, 1924. It was—then. 3May 4, 1939.
Logically, he argued that since the Gilpins, an amateur
group, were judged by professional standards, it followed
that they should perform plays for which they were physi-
cally and temperamentally suited.

While they might do a creditable piece of work
in a white play, they can no more compete on an
equal basis with the [Cleveland] Playhouse group
or any one of a hundred similar organizations
throughout the country than Miss Barrymore could
compete with Frances Williams in the portrayal of
Sister Mary.

Thus establishing one rationale for scheduling Negro folk
plays, he defended the group from the charge of degrading
and humiliating the race: "The Gilpin Players individually
and as a group are intensely race conscious and have a loy-
ality and pride of race which instantly precludes considera-
tion of any play reflecting unfavorably upon our people."

First concluded with a firm policy statement:

Gilpin Players are primarily a race organization
and have striven and will continue to strive to
merit the approval and support of their people.
They deplore the forces of bigotry, intolerance
and narrowmindedness which have arisen from time
to time and have sought to discredit their efforts
and distort their aims. I suppose, however, that
such things are unavoidable.¹

Rowena Jelliffe recalls that in the thirties "any folk
play was regarded as a Negro play—some that weren't Negro
plays at all,"² and they were criticized as "nigger" plays;

¹ March 23, 1935.

² Interview, April 10, 1961. Mrs. Jelliffe mentioned
that ANNA CHRISTIE was one play so criticized.
and she adds that there is still a hangover of this sort of criticism today, and that the ushers and hostesses sometimes hear it spoken.

While supporters and detractors made claims and counter-claims, exchanged charge and counter-charge, the Gilpin Players steadily produced plays— at least six each season, throughout the 1930's. And in 1935, another organization got into show business, and its production plans were to be important to Negroes both nationally and at the Cleveland level: the United States Government.

The Federal Theatre, a project of the much-maligned Works Progress Administration, was officially established on October 1, 1935, and in the less than four years of its life left a significant legacy of theatre behind it. It was under the inspired leadership of Hallie Flanagan, now Hallie Flanagan Davis, who shaped the "people's theatre" character of the undertaking, and who was keenly interested in Negro theatre.¹ There is no intention here to review and evaluate this mammoth theatre project, despite the undeniable value and romance of the undertaking, except as it relates to Negro theatre, and particularly as it involved Karamu Theatre. Edith Isaacs states quite flatly that no American theatre project "has meant more to Negro

¹Her Arena is the standard book on the history of the Federal Theatre (New York: Duell, Sloane and Pierce, 1940).
players... than the Federal Theatre did," and she gives it good marks for its encouragement of "initiative, invention and experiment."¹ Professor Sterling A. Brown puts it this way in the Oxford Companion: "Federal Theatre did more for Negroes than give employment to the many unemployed Negro actors; it served as a needed apprenticeship in acting, playwriting, producing, and designing; and it brought the [Negro] people into the theatre."²

Congressional action closed the Federal Theatre on June 30, 1939, largely as a result of "the candor of its comment on economic issues, especially in the Living Newspapers" (one of its pioneering achievements in theatrical form), according to Hallie F. Davis.³ These "indiscretions" had aroused the (Martin) Dies Committee (House Committee on un-American activities) and the House Appropriations Committee, and accusations of Communist infiltration hastened its demise. "Despite last ditch efforts of a theatre delegation led by Tallulah Bankhead, daughter of the Speaker of the House, and mass demonstrations throughout the country,"⁴ Federal Theatre came to its end having served many artistic purposes, not the least of which was to

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¹Negro in Amer. Thtr., 106.
leave Negro "actors with new assurance of their talent, directors and young playwrights strengthened by experience and hope."¹ Given the opportunities, Negro theatre workers were now sure they could do the job.

At the Cleveland level, Federal Theatre activity was organized with K. Elmo Lowe, on the staff of the Cleveland Playhouse, as head, and with Rowena Jelliffe under him. Playhouse Settlement became a cooperating arm of the Cleveland Federal Theatre project, and a mixed group of white and Negro actors was organized in December, 1935-January, 1936. (The main Cleveland group was housed at the Carter Theatre, at Ninth and Prospect, in downtown Cleveland.) This Karamu group was WPA #8118, popularly called "The Community Lab Theatre."²

The group mounted productions, full-length and one-acts, all through 1936, at Karamu and away (at the same time that Gilpin Players productions were going on). THE BIG TOP, a product of a Karamu writing workshop group; UNITED WE EAT, a sharecropper drama; NO LEFT TURN, a short play on the social life of a Negro; FOWL PLAY, a one-act farce; PEACE ON EARTH, the powerful Maltz-Sklar "agit-prop" play; a revival of BRAINSWEAT (at the Little Theatre of Public Auditorium); Rudolph Fisher's THE CONJURE MAN DIES;

¹Isaacs, Negro in Amer. Thtr., 112.
²C&P, Feb. 27, 1936.
and Obey's NOAH. Tickets were free in order to stimulate theatre-going in these depression times. The Community Lab group plays were directed by William Johnson, a graduate of Kansas City University, and one of the Gilpin Players' leading actors. He had played Dessalines in TROUBLED ISLAND (McDermott's review singled him out for praise), the hero in the controversial STEVEDORE, and the lead in DARKER BROTHER, as well as many other lesser roles. He married Marjorie Witt in 1936, and is now a doctor in a Jacksonville, Florida hospital.\(^1\)

In November of 1936, WPA #8118 was dealt a low blow. Despite its integrated makeup, and Karamu's interracial origins, Cleveland's Federal Theatre project was ordered to segregate and re-form, with the added affront to the Negro performers that they be relegated to the State's Recreation Project and paid for "recreation" activity, not theatre work. When the nineteen actors protested this arrangement as a slight to their abilities, they were dismissed, and the Community Lab Theatre was abolished.\(^2\)

Mrs. Cora Newald has reported that a Committee of Forty, "backed by prominent individuals," protested this action vigorously, and in various directions, and we know from another source that both colored and white civic

\(^1\)Mrs. Marjorie Witt Johnson, interview, May 16, 1961.

\(^2\)Eagle, Feb. 19, 1937.
organizations brought heavy pressure to bear.\textsuperscript{1} These efforts were unavailing for some months, but on February 19, 1937, the \textit{Eagle} was pleased to announce that "a revamped bi-racial Federal Theatre group [was] prepared to stage its first play here sometime this month."\textsuperscript{2}

The new mixed group was called the Civic Repertory Theatre (WPA #13008) and was directed by Gerald Davidson,\textsuperscript{3} "internationally known dancer and dramatist."\textsuperscript{4} Davidson was the author of \textit{FRESH OUT O'HEAVEN}, which had just been produced by the Gilpins at Karamu, on February 17, and he seems to have had a full, though short, career in the Cleveland theatre scene. He had trained in New York in theatre, and in dance with the Charles Weidman group, and "formed Cleveland's first Black and White Modern Dance Company."\textsuperscript{5} While in Cleveland, he taught a dance group at Karamu, with Festus Fitzhugh (the devil dancer from the Gilpins' \textit{THE EMPEROR JONES}) as his co-director.\textsuperscript{6} He later married Evelyn Jackson, long active in Karamu dance at camp and in the city, and moved to the West Coast.\textsuperscript{7}

Davidson led the Civic Repertory Theatre through

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}\textit{Eagle}, Feb. 19, 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{3}\textit{CPD}, Feb. 14, 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{4}\textit{CPD}, March 4, 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{5}\textit{CPD}, April 29, 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{6}Festus Fitzhugh, interview, April 1, 1961.
\item \textsuperscript{7}Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe, joint interview, May 16, 1961.
\end{itemize}
CHANTECLER by Rostand (staged for two nights at the Little Theatre of the Public Auditorium; tickets were 15, 25, or 35 cents); and through BURY THE DEAD, by Irwin Shaw, in which he used "interpretative dance routines [in] the tense scenes," performed by members of his recently-formed modern dance company. These were interracial productions, and many Gilpin Players were involved. The Gilpiners in Civic Repertory productions were paid, while those continuing such Karamu productions as HAITI and the revivals of THE SOON BRIGHT DAY and MARTA OF THE LOWLANDS, were not.\(^2\) William Johnson, the group's director when they were \#8118, was acting in \#13008, in CHANTECLER, BURY THE DEAD, and the revival of that anti-war drama (also by Civic Repertory under Davidson) in late May, 1937.\(^3\) Other Karamu personnel in these mixed-cast Federal Theatre productions were Minnie and Lloyd Gentry, Ethel Henderson, Mildred Coleman, Jack Stewart, Margaret Williams, and William Day;\(^4\) also Fred Carlo and Elmer Brown.\(^5\)

It is clear that the beneficial effect felt by the commercial theatre world when it incorporated Federal Theatre-trained Negroes after 1939, was also felt by Karamu Theatre as it re-absorbed those Gilpins who had gained

\(^1\)C&P, April 29, 1937.
\(^3\)C&P, June 3, 1937. \(^4\)Ibid. \(^5\)C&P, March 4, 1937.
additional experience from WPA Projects #8118 and #13008, in addition to Gilpin productions that went on concurrently.

Thus it appears that Cleveland Negroes interested in theatre had several outlets in the thirties: Gilpin Players, Federal Theatre, and miscellaneous minor groups which will be reviewed below.¹ But there was another important development, directly tied to Karamu. Like any successful theatre organization, Karamu soon stimulated more activity than one producing unit could provide the outlet for. This "excess" of personnel and desire is transmuted, in some theatre organizations, into laboratory or workshop activity, but at Karamu in the decade of the thirties, it seems to have blossomed in the form of subsidiary production groups.²

The earliest of these subsidiary groups to organize was the Robeson Players, named after Paul Robeson, whose star had risen in O'Neill's ALL GOD'S CHILLUN, and who continued, through his concert of spirituals and Negro work songs (also at Provincetown)³ and his appearances as

¹ 294-86.

² Children's Theatre continued as before. The section on Children's Theatre in Ch. III (pp. 52-58, q.v.) carried us to 1933, and indicates both the range and nature of this activity through 1939. Puppetry (marionettes), too, continued, largely (but not solely) as it related to children's theatre activity, and in no material way altered from the review given in Ch. IV, pp. 154-156, q.v.; and Ch. III, p. 58, and n. 2.

³ Isaacs, Negro in Amer. Thtr., 78.
Brutus Jones (he played London in 1925\textsuperscript{1}), to personify real achievement in the theatre for Negroes.\textsuperscript{2} The group was formed in 1927, so it seems clear that the acquisition of their own home stimulated Karamu theatre growth in a variety of ways. Malvina Lomax (now Malvina Lomax Squires of Seattle) was the head of the group, and had been for several years before—and continued to be for more years after—an actress in Gilpin productions. It would, perhaps, be accurate to describe Robeson Players as a kind of "farm club" for the older, better established Gilpins, who took the more talented of the Playhouse Settlement personnel for their shows, and left the rest to gain experience and, ultimately, be brought to the "big leagues."\textsuperscript{3}

The Robeson Players, mostly men and women under twenty, produced one-act plays, occasionally choosing works the Gilpins had staged earlier. The standards of play selection were, roughly, comparable to those of the Gilpins, with, perhaps, more democracy connected with the methods by which they were chosen. The director would

\textsuperscript{1}Sobel, op. cit., 669.

\textsuperscript{2}Sparkus Pantroy, a veteran Karamu player, says that the group, "serious, ambitious, and proud of its name," was very disturbed at Robeson's subsequent involvement with Communism. (Interview, June 25, 1961.)

\textsuperscript{3}Mrs. Arthur Taylor, interview, March 30, 1961. A great deal of my information on these lesser Karamu drama organizations comes from Mrs. Taylor, whose significant role and extensive activity in all of them will be evident.
offer the initial recommendations for several plays (these often chosen with Mrs. Jelliffe's aid); majority vote would make the final selection. The productions of the Robeson Players were given at the Karamu Theatre, of course, but they frequently toured their better shows: to Friendly Inn, Phillis Wheatley, other settlements, churches, and so on. This enabled them to repeat the plays they had worked on, rather than let them "die" after their (usually) one-night stands at 3807 Central. Karamu received no fees for these touring programs—they were an aspect of the settlement house's direct public service—though a church might occasionally make a contribution to Playhouse Settlement. At home, there were usually mimeographed programs for their performances, and paid admissions, and Mrs. Arthur Taylor recalls that "houses were pretty good."\(^1\)

Although there was no regular schedule, the Robeson Players produced about three productions a year, always opening their season after the Gilpins, of course, usually in January or February.\(^2\) Ethel Henderson Tann, Lloyd Gentry, Minnie Gentry, Sparkus Fantroy, and Percy Marshall (the latter three still active Karamu performers) were Robesons who became prominent in the senior Gilpin group. Participation in the Gilpin Players carried with it a cachet that did not mark the younger, more socially-minded Robeson Players.

\(^1\)Ibid.  \(^2\)C&P, Feb. 13, 1936; Feb. 24, 1938.
They often planned parties, dances, camping trips, and were--at seventeen to twenty--normally concerned with boy-girl relationships. The talent level of the Robeson Players was "fair" in comparison to the Gilpins, and Murtis Taylor describes it as "good high school level," and in retrospect, she cannot describe them as dedicated. She adds that Mrs. Jelliffe, her heavy schedule with the Gilpins notwithstanding, would always come to the late rehearsals of the Robesons for constructive criticism, and was "very, very helpful."

Murtis Howard Taylor was an actress in the Robeson Players under Malvina Lomax, and took the group over from her when the latter left it. In 1934, Miss Howard married Arthur Taylor, who had been a settlement staff member since 1922, and a member before that. Frances Williams then took charge for a year, and Marjorie Witt replaced her on November 15. The group was still active in 1938, and produced three productions that year, the first of which was Cedric Mount's eight-character, one-act anti-war play, TWENTIETH CENTURY LULLABY.

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1 Mrs. Taylor interview, March 30, 1961.

2 Miss Williams is a Karamu "graduate" who has been connected with the professional theatre since the mid-thirties. She played in YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU in 1937, visiting Cleveland on the tour, and is currently Claudia McNeil's understudy in the A RAISIN IN THE SUN company.

The second and third of these subsidiary Karamu Theatre production groups were the Harrison Players\(^1\) and the Taylor Players, and since they were both founded by Murtis Taylor, it is clear that this energetic woman deserves a second glance. Her membership in children's theatre at Playhouse Settlement has been mentioned,\(^2\) and she returned in a volunteer capacity during her Western Reserve University student days, around 1930. She was invited to become a full-time staff member, and worked in programming, establishing interest, social, and general activity groups, and was named Educational Director of Karamu House, a position she retained until she and Mr. Taylor left in 1943. She remained in social work, taking charge of the recreational center of Outhwaite Homes, and then became Director of the Kinsman branch of Hiram House. She is presently Director of the Mt. Pleasant Community Center\(^3\) and one of Cleveland's leading social workers. The Jelliffes speak of both Arthur and Murtis Taylor as having been important for planning and conferring, as the kind of people "who would think

\(^1\)Do not confuse this group with Andrew Bishop's Richard B. Harrison Players, organized about six months later. (See above, pp. 263-64.) These groups were founded independently, and owe their similarity of name to the immense popularity of the man who created the role of "de Lawd" in THE GREEN PASTURES. Because of the informal nature of the Karamu group, it is probable that Bishop had not heard of its existence at all.

\(^2\)Above, Ch. III, p. 57.

\(^3\)Interview, March 30, 1961.
with you as you were planning ten years ahead.\textsuperscript{1}

The Harrison Players was organized late in 1935, while Murtis Taylor was still working with the Robeson group, and in her capacity as Educational Director. It was designed to meet the demands of young people who wanted drama as an activity, and since it had the appeal, primarily, of a neighborhood group, it was not interracial, as the Robeson group had not been. The formation of such a group must be seen as part of the natural growth of programming that took place at the settlement, or that takes place at any organized center of this kind flexible enough to meet felt needs on the part of its clientele.

The Harrison Players sought no notoriety as a theatre group: "We were just an informal group--not publicity conscious at all";\textsuperscript{2} they rarely had programs for their one-acters, admission was generally free, and no production record for this group exists. Though the Harrison Players, with Mrs. Taylor's leadership, engaged in frequent discussions of current events and problems--an influence of the Federal Theatre period\textsuperscript{3}--they, too, partook of a good

\textsuperscript{1}Interview, May 25, 1961.

\textsuperscript{2}Mrs. Taylor, interview, March 30, 1961.

\textsuperscript{3}Sinclair, loc. cit., 103, writes that the Robeson Players and the Harrison Players "specialize in social-and living-newspaper drama." From the evidence available, this seems to be an overstatement.
many social activities, as did the Robeson Players, and they were less serious toward drama than the older group. Mrs. Taylor describes their talent as "a shade below the Robeson Players"¹ (which, it will be remembered, she had called "good high school level"). The group had no lasting effects in terms of Karamu Theatre history, though there were, of course, incalculable personal, educational, social, and cultural benefits from the activity. They existed for about three years, when attrition—not by defection to the Gilpin Players—but by marriages and general changes of interest on the part of the membership, led to its dissolution.

"The Taylor Players were organized in February, 1938, for the purpose of providing dramatic experiences for a group of sightless people who are interested in cultural and educational advancement."² For the background of Karamu’s blind theatre group, we must go back to 1932, when Mrs. Carrie B. Turner, staff member of the Cleveland Society for the Blind, formed the Cheerio Circle³ to provide constructive activity for a group of sightless men and women.

¹Interview, March 30, 1961.

²Program, TWENTIETH CENTURY LULLABY, April 9, 1938. On this program is printed "first production, first season" of the Taylor Players. Such a note suggests confidence as well as a sense of history.

³Dalva, op. cit., 33, incorrectly gives 1932 as the founding date of the Taylor Players.
They often met at the settlement, and ultimately, Mrs. Turner hit upon the idea of drama as an activity. Murtis Taylor "was intrigued by the idea, and with Mrs. Jelliffe's approval, we started a group."\(^1\)

Naturally, many members of the group were hesitant, and dubious about their ability in this area, and group playreading and discussion of plays and characters was the first step in building up their confidence. Scripts for playreading were provided by Lula Mae Brown, a Cheerio Circle member, who copied the plays read to her into Braille, by hand. Ultimately, under Murtis Taylor's guidance, but still with some reluctance, for "simply going on and off the stage took a tremendous amount of work,"\(^2\) they began rehearsals. Murtis Taylor's description of these sessions, held at 3807 Central, carries with it the drama inherent in this kind of theatre group:

Rehearsals were held early in the evening in order to get the stage as often as possible. We always set up the stage just the way it would be in the performance: furniture settings exact, etc. The actors depended on their mental picture, and on their pacing off a certain number of steps between pieces of furniture or major props. We rehearsed often, so that, ultimately, their steps would not be hesitant. With some plays, they would model the characters they would play in clay, in the shop. This helped them to get a "feeling" of the character. They could think about the role, and the modelling stimulated their interest. Also they would feel each other's face, when the face was expressing emotions, so that these blind people could feel what faces felt like when they were expressing

\(^1\)Information, March 30, 1961. \(^2\)Ibid.
anger, etc. Occasionally, we used sighted people in plays in addition to the blind, to give the blind this experience of working with those who could see. The Robeson Players would join them occasionally. Oftentimes, we were told that the audience could not tell who was blind and who was not, because the actors moved so surely.

Some of the sighted actors would accentuate facial expressions, so that blind people could feel their faces and know what anger felt, and looked like. Some of the people blind from birth did not know, for instance, what frowns were. Blind people were fascinated by this--they never missed a rehearsal. Though rehearsing over and over again was necessary, the blind players were eager to do it.\(^\text{1}\)

When the group were sufficiently assured of their competence, they organized formally, and took the name of their leader, Murtis Taylor. By this point, new sightless persons had joined the group, and a Braille typewriter had been acquired for transcription of scripts. The men and women of the Taylor Players ranged from their mid-twenties to fifty-five or so, and though the primary objective of the group was human development through drama, rather than drama itself, "objectively, in terms of talent, some of the actors were as good as the Harrison Players or the Robeson Players. Some of them were stilted."\(^\text{2}\)

The productions of the Taylor Players were staged at the Karamu Theatre, where never more than a 75 cent admission was charged. The plays, all one-acts, often toured to churches and other settlements, and the group would always rehearse several times on the new stage. The plays

\(^{\text{1}}\text{Ibid.}\) \(^{\text{2}}\text{Ibid.}\)
were frequently accompanied by musical programs, also by the group.¹ Some of their other productions in the 1938-1943 period were LARNIN', by Alla Webb; JUST OFF PICCADILLY, by James Parish; O'Neill's ILE; JUST NEIGHBORLY, by Alexander Bean; GOOD NIGHT, CAROLINE, by Conrad Sellin; Zona Gale's NEIGHBOURS; and an original play, created by the group, KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED. The loss of the Karamu Theatre in 1939 did not daunt the Taylor Players; they continued to utilize "foreign" stages, and occasionally performed before other blind groups. With Mrs. Taylor's departure in 1943, their activity diminished, and finally stopped.

Murtis Taylor, who founded two of these subsidiary groups, and directed all three of them, makes the obvious point that the greatest benefit to the individual was found in the Taylor Players. Reaction to them was tremendously heartwarming for the actors, for audiences seemed to find it almost unbelievable that blind people could achieve so much in the area of theatre. The periodic, personal contacts Murtis Taylor continues to have with the former members of Taylor Players, almost twenty years after

¹One such bill, "A Program & A Play," was given at a church on Dec. 14, 1939. The play was CURED, by Ida Lublenski, with a cast of six; and there were thirteen numbers preceding it: a song by the Congregation, Prayer, Scripture reading, three vocal solos, two piano solos, two recitations, one reading, one saxophone solo, and a "Ukrainian Quartet [Ukrainian]." The typographical error as well as the entire "Program & A Play" were repeated two weeks later at a second church.
the group ended, is testimony to the lasting impact the work had on these sightless men and women. One such recent contact was with Lula Mae Brown, whom she called in preparation for the interview upon which so much of the material above is based:

I asked her to tell me what she could remember about the Taylor Players. Lula said she could remember most the self-confidence she gained, the association with others, and the intellectual stimulation from reading and discussing the plays.¹

Though the Cheerio Circle would welcome drama activity again, Mrs. Taylor cautions that the activity is extremely time-consuming and the demands exacting and varied.² It is clear that a rare sort of training, personality, and leadership are required for success in such activity; it is equally clear that Murtis Howard Taylor had them all.

The popularity of drama as an activity is attested to by the large number of small clubs and groups in Cleveland in these same years, the mid-thirties; it may very well be that their transitory nature was in large part due to the absence of such qualities of training, personality and leadership in their directors as attributed to Murtis Taylor, and as must surely be attributed to Rowena Jelliffe and her Gilpin Players. The pages of the Negro press³ give evidence of the existence of these groups: Church

¹Mrs. Taylor, interview, March 30, 1961.
²Ibid. ³CeP, 1934-38; Gaz., 1933-38.
groups, the Hayes Dramatic Club, Echo Dramatic Club, Euterpes Dramatic Club, Bronze Theatrical Guild, Ivy Leaf Club, Imperial Theatrical Players; the items testify to their high degree of social activity and their low quality of play selection,¹ additional reasons why none of them, with one exception, attained even minor significance or endured more than a very short time.

The single exception is the Aldridge Players.² One clue to the relative success of this group appears in their play selection, clearly superior to the groups listed above: Zona Gale's NEIGHBOURS, Wilder's LONG CHRISTMAS DINNER, Milne's A PERFECT ALIBI, Chekhov's THE BOOR, O'Neill's THE DREAMY KID and THE EMPEROR JONES, et al. Another indication is in the concern for, and existence of, leadership. It is significant that in only three of the listings of the minor groups is a director even mentioned; one single newspaper item³ tells us more about the executive and directorial leadership of the Aldridge Players than all of the issues covered do about all of the other groups and their directors. This "excess" of directors (six are mentioned as active from 1935 to 1937) is clearly not an unmixed blessing, however, and may be in part responsible

¹LOVE 'EM AND LEAVE 'EM, GIRL WITHOUT A HOME, THANKS AWFULLY, DON'T TELL A SOUL, etc.

²Above, Ch. IV, p. 104.

for the Aldridge Players' failure to flourish into true prominence.

Perhaps a final word on the drama program in settlement houses is appropriate. In Chapter IV, it was noted that Negroes were not affected by this activity because they were not welcome at the city's neighborhood centers. By the 1930's, however, several Negro centers (other than Playhouse Settlement) had developed drama programs, and these, too (like Aldridge Players with its roots at the Phillis Wheatley Association), seemed to have at least somewhat greater seriousness and permanence than the host of unaffiliated or church-affiliated drama clubs and social-drama clubs.¹

¹Lafayette Community Center, the only Negro group in competition with nine other neighborhood centers, won first prize in a drama competition in 1933, but after this the group seems to have turned to revues and vaudeville. (Gaz., March 4, 1933.) The drama unit of the Alexander Hamilton Community Center, in the 1936 inter-settlement drama competition, presented Edward J. McCoo's ETHIOPIA AT THE BAR OF JUSTICE, a Negro pageant (taken from Willis Richardson's Plays and Pageants from the Life of the Negro [Washington: Associated Publishers, 1930]), and in 1937 planned another entry. (C&P, Feb. 4, 1937.) The Stagecrafters, foremost among the settlement drama organizations, met at the Woodland Center, at 46th St. and Woodland Ave. This was the group headed by Mrs. R. P. Kessecker which, according to one source, was founded in 1929, though no other evidence of its activity until 1934 has been found. In 1934, it was called the Art Ramblers, and it was producing a trio of one-acters, all of which were Negro content plays, and two of which were by "John Mathens, Colored [Gaz., May 12, 1934]." Irene Catalan was a member of this group, and three years later (after additional experience as member and director of the Bronze Theatre Guild [C&P, May 14, 1936]) her name appears as director of the Stagecrafters,
One of the characteristics of Karamu--both theatre and house--with which all these other groups seem consciously or unconsciously to have been unconcerned, was (and is today) a high degree of contact with the community around it. Both by precept and practice, Karamu has sought to extend its sphere of influence outward, knowing that it could not be viable in isolation. Since 1939 ends both a phase of the Karamu history and this chapter, it might be well at this point briefly to recapitulate this concept of community-relatedness, a prominent pillar of the Karamu philosophy.

Certain aspects of this "public service" approach can be summed up as follows: the dedication to personal growth and education through the medium of drama; the use of the arts as a vehicle for harmonious interracial activity; the specifically "settlement house" activities; the visits of Karamu's supplementary drama groups (adult and children's) to the Museum and other settlement houses, and community centers, other theatres and colleges; the considerable activities undertaken on behalf of cultural growth in the art field\(^1\); the assistance given by the Gilpins,

\(^{1}\)These will be discussed in some detail in Ch. VI.

"formerly the Art Ramblers of Woodland Center's Little Theatre [C&P, Jan. 28, 1937]." That same year, 1937, another mention--the last one discovered on this group--refers to their productions of THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS and MIRAGE, "and several other plays [which] had four or five successful performances this season [C&P, July 8, 1937]." From the photograph of the MIRAGE cast, the group appears to have been interracial.
through their directors, "to some three hundred drama groups throughout the country";\textsuperscript{1} and the contribution represented by the following announcement, as early as 1930: "Members of the group directed plays for other institutions and were also called upon to give individual programs for various adult groups throughout the city."\textsuperscript{2}

These operational principles shaped the image held by the community at large, so that by 1940, Karamu could share significantly in tributes to Cleveland itself: "It is due largely to Karamu House, through its development over the years of Negro culture and character, that Cleveland today stands for mutual appreciation and understanding between the races."\textsuperscript{3} In 1942, the \textit{Cleveland News} declared that the image of Karamu was as "one of the 100\% effective agencies for social betterment of the community."\textsuperscript{4} The theatre was firmly and proudly established. Stan Anderson includes it prominently in his discussion of Cleveland's real vitality in the theatre field, attributing to it what he finds praiseworthy: the continuity of production, the

\textsuperscript{1}Karamu Theatre brochure, 1939-40 season, Karamu files.

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{CYE}, 136.

\textsuperscript{3}Alice P. Gannett, President of the National Federation of Settlements, quoted in Karamu's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Program, Karamu files.

\textsuperscript{4}March 12, 1942.
use of plays with "significance beyond the strictly entertaining," the emphasis upon American playwrights, and the extensive use of original manuscripts. ¹ William McDermott's superlative institutional praise for Karamu has been noted;² on another occasion he directly related Karamu's philosophy to his praise: "I believe the Karamu Theatre of the Gilpin Players to be one of the most important theatrical institutions in the United States in regard to its furtherance of education in drama and the allied arts."³

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Then, on Sunday, October 22, 1939, fire destroyed the Karamu Theatre.

It was a rainy Sunday night, and Karamu was empty, silent, and dark. The Jelliffes were at home. An experimental educational project in drama, music, and dance for Rutherford B. Hayes School (Hazel M. Walker, Principal) students was to begin Monday morning,⁴ and the Jelliffes may have been doing some last-minute thinking about it. On Wednesday, rehearsals for a new play were to have begun, Shirley Graham's I Gotta Home,⁵ but some "difficulties had

¹"The Blouse Off Her Back," Crossroad, No. 4 (Jan.-March, 1940), n.p.
²Above, Ch. I, p. 2.
³Karamu Theatre Brochure, 1938-39 season, Karamu files.
⁵CPD, Oct. 23, 1939.
arisen . . . in obtaining the rights."\(^1\) Rowena Jelliffe was reading a new play, Dorothy Paxton's IT'S BETTER FO' TO SING, as a possible substitute, when the telephone rang at about 11:00 P.M. It was a girl from the settlement neighborhood whom the Jelliffes knew, a rather strange girl, who—considering the hour—asked a few seemingly irrelevant questions: "How's your son, Roger? How are you?" Mrs. Jelliffe's irritation was growing, when the caller told them the bad news: "Your theatre's on fire."\(^2\)

Immediately, the Jelliffes raced to 3807 Central. A number of the Gilpin Players were already on the scene, for the radio had broadcast the news. It was a towering, two-alarm fire, and witnesses reported flames fifty feet high shooting from the roof. The first alarm had been turned in at 10:51 P.M., and the second at 11:08 P.M., summoning additional equipment and men. Four pumperers and two hook-and-ladder trucks were used, and extinguished the blaze in an hour. Fire Chief Granger and First Assistant Chief Nimmo were at the fire, as was Battalion Chief Daniel T. Lavelle, who made the report: "The fire started in a basement room near the furnace and swept upward through the stage, wrecking the building and causing $2500

\(^1\)CPD, Nov. 5, 1939.

damage." The gutted theatre building had also housed other activities. The children's play room on the first floor was flooded, the second floor art studio was burned out, as well as rehearsal, sewing, prop and dressing spaces. The day nursery and the Bokari (sales and display shop for Karamu handicrafts and art products) were both water- and smoke-damaged. And with the theatre went the decorated foyer and the striped wainscoting and the bright yellow sun in the center of the ceiling and the hand-carved wooden light shades and all but two of St. Wenceslas' old church pews and all but two of the African burlap wall hangings. "Now and then," says Mrs. Jelliffe, "I still see a costume that went through the fire."  

Damage was at first estimated at $2500 by Chief Lavelle and by one paper, and at $5000 by a second; later, official figures stood at $3500 for the contents and $8400 for the building. The newspapers misinterpreted Mr. Jelliffe's estimate of a six-week suspension of most activities to mean "reconstruction of the burned Karamu Theatre is expected to take six weeks"; but no reconstruction was ever

1CPD, Oct. 23, 1939.  
2Ibid. 
3Interview, April 10, 1961.  
5CPD, Oct. 26, 1939.  
6Newald.  
7CPD, Oct. 23, 1939.  
8News, Nov. 4, 1939.
planned. It seemed clear that the remaining walls were far too weak to rebuild (though, ironically, the building still stands today), and that the City would issue no such permit. "It was an 1880 building or so--an old, dried-out place."  

A fire of "undetermined origin"... The Call and Post headlined its story: Mysterious Blaze, and immediately a phrase from the past came to mind: "Such a show should be shut down or burn down," from "A Citizen's" letter objecting to MULATTO. W. O. Walker, Call and Post editor, remembered it too, and wrote an editorial about it now: "INCENDIARISM SUSPECTED"

Evidently the vandals, who for several years have been attempting to set fire to the theatre have finally succeeded. Three previous attempts had been made, but, fortunately, in each instance, only slight damage was done.

We hope that a thorough investigation will be made, and if at all possible, the culprits caught

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1Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961.

2Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 25, 1961. There is an additional irony. In what can only be called a cosmic coincidence, the following event took place five months earlier: Youngsters from Playhouse Settlement, comprising "Battalion 5" of Cleveland's Fire Prevention Bureau, won the first place award for "finding the largest number of hazards in a fire hazard contest"! Mayor Burton presented the children with their award, in a ceremony broadcast over station WHK. (C&P, May 11, 1939.)

3Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961.


and punished. As the theatre had not been used for a period of over 24 hours before the fire was discovered, and as it happened at an hour and on a day when no one probably would be in the building, there is strong suspicion that the place was deliberately set afire.\(^1\)

Russell Jelliffe had had a new cement floor put in the basement, where the blaze began, and had it kept very clean.

Was it arson? By vandals? By opponents of Karamu too angry to "welcome conference and discussion on the basis of an honest difference of opinion," as Russell Jelliffe had offered?\(^2\) Some years before, a young boy from the neighborhood, a mental case, was probated on arson charges. He had fired his home and two cars, and was believed to have set other small fires in the area. An older man, a long-time neighborhood resident, confided to Russell Jelliffe years after the fire, that he had overheard this boy from his window on that Sunday night, muttering that he was going to burn down the Karamu. The older man had been drinking, and Jelliffe was not sure how seriously to take his story, but today, both Russell and Rowena Jelliffe somewhat sadly concede: "Arson? It probably was."\(^3\)

The role of fire in the history of the Theatre is common knowledge. Fire has destroyed more theatres than

\(^1\) Oct. 26, 1939. \(^2\) C & P, April 13, 1939. \(^3\) Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe, joint interview, April 25, 1961. But it was arson "without malice," the Jelliffes believe.
censorship, bad notices, and second-rate playwriting or acting. Some of these theatres were rebuilt; some merely vanished, giving up the theatrical ghosts and leaving memories behind. Karamu Theatre, 3807 Central, was twelve years old when it died: the Gilpin Players it had housed were seventeen; the drama program at Playhouse Settlement, nineteen. Well over four hundred productions had been given, by one Karamu group or another from 1920 to 1939, and a national reputation of which they had every reason to be proud had been created. But now it was all "a heap of smouldering embers at the Central-E. 38th corner."¹ Had the opposition: to Negro content plays, to white leadership, to integration, to an arts program—had they all found an ally in the fire? Was Karamu strong enough to survive?

This was Karamu's acid test.

CHAPTER VI

HOMELESS AGAIN -- THE INTERIM PERIOD (1939-49):

"The Phoenix Aspect"

The Gilpin Players, with the parent body, now face the phoenix aspect of their history. We are struggling to rise from our ashes. Given a new home, we propose, on the basis of our twenty years of experience, to build yet more solidly into the whole the talents of our people. Here is a way in which the American Negro can further participate in the building of America's culture.¹

What was there to build on? Two charred church pews, some tattered hangings, $10,448 in insurance,² memories? There must have been moments for some--perhaps as they watched their theatre burning--when even the spirit was weak. But when the news spread, when Cleveland became aware of what had happened, a new resource became apparent: the determination of citizens, Negro and white, that the creative efforts which Karamu symbolized--in art and dance and music and drama--that these were precious and must somehow be retained. As Jo Sinclair put it: "All the bridges Karamu House had erected, all the lines they had

¹Rowena Jelliffe, "Karamu: 'Place of Enjoyment,'" 18.
²Newald.
thrown out over their city, all the trays and bookends, the pictures and lithographs that were now in homes even in far parts of the country—all these worked."¹ Cleveland learned that they wanted Karamu and needed it.

The Jelliffes speak of this rush of goodwill from individuals, from city institutions and organizations, from the surrounding schools and colleges, as refreshing their faith and belief in what their work had stood for: "We had the feeling from that moment on, of going—not alone, not just Russell and I—but a community of people going on together to the rebuilding of the Karamu we have today."² But Russell and Rowena Jelliffe knew that until a new theatre could be built "we exist upon the hospitality of the community."³

A major gesture of hospitality came immediately from the Cleveland Playhouse, which offered the Gilpins its Brooks Theatre for the month of November.⁴ The graciousness and magnanimity of their offer were noted by all the papers, one of which had observed, thirteen years earlier, that the Playhouse "holds out a helping hand, whenever

¹Loc. cit., 107.
²Mrs. Jelliffe, quoted in Rey Gillespie, CPD, May 25, 1958.
³Rowena Jelliffe, "Karamu: 'Place of Enjoyment,'" 18.
⁴News, Nov. 4, 1939.
it's needed" to all drama groups.¹ The Jelliffes, in thanking Frederic McConnell and the Playhouse Board, declared that the kindness "speaks very well for healthy race relationships in Cleveland";² they might have added for "theatre relations," too.

One of the ironies everyone pointed out after the fire was that the Gilpin Players now found themselves in this position: no home, no I GOTTA HOME, the Shirley Graham comedy of Negro life they were hoping to produce. It was at this point that Dorothy Paxton's script, IT'S BETTER FO' TO SING, written especially for the Gilpin Players became a certain selection. It was a happy coincidence, too, for Miss Paxton was a Cleveland Playhouse actress, the wife of its assistant director, K. Elmo Lowe, and the Karamu group had accepted the Playhouse's Brooks Theatre offer.

IT'S BETTER FO' TO SING opened, after more than usual advance publicity, a month after the fire. The set design, executed by the Cleveland Playhouse technical staff,³ was by Richard Beatty, since 1934 instructor in printmaking and director of the Karamu Art Studio.⁴ Beatty was designer for a great many Gilpin productions, of which

¹Grace Kelley, CPD, Nov. 14, 1926.
²CPD, Oct. 25, 1939. ³Program, Nov. 24, 1939.
⁴Kelley, CPD, March 30, 1941.
Shirley Graham's COAL DUST, with its twenty-eight scenes and a coal mine onstage, may have been the outstanding.\(^1\) The program, printed by Karamu's own Bokari Press which had survived the fire, listed the sizeable cast of thirty-two, and a larger production staff than most previous Karamu productions. The reviews were friendly, though McDermott called attention to the lack of suspense and complication. He felt that the play had steady interest, but "no strong and sustained plot structure . . . more background than foreground."\(^2\) Winsor French praised it less reservedly, saying: "Most interesting production I have seen this group offer."\(^3\) The News observed that Author Knows South (Miss Paxton is from Greenville, Mississippi\(^4\)), and that the play "provides good laughs."\(^5\) McDermott's observation that playing at the Brooks Theatre would earn the Gilpins a wider audience than playing on Central Avenue\(^6\) was confirmed by the Junior League's sponsorship of the November 28 performance, a fact reported fully by all three Cleveland dailies.\(^7\) One prominent Cleveland, however, did

\(^{1}\)Arthur Worley, interview, April 14, 1961. Mr. Worley, himself a Karamu Technical Director in 1949-50 and again in 1959-60, began working under Beatty in 1938, in the N.Y.A. Student Training Program.

\(^{2}\)CPD, Nov. 25, 1939. \(^{3}\)Press, Nov. 25, 1939.

\(^{4}\)News, Nov. 10, 1939. \(^{5}\)E. K., Nov. 25, 1939.


\(^{7}\)CPD, Press, News, Nov. 21, 1939.
not see the production: the playwright, Dorothy Paxton, who was performing in OUR TOWN in the Playhouse's Drury Theatre, in the same building, all through the Gilpins' two-week run.

A second gesture of theatrical cooperation and hospitality came from Western Reserve University, which also responded to the Karamu tragedy, and offered its campus theatre, Eldred Hall, for the use of the Negro company.¹

Here, in February, the Gilpin troupe finally staged I GOTTA HOME, the second production of its nineteenth--its first homeless--season. Barclay Leatham, then, as now, Chairman of Western Reserve's Department of Theatre and Drama, Secretary of the National Theatre Conference, and pioneer in the relationship of television and the universities, called the Gilpin visit a "privilege" for the Eldred Players, because of "the integrity of the work [and] the fine sense of craftsmanship maintained at Karamu."²

Shirley Graham, the playwright, was an Oberlin graduate whom the Jelliffes knew as a Conservatory of Music student there.³ She had written a one-act play, TOM-TOM, which, at the behest of a Cleveland entrepreneur, Laurence Higgins of Dramaturgy, Inc., she rewrote and orchestrated

¹C&P, Feb. 22, 1940.
²Karamu's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Program, 1940.
into a full-length opera. Higgins staged it at the Cleveland Stadium in 1932, in Reinhardtian style, and although this spectacular extravaganza was not a Karamu production, scores of Karamu personnel were connected with it.\(^1\) Miss Graham was granted a Rosenwald Fellowship, and did graduate study at the Yale Drama School, where faculty member Otto Preminger directed her *IT'S MORNING*.\(^2\) She became the head of the Department of Fine Arts at Tennessee State College, and later supervised the prominent Negro Federal Theatre Unit in Chicago, which produced *THE SWING MIKADO*,\(^3\) fore-runner of *HOT MIKADO* and *SWINGIN' THE DREAM* (based on *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*). *COAL DUST*, her first full-length play, was produced by the Gilpins in April, 1939, and their production of *I GOTTA HOME* was actually premiered at Miss Graham's alma mater on February 17, 1940, prior to its Eldred Hall showing,\(^4\) as a benefit for the Phillis Wheatley Community Center there.\(^5\) A later tour, for the Association for Colored Community Work, was held at Akron's Goodyear Theatre, in March.\(^6\)

In the months that followed *I GOTTA HOME*, the Gilpin schedule was irregular. The last production of the 1939-40

\(^1\)Ibid. \(^2\)CPD, Feb. 18, 1940. \(^3\)Program, April 26, 1939. \(^4\)Walter Anderson, loc. cit. \(^5\)Program, Feb. 17, 1940, Oberlin, O. \(^6\)Program, March 23, 1940, Akron, O.
season appears to have been matinee and evening performances of "a swing version" of H.M.S. Pinafore, at the new auditorium of the R. B. Hayes School, as a benefit to pay for an Ohio sightseeing tour for a group of thirty-four Karamu youngsters. ¹ The 1940-41 season shows no organized drama program, though there were scattered repeats of Zora Neale Hurston's The Sermon in the Valley, which seemed to continue in its popularity and was, of course, short and easily portable. Rehearsals for Richard Chase's Home to Canaan were being held, in the hope of a summer theatre invitation.² Dance activities grew in scope, though, and the Karamu Dancers appearance at the World's Fair in New York in July, 1940, would remain a highlight for a long time.³ Plans for fund-raising were underway, and energies were dispersed in a variety of directions.

In an attempt to re-form the drama program, a series of three productions was planned for the 1941-42 season: Owen Dodson's Doomsday Tale, for the Brooks Theatre in the late fall; an unnamed comedy⁴ by Shirley Graham, for Eldred Theatre in the winter; and Langston Hughes' Sold Away,
for spring production at the Brooks Theatre.\textsuperscript{1} None of these were performed because of Pearl Harbor,\textsuperscript{2} and the war and Selective Service took its toll. "Because most actors and actresses had entered the armed services,"\textsuperscript{3} the years from 1942-45 were "dark" for Karamu Theatre in more than one sense.

The theatre might have remained "dark," too, save for the energy which a variety of forces immediately applied to a massive fund-raising drive. There was a financial "hospitality" shown, too, as "bridges" which had carried Karamu, in all of its many aspects, out to the community, now carried their thanks back.

Plans for a campaign to build a new Karamu were laid within a week of the fire,\textsuperscript{4} for the burning of the theatre clearly "furnished the impetus needed to spur the trustees into a long overdue decision to seek public assistance in building a home for this most vital and important community work."\textsuperscript{5} But the campaigning moved slowly at first: building plans had to be drawn up, and were--by

\textsuperscript{1}News, Oct. 17, 1941.

\textsuperscript{2}Actually, the Gilpins did do a production in Feb., 1942: a revival of \textit{ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE} at Western Reserve's theatre; and they presented \textit{TRACK THIRTEEN} as a radio play in March.

\textsuperscript{3}CPD, May 19, 1948. \textsuperscript{4}News, Oct. 27, 1939.

\textsuperscript{5}Herald, Nov. 3, 1939.
architect Francis Draz; land for a new site had to be secured, and was—a $500 option held the acre and a half on Quincy, between 89th and 90th Streets;¹ a new name had to be chosen to replace the awkward official title: Playhouse Settlement of the Neighborhood Association, and it was—"Karamu"—the name of the theatre, was adopted as the parent name for the House and its activities. As the Plain Dealer explained it: From now on, it will be Karamu Theatre instead of the Gilpin Players, Karamu Dancers instead of the Modern Dance Group, Camp Karamu instead of Chippewa Valley Camp, and so on.² Now, the tempo mounted. Russell Jelliffe travelled to New York for support in January, 1941, and returned there again in February. Special committees were established: Church and Education, Labor, Women's, Commerce and Industry, Special Gifts and Memorial, National Sorority and Fraternity, National Sponsors.³ Now, a professional publicist, Ralph Preston Wentworth, was hired, and Eleanor Farnham was made his publicity assistant.⁴ The official date for the public opening of the national drive was set for March 11, 1942, and the goal was put at half a million dollars to cover the costs of erecting and endowing the new building and the theatre.

¹Newald. ²May 8, 1940. ³Some of these were: Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor, Oswald Garrison Villard, Tallulah Bankhead, Carl Van Vechten, Langston Hughes, and others. (Press, Nov. 7, 1941.) ⁴Milt Widder, Press, Nov. 7, 1941.
When Pearl Harbor plunged America into war, progress on the drive had proceeded to the point where $250,000 had been promised to underwrite building contracts. The war brought building restrictions, of course, and spiralling costs, and the campaigners knew that when building contracts could again be let, the $250,000 would not be half enough. But the campaign went on, accelerated by the great public launching on March 11, 1942, where Campaign Chairman Fred C. Baldwin announced new gifts: $10,000 from Congresswoman Frances Bolton; $15,000 from William Pierson, prominent Negro businessman; and $50,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation (a most significant gift, earmarked specifically for theatre, and contingent upon Karamu's raising $145,000 on its own). There were other substantial donations from

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1Pierson, the owner of a local cafe, bowling alley, and real estate holdings, had been in the "numbers" in Cleveland. A letter to the Editor of the Cleveland Press, on May 6, 1942, took the position that the "numbers" were the stock market of the Negro community, and just as legal as "playing the market" was for the whites, who could afford the bigger stakes. To prove the legitimacy of the "numbers," the writer adduced the benefits to Cleveland Negroes made possible by "numbers" money: fine cafes, a bowling alley, apartment houses, etc., and he wrote (in a clear reference to Mr. Pierson): "... and lastly, the numbers made it possible for a Negro to give $15,000 to Karamu House." This demonstrated, he concluded, that money lost to Negro numbers bosses "comes back" to the Negroes with interest! (The Jelliffes recall Mr. Pierson's background in the "numbers"—the team of Pierson and Price was notorious in the field—but explain that Mr. Pierson had been for a long time out of the racket when he made his Karamu contribution, and that he was, and still is, a sound businessman [interview, April 25, 1961].)

2Press, March 12, 1942.
various local foundations: Cleveland, Thomas H. White, Hanna, and Beaumont Trust; and national foundations: Claremore (Los Angeles), Columbia (San Francisco), and Flagg,\(^1\) Whitney, Harkness, Payne, and Field, all of New York.\(^2\)

There were smaller gifts, too, of course—thousands of them. Frank Lausche, then Mayor of Cleveland, gave $135 for the fund.\(^3\) Louis Bromfield's gift has been noted.\(^4\) Two Cleveland museums, Art and Natural History, "which have both profited by the efforts of organized groups at Karamu House,"\(^5\) sponsored art shows, displays, exhibits, and receptions for "moral and material support to the Karamu building and endowment campaign."\(^6\) Dorothy Maynor, who had accepted the Chairmanship of the National Sorority and Fraternity Committee, gave a benefit concert at Public Music Hall on October 19, 1941, and over thirty news items publicized her concert and Karamu's drive. Perhaps the most touching gift of all (and a type without which no drive is complete) was a contribution of eight hundred pennies from the children of Central Junior High School.\(^7\)

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\(^1\)Russell Jelliffe recalls getting "a few hundred dollars" from the Oberlin faculty immediately after the fire. "And then I got my first grant from [Oswald Garrison] Villard's Flagg Fund in New York." (Interview, May 16, 1961.)

\(^2\)Press, Nov. 6, 1947.

\(^3\)C&P, May 9, 1942.

\(^4\)Above, Ch. II, pp. 16-17.

\(^5\)See below, pp. 310-15.

\(^6\)CPD, March 13, 1942.

\(^7\)CPD, April 2, 1942.
The Rockefeller Foundation, aware that the rise in costs meant a reduction in the adequacy of their $50,000 contingency contribution, raised the sum to $70,000, but upped the Karamu share, too, to $260,000 from the original $145,000.\(^1\) The problem was clear: raise the required amount or the Rockefeller grant would fall through, and with it, the entire project, for constantly creeping wartime costs had forced some cutbacks and compromises already. The campaigners, dissatisfied with Ralph Wentworth's hard, professional techniques (which they felt were alienating, rather than creating, Karamu friends), released him, and the Jel liffees took over the fund-raising duties themselves. Rowena Jelliffe has said that she and Russell were reluctant to do this, but never regretted it because of the opportunities to do race-education, make new friends by simply "telling the Karamu story," and meet "stimulating and challenging people who really made you examine your ideas all the way through."\(^2\) As fund raisers, they preferred to leave knowledge of, and goodwill for, Karamu with prospects, whether they contributed or not.\(^3\)

In April, 1947, $56,000 short, Russell and Rowena Jelliffe\(^4\) headed for Hollywood, with a September 15

\(^1\)Press, Nov. 4, 1947.  \(^2\)Interview, June 29, 1961.

\(^3\)Interview, March 28, 1961.

\(^4\)Punning on the Kaufman-Connelly play, Arthur Spaeth called Russell Jelliffe "the beggar on horsepower." (News, Nov. 30, 1949.)
deadline for the Rockefeller money.\(^1\) There a "Committee of 29," headed by George Cukor, was established, including Judith Anderson, Joseph Cotten, Melvyn Douglas, Rupert Hughes, Jennifer Jones, Danny Kaye, Emily Kimbrough, Dudley Nichols, Joseph Pasternak, Gregory Peck, Rosalind Russell, David O. Selznick, Frank Sinatra, and Walter Wanger.\(^2\) Enthused, Hollywood pledged $80,000, and chances of raising the sum looked good,\(^3\) as Karamu had "raised a lot of good will."\(^4\) It was at this time that the British, hard-pressed for funds, "slapped on this 75% tax on all American films, and that scared the pants off Hollywood. You were going to get $1000 and got $50."\(^5\) But dozens of actors contributed, even without funds on hand: "One of them was Katherine Hepburn, who came up to George Cukor, the chairman of the occasion, and said, 'Here's a check for $1,000; but tell Mr. Jelliffe not to try to cash it until September 1.'"\(^6\)

Off on another of their "tin cup" sojourns, as Arthur Spaeth described them,\(^7\) the Jelliffes headed East, with

\(^1\)Ibid.
\(^2\)Press, Nov. 4, 1947.
\(^3\)Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961. The CPD, Nov. 27, 1949, gives the pledge as $50,000.
\(^4\)Mr. Jelliffe, quoted in Press, Nov. 4, 1947.
\(^5\)Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961.
\(^6\)McDermott, CPD, Nov. 27, 1949.
\(^7\)"Theatre, Cleveland," Theatre Arts, XLIV, No. 1 (Jan., 1960), 76.
the Rockefeller deadline only days away, $259,700 raised, and the dollar gap at $300:

Excited and desperate, for he had milked every possibility for new funds, he went to Katharine Cornell and explained his plight. She gave him $500.

Jelliffe was able to come through with about $200 more than was necessary to obtain the Rockefeller grant, and it came in just under the line. As Jelliffe says: "She never knew how important that $300 was. The theatre might not have been built without her." Gertrude Macy, Miss Cornell's secretary and general manager, said, after visiting the new Karamu theatre, "We don't always know how contributed money is spent, but in this case we know it is spent in just the way that Miss Cornell, and every lover of the theatre, would like it to be spent." 

The Jelliffes, in looking back on the campaign, laid great significance on the Rockefeller Foundation action, saying that their grant, in a way, assured them that they would have a new Karamu Theatre. In making their gift specifically for a theatre building, the Rockefeller donors were acknowledging the importance and value of Karamu's theatre as they had seen it at 3807 Central, and, of course, as Ridgely Torrence (sent to Karamu by the Foundation) had seen it, too. Until the Rockefeller donation, the only previous subsidy Karamu Theatre had ever had was Charles Gilpin's $50 gift, twenty years earlier.

But long before this consequential foundation gift blossomed into a new home, when the building campaign was

1McDermott, CPD, Nov. 27, 1949.

2Interview, May 6, 1961.
still in its infancy, Karamu celebrated its Silver Anniversary. This event was a good momentary resting place, a vantage point for a realistic backward look at achievement, and a forward look at challenge. Paul Green and Dorothy Maynor were the principal speakers, and their remarks helped make the twenty-fifth birthday a truer highlight than the calendar alone would have done. Green, who as a playwright had been important to the Gilpin Players, looked ahead to a revivification of the democratic soul and the democratic vision. He saw America "entering a period of culture," adding: "The salvation of the world lies in the creation of beauty and not in things and theories." Karamu House, therefore, was serving democracy by teaching people "to do things for the beautification and enjoyment of the world."¹

Dorothy Maynor's talk was more spiritual and more personal:

It would, of course, be false and misleading to try and to make distinction here today between those who have given and those who have received. In the realm of the spirit there is no difference between loving and being loved, serving and being served, or blessing and being blessed.

She went on to observe that

if in every community in this country where my people live there could be placed sufficient means and sympathetic leadership for the work of goodwill to which they [the Jelliffes] have given themselves here so relentlessly during the past quarter century, Democracy would have nothing to fear from the Negro.²

¹Press, Dec. 7, 1940.

²C&P, Dec. 21, 1940. Miss Maynor's speech is reprinted in toto in this issue, and also in Our Book--Good Will, I, No. 7 (Nov., 1941), 4.
Winsor French, Cleveland Press columnist, declared in the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Program that the artistic contributions of Karamu members strengthened democracy and enriched "our common culture," and that it was "impossible to estimate the value of the Karamu Theatre, the Karamu Dancers, the Karamu artists."\(^1\) Earlier he had written: "Hampered or not, Karamu still continues its magnificent work, . . . in every form from acting and the dance, to design, the execution of wood blocks, etching, and painting."\(^2\) This recognition of the importance of art and dance was typical of the newspaper stories that reviewed Karamu's first twenty-five years,\(^3\) for though the theatre had been burned out over a year already, the other Karamu arts activities had, of course, resumed operation.

The ongoing relationship between the theatre and Karamu art activity will be noted here at two of its major points: the Gilpin Players-African Art Sponsors Fund, and the Gilpin Players Art Scholarship Fund. Late in 1927, the Jelliffes organized a group of Cleveland Negroes as the African Art Sponsors (hereafter, the AAS) who, together with the Gilpin Players, pledged $1000 (later raised to $1500) to provide the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Museum

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\(^1\) Dec. 7, 1940.  
\(^2\) Press, Dec. 3, 1940.  
\(^3\) Edwin T. Randall, CPD, June 16, 1940; Marie Daerr, Press, Dec. 6, 1940; Ken Jessamy, C&P, Dec. 7, 1940; et al.
of Natural History with African art and ethnological material.\(^1\) The first monies came from the profits of two bills of one-acts early in the seventh season ($300); Russell Jelliffe, who raised $100; the AAS group ($260); and additional sums "from collections made in colored churches."\(^2\) The fund was given to Paul Bough Travis, of the Cleveland School of Art faculty, who was fulfilling a lifelong ambition by going to Africa, to "collect objects of primitive art."\(^3\) The native art objects and sculpture which Travis brought back formed the nucleus of the collection Karamu presented to the two museums, and which is on permanent public display. The Cleveland News editorialized:

> The material is not rivaled by anything of a similar nature in the United States. But of equal importance is the cooperation between local representatives of two diverse races which made possible this latest cultural contribution to our city.\(^4\)

The impetus for things African was impelled by the enthusiasm with which the Gilpin Players decorated their theatre. (It will be remembered that Paul Travis played an advisory role at that time.\(^5\) It is obvious that this desire, on the part of the Gilpins and the AAS, to indicate

\(^1\) CYB, 1927, 23.

\(^2\) Grace V. Kelley, quoted in Gaz., Dec. 13, 1927.

\(^3\) News, Dec. 1, 1928. \(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Above, Ch. V, p. 169, n. 3. Louise Dunn was the chief adviser.
their interest in the artistic inheritance and tradition of
the race, met with opposition from precisely the same sources
which described the Gilpin productions as "nigger plays,"
but the force with which the fund proceeded and the reward-
ing contacts with the museums and the Art School, survived
the petty criticism. Part of the significance also is re-
vealed in this remark of Harry E. Davis, President of the
AAS: ¹ "This is the first time in the history of Cleveland
or any other city that a group of Negro citizens have contrib-
uted to the art treasures of a city."² It was a reversal of
what had been the usual relationship of many Negroes to pub-
lic organizations and cultural institutions.

Some few months after their African art project,
with initial monies from the professional appearance of IN
ABRAHAM'S BOSCM at the Little Theatre, the Gilpin Players
established a scholarship fund--"the first of its kind in
the United States"--at the Cleveland Museum of Art.³ The
fund was to total $5000, and the income from it would be

¹Davis was a strong supporter of the Jelliffes in
the twenties and thirties, aiding them in a variety of ways
(in the STEVEDORE episode, for example). He was regarded
as one of the ablest people in the Negro community, and
Russell Jelliffe has said of him that he knew how to help
move into a problem area with wisdom, a sense of ultimate
direction, and diplomacy. (Interview, May 16, 1961.)

²[Dec., 1928.] This quote appears in an unidentified
editorial from one of Cleveland's Negro papers. (Karamu
files.)

³CPD, June 20, 1928.
used to "defray, in whole or in part, the tuition of one or more colored students in the Cleveland School of Art."

The Gilpin Players were expressing their interest in stimulating, developing, and preserving the art talent of Negro children, for there were twenty Negro youngsters in the specially talented children's classes at the Museum, and these youngsters would be eligible for the scholarship upon completion of these classes. The Gilpin Players were also "acting out" the philosophy of interrelationship of areas at Karamu, for--as Norris Houghton observed--you cannot judge the breadth of the Gilpin Players by their actual membership, for many more people are involved in the range of Gilpin activity. Pointing to another specific way in which the art and theatre areas interrelate at Karamu, is this statement by Rowena Jelliffe, which underscores the need to consider the subsidiary and related groups in this theatre history:

The Gilpin Players have not existed as an isolated group, but have related their work to the life of the community and to the general program of Karamu House, the parent organization. In this way it has been fed by many other children's and adolescent drama groups. Its stage design has been fostered by the graphic art department of Karamu House. Closely related, too, has been the dance and music development of the larger organization. 4

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1 Program, March 21, 1929.  2 Ibid.
4 "Karamu: 'Place of Enjoyment,'" 15.
The Gilpin Players were aggressive. By mid-1930 they had accumulated $1625,\textsuperscript{1} and the entire proceeds from their Theatre of the Nations performances of THE EMPEROR JONES (1931)\textsuperscript{2} and PORGY (1933)\textsuperscript{3} went to the Art Scholarship Fund. At the end of 1934, the $3000 principal, invested by trustees of the Cleveland Museum, had accrued sufficient interest to pay for the first, full-year scholarship. A joint committee of the Museum and Karamu awarded it to Charles Sallee, who "made a splendid record"\textsuperscript{4} at the Art School, and upon his graduation in June, 1936, was awarded a post-graduate scholarship by the School faculty.\textsuperscript{5} Sallee, like other Gilpin Scholarship winners, was "required" to give some personal service in set design to Karamu Theatre, or assist with the instruction of children's art classes.\textsuperscript{6} He was doing just that, for he was an instructor in portraiture at the settlement at the time of his scholarship studies.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1936-37, Hughie Lee Smith became the second recipient of the Gilpin Art Scholarship,\textsuperscript{8} also earning a fifth year award

\textsuperscript{1}Gaz., May 31. \textsuperscript{2}CPD, March 30, 1931.
\textsuperscript{3}CPD, March 8, 1933.
\textsuperscript{5}C&P, June 4, 1936.
\textsuperscript{6}CPD, Dec. 16, 1934. CPD, March 15, 1929, said: "It is hoped" winners might perform these services!
\textsuperscript{7}C&P, May 21, 1936. \textsuperscript{8}Gaz., Oct. 17, 1936.
from the school, he was later an assistant instructor in portraiture at the Karamu art studio. The fund principal stands today at over $4000, though there is no current scholarship holder, pending the accrual of additional interest and a worthy recipient.

Not all of Karamu's art activities revolved around African funds and scholarships. One key spot was (and is today) the Bokari ("market place" in Swahili), where art products of students and staff are displayed and sold. The Bokari was originally located one door east of Karamu Theatre, at 3813 Central, and the first annual sale, in May, 1930, "was most stimulating, partly because of the variety of designs, and partly because the objects were created without thought of sales." In 1931, the children's Bokari show included "block prints, batiks, linoleum cuts, sketches, water colors, and metal work." In 1933, the Bokari was showing two books about "Cowboys and Indians" and "Nursery Rhymes," illustrated with original linoleum blocks of seven to thirteen-year old Playhouse Settlement artists, and printed by the Bokari Press.

1CPD, July 7, 1940.  2Program, Dec. 8, 1937.  3Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 11, 1961.  4CYB, 1930, 136-37.  5Bordner, Press, June 27, 1931. The metal shop was one door further east on Central, at 3815.  6Program, March 15, 1933.
The existence of an art activities area at the settlement, and the stimulation afforded it both directly and indirectly by the existence of an active theatre program and the art-minded Gilpin Players, bore fruit. Settlement-trained Negro artists, many of them active in scene design for the Karamu Theatre, began to place their entries and win prizes in Cleveland's biggest art competition, the annual May Show.¹

It was, perhaps, inevitable that this talent organize. Shortly after the 1940 May Show, six of the settlement's most talented formed Karamu Artists, in order to acquaint the community at large with their work and the merits of Negro craftsmen in general. The group consisted of Hughie Lee Smith, Charles Sallee, William E. Smith, Elmer Brown, Fred Carlo, and Thomas Usher. Associate members were Zell Ingram (at the time in New York); Richard Beatty, Art Director of Karamu Studios; and Frank Lee, in charge of crafts at Karamu. All of these artists had sound training, in Cleveland and elsewhere, had exhibited nationally, and taught at a variety of colleges, schools, and community centers.² Elmer Brown painted, not long afterwards, a large mural, twenty-two by eleven feet, in Cleveland's City

¹Eagle, May 18, 1938; Herald, May 5, 1939, and May 10, 1940; Program, May 24, 1939.
²Grace V. Kelley, CPD, July 7, 1940.
Club. It depicted the freedoms of a democratic society, particularly the freedom of speech.  

James A. Porter, in his comprehensive Modern Negro Art, had a great deal to say about the Karamu Artists. He calls them the "one instance of a promising attack on the problem of social description and interpretation" in the etching field, and he names Sallee as the group's leader in this. Hughie Lee Smith he calls one of the only three Negro printmakers he knows who have proper command of lithography to "produce fine prints and to instruct others in the medium." Elmer Brown is designated "the most interesting one of the Karamu Artists," in terms of "artistic expression," and of the whole group he writes:

In Karamu Artists, Inc., an auxiliary organization of artists and students of Karamu House, there is no attempt by the members to outrank one another; all are on a basis of equality. When opportunity permits, they collaborate on large projects, and they are as interested in each other's success as in building a personal art not consciously imitative of a "school." Some of the older artists have had more experience in art technics than their confreres. Sallee, Smith, Ingram, Brown, and Hughie Lee Smith have ranged through more than five media and have taken firm hold of each.

As inevitable as their organization was the exhibition of their work, not only at Karamu and in Cleveland,

1Milt Widder, Press, April 23, 1942. I have, of course, seen it, and it is impressive and of high quality.
2P. 159. 3Ibid., 163. 4Ibid., 129.
5Ibid., 128-29.
but nationally. Their most significant showing was in New York, the group show ("the largest Negro art exhibition ever held in this city"\textsuperscript{1}) at the important Associated American Artists' Gallery.\textsuperscript{2} With Eleanor Roosevelt as honorary national chairman and Dorothy Maynor as chairman, and an impressive list of sponsors,\textsuperscript{3} the show opened on January 7, 1942. The exhibit included oils, watercolors, drawings, prints, ceramics and metal enamel, pastels, lithographs, etchings, jewelry, and sculpture; twenty-five Karamu artists were represented in all, though the Karamu Artists group dominated, and the whole show was enthusiastically received by the New York art critics.

It is interesting how reminiscent of some of the Gilpin Players' notices these art reviews were. The \textit{Times} man praised the "rare quality of honesty and sincerity," and declared that much of the total body of work exhibited could be judged by the strict standards applied to the work

\textsuperscript{1}New York Post, Jan. 13, 1942.

\textsuperscript{2}C&P, May 24, 1941.

\textsuperscript{3}Marshall Field, Langston Hughes, Beatrice Straight, Dr. Alain Locke, Mrs. James Weldon Johnson, Mrs. William F. Gibbs, Ethel Waters, Mrs. Edith J. R. Isaacs, A. Philip Randolph, Mr. and Mrs. Donald F. Hyde, Mrs. William S. Paley, Mrs. David R. Levy, Marian Anderson, Carl Van Vechten, Leonard Hanna, Katherine Dunham, Walter F. White, Louise Crane. (Program, Exhibit by Karamu Artists, N.Y., N.Y.)
of professionals.¹ The Herald Tribune grasped the dual achievements of personal and technical growth, and singled out the work of William Smith, Fred Carlo, Elmer Brown, Charles Sallee, and Hughie Lee Smith:

The work . . . is most exceptional from the viewpoint of the social factors involved. For bright talents have been reclaimed from humble lives and given vitality through the cooperative free activity of the group. At the same time the degree of accomplishment achieved is such as would bring credit to many a more mature and independent artist. The Karamu oils . . . are conspicuous highlights in an exhibition which shows an even level of skill and serious attainment throughout.²

The New York Post observed that such an exhibit was "an especially cheering event in a day in which the defense program has again raised the question of the Negro's participation in American life," and added, wisely: "We do not believe a Negro art show will solve the Negro problem, but, on the other hand, we think that a country which shows a decent pride in Negro cultural development will someday be capable of a solution."³ The exhibit traveled to Philadelphia, where Langston Hughes and Dorothy Maynor spoke at its opening, and where the critical welcome was equally warm.

Like art, dance activity did not suffer directly from the destruction of the Karamu Theatre, for it was easy to continue dance in host auditoriums and on

out-of-town tours. While manpower demands depleted the Gilpin Players, there were enough women dancers left to give occasional concerts, even in the 1942-45 period, when Karamu Theatre was "dark." In one sense, Karamu Dancers "replaced" drama activities, maintaining the performing image of Karamu for the public during this interim period. Then, too, dance had always been related to theatre, and more than half a dozen important Gilpin productions between 1931 and 1937 featured dance prominently. Jo Sinclair depicts this particular inter-departmental relationship lyrically when she speaks of Karamu "experiments":

The one that produced the now famous Karamu Dancers came about very simply. The Gilpins put on a play that called for dancers. "We need dancers!" they cried, looking around their world.

So there were dancers! A small group started in the usual Karamu way. Talent was discovered; the group grew steadily in size and art. After all, Central Avenue loved to dance, as well as sing.¹

Marjorie Witt Johnson² and Festus Fitzhugh,³ both

¹Loc. cit., 104.

²See above, Ch. III, p. 50. Mrs. Johnson earned her M.A. at Western Reserve University. She remained at Karamu as a full-time staff member from 1936 to 1942, active in the dance area. From 1936-40 she led a group of young people in still another subsidiary theatre-social group, the Senior Drama Group, or "Les Inconnus," as they were also known. From 1942-47, after she left Karamu, she worked as Program Director in Chicago's public housing field, and taught group work at Atlanta U. from 1948-57. There, she also taught dance, on an extra-curricular basis, to children and adults. She is presently with Belzofaire, a private, Cleveland social work institution for disturbed Jewish children. (Interview, May 17, 1961.)

³In the fall of 1926, Mr. Fitzhugh took the place of
Negro staff members, are the key figures in the Playhouse Settlement dance program in the thirties. Both of them were active as dancers first, then as teachers for organized groups of children and adults. Mr. Fitzhugh's role in inculcating African dance techniques is an important one, and his students were, for the most part, young Gilpin Players whose talents in primitive dance were distinctly above average. Their choreography was often based on their daily experiences in their rather crowded, urban, industrialized environment. The Boys' Dance Group, one of several, was organized as a weapon against delinquency, and the members' interests were later extended, beyond dance, directly into theatre through a Stage Hands and Crew Club.

Marjorie Witt Johnson taught about five or six girls' "Bud" Munson, and became Assistant Boys' Worker under W. E. Sinclair. He remained until 1930, rejoined the staff from 1935-42, and then served three years of Army service. As a performer, he used his gymnastic skill in dancing and movement for the role of Puny in IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM; he achieved prominence with his "witch doctor's" dance in THE EMPIER JONES, which he repeated often; and he created the title role in LITTLE HAM. Fitzhugh also assisted Mrs. Jelliffe with costume work, and Mr. Jelliffe in the design and construction of numerous stage settings. (Interview, April 1, 1961.)

1Press, Nov. 12, 1936.

2Festus Fitzhugh, interview, April 1, 1961. Mr. Fitzhugh recalls a "Foundry Dance," which grew out of a field trip and a subsequent reconstruction of the foundry's sounds and "movements."

3Ibid.
and women's groups, and describes a similar "personal" basis for choreographic content. "Every time they rehearsed, they lived," she has said, for the dance related directly to their backgrounds, their neighborhood, their occasionally grim personal experiences. In her modern dance group, she used Negro content extensively at first, then as the group acquired more technique, she moved with them into other, non-Negro areas. She recalls opposition to the use of spirituals in dancing, most particularly from her Mothers' Club (which was genuinely enthusiastic about their program [square dance, largely] and dance in general), as well as from many lower class and middle class Negroes. These opponents to Negro content in dance, however, would always admit, when they saw the youngsters performing: "They sure have got the movement!" Marjorie Johnson paid many visits to the Holy Roller church meetings to gather material and movement for her young dancers, and upon this material choreographed such numbers as "Everybody Will Be Happy" and "Going Down to the River."

Two statements are worth quoting in the light of

1She recalls rather romantic "creative choreography" about prostitutes, drunks, and one dance called "Barbecue," based upon one of the dancer's thoughts and memory of very literal hunger. Mrs. Johnson's Master's thesis in Social Work is subtitled "To Dance is to Live," suggesting the acting out of life experiences and attitudes in the Dance. (Interview, May 17, 1951.)

2Ibid.
the foregoing: one, a statement of the purposes of the Playhouse Settlement's dance program, on the occasion of one of the group's many recitals; and the second, a first hand description, by a dance critic, of the work of the dancers:

We dance because we are trying to aid the physical, mental and emotional development of both young men and women and boys and girls of the community. We believe this development can be furthered through the rich rhythmic and dramatic life of the Negro. We believe also that by reflecting the social scene, past and present, according to the aptitude of the individuals, that we are contributing to the culture of America.¹

William Gates' description is based on a visit to a dance rehearsal. Present were ten girls, all Negroes, Marjorie Witt Johnson, Rowena Jelliffe, A. Lois Perry at the piano, and baritone Edward Lee Tyler as accompanists.² Gates' appreciation of what he saw is excellent source material:

Their compositions were in the process of evolution. Indeed my impression is that they are constantly in that process for the reason that they are community products. If Miss Witt sets the line of the work, she cordially receives and incorporates suggestions from her group as to details of movement, and frequently submits to their judgment her own phrases.

... the present direction under Mrs. Jelliffe's skillful pressure is all toward exploitation of the true Negro body rhythm. While working within the principles of the modern dance, the group is

¹Dance Program, March 24, 1939.

²Mr. Tyler often accompanied the Karamu Dancers, and participated in a few Gilpin productions, too. He has a fine voice and is today a concert singer in New York. (Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, June 27, 1961.)
properly seeking its own racial idiom . . . .
Into their compositions they are incorporating
the loose-jointed foot work, the strut, and the
torc flexings of the colored dance entertainer;
the hypnotic gesturing of the colored preacher.
Obviously in this line communal composition has
great value, for every participant both gives
evidence and acts as juror.
Setting Negro dance composition to the spiritual,
the sung spiritual, constitutes a revisit to the
common head-waters of dance and music. The emotion
which so powerfully pervades the simple heart of
the spiritual is so strong that it must likewise
externalize itself in movement . . . . So move-
ment illumines the song, the song enlarges the
impact of the movement. Therefore when Tyler
sings a spiritual and the group describes its
emotion in dance, you have something which tran-
scends the faulty technique of the dancers and
the confining walls of the Settlement auditorium.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
I cannot bid Miss Witt's dancers farewell with-
out letting them make one more point. Although
they worked to a blank wall, they seemed to dis-
solve it and move before a sea of faces, of which
I found myself a part. This is what one may loose-
ly call a sense of entertainment, or more accurate-
ly the faculty of communication. How this mystery
is encompassed, the observance of what rules yields
audience appeal, I cannot say. But ballerinas
and chorus girls know what it takes.¹

Again, Jo Sinclair— the dancing from another point of view:

It is what many critics have called "unique
dancing." The dark, strong, rich bodies attempt
to interpret an entire race; the steps and ges-
tures speak of Africa, the deep South, the
strange cold North; arms and legs test out a
music of weariness, trouble, work, hope. Lord,
Lord, I got a pain in my soul! Lord, Lord, I'm
gonna work my way clean to heav'n! The shadows
of the dancers stretch long and beautiful with
movement into the houses on Central Avenue.
They drift over the roofs of the broken houses

¹"Of the People: A Negro Group Turns to Folk Song
for the Emotional Stuff of the Dance," Crossroad, Spring,
1940, n.p.
of the side streets, and take their dark, live steps into the clean and lovely houses at the other end of the city. They bridge the tremendous gulf between Central and the Heights, making a series of subtle gradations between the colors of black and white.\footnote{1}

Ultimately, these boys' and girls' groups were merged, at Marjorie Johnson's and Rowena Jelliffe's suggestion, with Mrs. Johnson and Mr. Fitzhugh in charge.\footnote{2} And from 1939 to 1948, they gave scores of concerts, in Cleveland and away, at points as scattered as Detroit ("75 Years of Negro Progress" Exposition); Wilberforce College;\footnote{3} Kentucky State College; Pittsburgh (Irene Kaufmann Auditorium of the YWCA);\footnote{4} et al. The notices of these programs reveal participation by as many as seven groups of dancers: Little Girls, Intermediate Boys and Girls, Adults, Junior Girls, Junior Boys, Senior Boys, and Senior Girls. Several of the concerts used variants of the title, "A Creative Dance Recital of the Negro in America," and once the war had begun, "Dances for Democracy." The list of dancers included many active in other areas, notably Arthur Worley, who later became Technical Director of the theatre; Nolan Bell, one of Karamu's actors for over thirty years, and still very active; and Hughie Lee Smith, Karamu artist. Male dancers

\footnote{1}{Loc. cit., 104.}
\footnote{2}{Fitzhugh, interview, April 1, 1961.}
\footnote{3}{Fritchey, loc. cit.}
\footnote{4}{Program, April 24, 1948.}
seem to vanish from the "cast" at the height of the war, and non-Karamu dancers—mostly white women from Cleveland's burgeoning modern dance movement¹—join in the recitals.

One of the outstanding leaders of dance in Cleveland is Eleanor Frampton, currently head of the Karamu Dance program. Miss Frampton took over the dance group in 1942 (when Marjorie Johnson left Karamu), though she had been giving "helpful suggestions" to Mrs. Johnson and Mr. Fitzhugh² and valuable training to Mrs. Johnson (whom she taught³) for years before she joined the Karamu staff. She had studied dance with Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Martha Graham, and at the Denishawn School, and had taught dance at four colleges in the Cleveland area. In addition to her present duties at Karamu, she is Dance Critic for the Plain Dealer, and Director of Public Relations at the Institute of Music.⁴ One of the high water-marks

¹As early as 1936, Clare Davis in "The Arts" column in the C&P (May 7) wrote: "It is quite surprising to note how Cleveland, never dance-conscious, has reacted to the Modern Dance Movement." (The Jelliffes believe this to be an overstatement of the interest in dance at that time [interview, July 6, 1961].) Cleveland today is generally acknowledged to have a vigorous interest in this field, with a particularly active Modern Dance Association.

²Dance Program, May 20, 1941.

³Miss Frampton was Director of Dance at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and taught a number of Playhouse Settlement members there, in addition to Mrs. Johnson: Florence Bundy Fairfax, Dorothy Smith, Murtis Howard Taylor, et al. (C&P, May 27, 1937.)

⁴Dance Program, Jan. 10, 1956.
of her early years with the dance group were the concerts given with Walter Anderson, currently Head of the Music Department of Antioch College,¹ as Music Director. Mr. Anderson, "one of the two Negro musicians in America who have been invited to the Berkshire Festivals,"² became the head of the Karamu music staff in 1942,³ and composed music for a number of the group's dances which are still in their repertoire.⁴

Karamu dance as a medium for the interpretation of the Negro cultural heritage reached its peak of prominence in the invitation to the dancers to perform at the New York World's Fair, in July, 1940.⁵ The group planned a dance program which would reflect the culture of the basic African roots and "still mirror the American influence powerfully,"⁶ as one observer put it after seeing their performance on the American Common on Saturday, July 27. The New York Times heralded it succinctly as "the Negro dance in America from its African origins down to the jitterbug."⁷

³Press, Nov. 21, 1942.
⁴As recently as 1959, Anderson composed new music for the Karamu Dancers. (Program, March 2, 1959.)
⁵C&P, June 22, 1940.
⁶Bill Chase, Amsterdam News, Aug. 10, 1940.
⁷July 21, 1940.
Jelliffe's description of the group accented the racial pride Karamu felt in this venture:

The group has created its own dance forms and developed a technique which holds on to the particular Negro rhythm, the particular Negro idiom. It has attempted to weave the natural Negro body movements into dance forms and symbols.\(^1\)

The actual numbers performed by the group ranged from "African Dance" through spirituals, the "Juba Dance," "The Black Clown" (to a Langston Hughes poem), Gershwin music choreographed, and a concluding panorama of American dance from the Cake-walk to the Charleston and jitterbugging.\(^2\) The program was a success—"in the Great Tradition"\(^3\)—and Ruth St. Denis and Katherine Dunham praised and congratulated the group of ten dancers, Marjorie Johnson and Festus Fitzhugh who directed them, Edward Tyler who sang for them, and Russell and Rowena Jelliffe.\(^4\) Gjon Mili, the world famous cameraman, whose work in sequence photography was such a milestone in the field, spent Sunday, July 28, with the group, at the request of his Life editor, Tom Prideaux.\(^5\) The results were a group of spectacular dance shots, some of which have since appeared in a variety of publications, but not in Life until the issue of June 18, 1951, eleven years later!

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\(^1\)Ibid. \(^2\)Ibid. \\
\(^3\)Chase, *Amsterdam News*, Aug. 10, 1940. \\
\(^4\)Marie Daerr, *Press*, Dec. 6, 1940. \\
\(^5\)Newald.
Dance and art flourished in the "dark" years after the theatre burned in 1939, and kept the performing arts image of Karamu current. But the feeling for drama never diminished. Newsletters by Helen C. Keesecker went to Karamu actors in the service all over the world, giving them news of each other, information on the coming theatre building, keeping the feeling for theatre going, and holding the nucleus of the group together psychologically. In Cleveland, too, there was talk of the coming theatre building; meetings by the home-front membership; consideration of the new demands the future would make, and of its promise; and a general unity of spirit and loyalty to Karamu through all these things.\(^1\) Of course, there were no productions, and energies were channeled into the plans for a satisfactory new home—not only for theatre—but for all the Karamu programming. Hence, the national building drive, with its wide base of support, from schoolchildren's pennies to the grants of national foundations.

In addition to foundation contributions to Karamu's building drive, the aid of prominent individuals—like Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, for example\(^2\)—and the groundswell

\(^1\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, July 6, 1961.

\(^2\)When the Jelliffes were received at the White House in 1940, they found Mrs. Roosevelt acquainted with the nature of their work through her many conferences with James Weldon Johnson. The First Lady grasped the need and promised to support the campaign, and, after a delay of a week or so—
of aid from ordinary citizens, government support played a role in Karamu's history, though not directly. The Lanham Act was legislation which provided government support for child care agencies--nurseries, et al--which released mothers for war production. Negro mothers were needed, of course--the war effort could not afford official discrimination--and Karamu could provide care for their children. As a Plain Dealer editorial put it: "With recognition of the fact that the colored population forms an integral part of the nation's war effort and that this is not solely a white man's war, the work of Karamu House looms as an ever more important cog in the defense machinery."\(^1\) To qualify under the act, an agency required local school board approval and sponsorship before any government monies could be disbursed, and when Cleveland's Board of Education accepted that role in the Karamu proposal,\(^2\) some $40,000 in Lanham Act funds was appropriated for the construction of the $70,000 day nursery building.\(^3\) On February 6, 1945, ground was broken

\(^1\)March 13, 1942. \(^2\)CPD, Feb. 7, 1945. \\
\(^3\)CPD, May 19, 1948.
for the "War Emergency Child Care Unit," the Karamu nursery for working mothers, the first building of "new" Karamu.¹ This children's center became the largest of the city's nineteen day care centers, while the former Karamu nursery, still operating at 38th and Central, was the third largest.²

The second floor of the nursery center became the arena-style Karamu Studio Theatre,³ and in November, 1946, the first full-scale production of a new Karamu Theatre era opened.

The background for the Karamu Studio Theatre, 2364 East 90th Street, goes back to the previous winter, when Gerald Marans was hired to revive the dormant drama program. Marans, now Program Manager of KQED in San Francisco, and a graduate of the University of Washington,⁴ became the Assistant Director of the Studio Theatre, under Rowena Jelliffe. He had earned his Master's degree at Western Reserve University, and stage managed its summer barn theatre at Squire Valley View Farm, not far from Cleveland.⁵

¹CPD, May 19, 1946. ²Newald.
³Needless to say, this use of the second floor was not a violation of the Lanham Act in any way. Federal funds paid for only the nursery portion of the building: two huge rooms, a large kitchen, an office, and toilet, storage, and closet facilities. After the war, such government-aided facilities always reverted, free of claim, to the private agency involved.

⁴CPD, Sept. 19, 1946.
⁵Barclay Leathem, interview, May 12, 1961.
Mrs. Jelliffe, planning in her characteristically careful way, and aware that her ever-increasing administrative load would prevent her resumption of full leadership of the theatre company, hoped to give group and new director a "getting-acquainted" period, and let play-reading, summer workshops, and similar subsidiary activities pave the way for the resumption of full production, and such time as she would give up actual directing.¹

In the early fall of 1946, Mrs. Marans, a graduate of Flora Stone Mather College of Western Reserve University, and a former settlement worker at Alliance House's Council of Education, was appointed Director of Children's Theatre.² She led seven dramatics groups for Karamu at four of Cleveland's public schools—a dispersed children's theatre, as it were—and these groups occasionally staged plays at the Studio's arena on Saturday afternoons.³ Marans offered acting classes ("scenes from various plays with emphasis on individual problems") and playwriting workshops ("individual and cooperative writing and play structure analysis") during the summer hiatuses. The fee was $2.00 for "either or both courses."⁴ And in addition, in the four

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 10, 1961.
²CPD, Sept. 19, 1946.
⁴Karamu publicity mailing, June 11, 1948.
years of his tenure (1946-1950, the twenty-third, fourth, fifth, and sixth seasons), he was charged with the Karamu drama program.

Gerald Marans was Karamu's first full-time staff member in the theatre area. Rose Griffiths and Lillian Heydemann were part-time, and Rowena Jelliffe was always Co-Director of Karamu House in addition to her theatre duties. Early programs of the Studio Theatre identify Marans as Assistant Director;¹ later, as Director²—a natural progression in the light of his enthusiasm, his hard work, some good productions, and Rowena Jelliffe's gradual shift out of directing into the demanding administrative sphere. His theatre, the second floor of the Nursery, was rudimentary: "a hall, with the audience on four sides," as Edith Isaacs bluntly put it.³ The seating capacity was very small, about eighty⁴ or ninety-nine⁵. Rehearsals were held in the stage space (though later, when the new theatre was built, and arts and crafts moved from old Karamu to take over the Nursery building's second floor, the first floor—the Nursery area proper—was used),⁶ and they

¹Nov. 6, 1946; Nov. 6, 1947. ²Dec. 7, 1947.
³Negro in Amer. Thtr., 140.
⁴"Arena Round the Country," Theatre Arts, XXXIII, No. 2 (March, 1949), 64.
⁵Glen Pullen, CPD, Sept. 11, 1946.
normally lasted four to five weeks. The average play ran about two weeks, and had from twelve to fourteen performances. General admission was $1.20, and season books good for four admissions were $3.80.

The dramas produced indicate a departure from the philosophy of play selection which characterized the Gilpins at 3907 Central, and since seven years and a World War have elapsed since the last full season of play production, a discussion of these changes and the times is warranted.

If the Negro Renaissance of the mid-twenties had created a "New Negro," then the war years made a "new, New Negro." The progress in race relations in the United States, whatever its pre-war pace, was accelerated in the national emergency, and Negro soldiers and war workers helped shape the general democratization which took place in a war fought against the racist philosophy of dictatorship. Oswald Garrison Villard, in making the Flagg Fund's contribution to Karamu's building campaign, wrote:

It is of utmost importance that everything should be done at this time to make the Negro feel that he has a genuine place in our American life, and that he is part of us; that we mean to do justice to him; that we shall give no countenance to racial theories which disgrace the dictatorships; and that we count upon him and need him to help us in our fight to preserve American democracy.¹

¹CPD, March 22, 1942.
William McDermott, speaking specifically of the theatre, used the two world wars to define the end of an era in which "the Negro has stepped out of the minstrel show to win an important place in the dramatic stage." Negros and whites began to regard the Negro as a little less limited, a little less "different," a little less the convenient stereotype many had previously believed him to be. In the drama, this meant the end of the Negro folk phase—at least the rural folk phase. Urbanization and industrialization had changed the concept; the Negro was no longer the carefree primitive of YOU MUS' BE BO'N AGAIN and IT'S BETTER FO' TO SING; he was not even the poetic primitive of IN ABRAHAMS BOSOM or THE NO 'COUNT BOY. This was not shame about racial heritage, it was not a victory for the Gazette point of view on the "nigger" play. It was, rather, a reaching out by the Negro to claim his shared participation in the mainstream, more than previously allotted to him. And at Karamu, that meant the arts; and at Karamu Theatre that meant all plays—the "white man's" plays, the world's plays. Besides, the plays of the older Negro playwrights had been staged and re-staged, and the younger dramatists, their development delayed by the war, were years from maturity. Karamu was new, in a new neighborhood, and the reputation of its theatre, growing steadily over a thirty-year

1CPD, Nov. 2, 1946.
period, had been boosted by the prominence given to House and Theatre alike by the national building campaign. The location was more accessible to interested whites, and this helped to facilitate fuller implementation of the basic interracial philosophy of the theatre. All these things help account for the different appearance of the new seasons' schedules.

What were the plays? A large dose of Americana—Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, O'Casey's Golden Boy, and Emlyn Williams' The Corn Is Green (significantly enough, adapted to the West Virginia coal fields from its original Welsh locale). These were the major productions of the first Studio season, 1946-47. In Marans' second year, numbered the twenty-fourth season in the overall theatre history,1 he staged George Kelly's The Show-Off, Family Portrait by Coffee and Cowen, and Taming of the Shrew, the first Shakespearean production in the history of Karamu Theatre.2 The presentation of the classics—of both the

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1 There is some irregularity in the numbering of Karamu's theatre seasons. 1941-42 is the twenty-first season; the years 1942-46, when there were no major productions, are called—collectively—the twenty-second season. 1946-47, when full activity resumed, is the twenty-third season. The current period, 1960-61, is the thirty-seventh.

2 The season also included the presentation of the world premiere of Mister Job, an original play by Mr. H. Shirley Fowke, which won first prize in the playwriting contest of Cleveland's Hermit Club. The press, generally, considered his script weak, though Mrs. Jelliiffe thinks it "very theatrical and pretty good" (interview, June 27, 1961).
ancient and the modern theatre—continued in the third, and last, Studio Theatre season: MY HEART’S IN THE HIGHLANDS, Anouilh’s ANTIGONE, COMEDY OF ERRORS, and THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH.

All these plays were presented arena-style, and THE CORN IS GREEN in 1946 was called the "first Arena production in Cleveland,"¹ and was a novelty for almost all of its audience. The initial reaction to arena staging is always interesting, and almost always favorable, and the local critics were no exception. Spaeth, of the News, said that though, at first, the staging seemed to be a novelty and amusing, and that it was somewhat disconcerting "to view the dramatic action against a backdrop of audience faces in the varying attitudes people assume in paying theatregoing attention," before long, the make-believe took over, and the "audience-rimmed square" became a stage, and the stage the living room of a house. "It takes stage art to accomplish that . . . and the Gilpin cast managed it very well last night."² In her pre-curtain remarks, Rowena Jelliffe welcomed the audience and explained the necessity which had forced temporary suspension of Karamu’s dream of a

¹Program, Nov. 6, 1946.

²Nov. 7, 1946. The appellation "Gilpin" clung for some time (and is occasionally still heard today), though it was no longer the official name for the actors of Karamu Theatre.
proper theatre building. ("The theatre could have been built for $250,000 in 1941."\textsuperscript{1} It was to cost $500,000 to build it in 1949, and even that sum would not be enough to finish it completely.) She attempted to put the arena form in historical perspective, by recalling Greek and Elizabethan staging, and all three daily papers noted this. The \textit{Plain Dealer}'s Glen Fullen observed:

\begin{quote}
It all seemed unorthodox, but actually this rustic technique of stagecraft was employed by the ancient Greeks, Chinese and Russians with dramatic effect for centuries. By the sheer force of their flavorful, highly individualized performances, the Gilpins make you forget the lack of theatrical background. I also was amazed to see how well THE CORN IS GREEN has survived its transition from a Wales coal-mining town to the hills of W. Virginia . . . . If anything, the inspirational theme becomes more meaningful . . . .\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

He also touched on what is, perhaps, arena's greatest strength as a theatre form: "A disarming atmosphere and intimacy and rapport with the spectators that you rarely find in conventional theatre." The late Omar Ranney, then drama critic of the \textit{Press}, wrote:

\begin{quote}
Makeshift as it is, it certainly demonstrates how a good play can be brought to life with simply the script, a competent group of players and a very minimum of props. A company of good actors, I suppose, could do THE CORN IS GREEN on the sands of the Sahara Desert and make it believable . . . .\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

\textbf{THE TAMING OF THE SHREW} was also well received, with

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1}McDermott, \textit{CPD}, Nov. 27, 1949. \\
\textsuperscript{2}Nov. 7, 1946. \\
\textsuperscript{3}Nov. 7, 1946.
\end{flushright}
the emphasis on the production's refreshing bounce and its easy adaptability to the arena style ("in which the play was originally given," according to one reviewer\(^1\)). *Ebony* magazine featured this production in a long picture story, with eighteen photographs, many of which show the physical audience-stage relationship well.\(^2\) Since the question of an "American" approach to Shakespeare is so current, and the (meaningless) debate over "reading for poetry" or "reading for meaning" rages so often, the following observation on Karamu's *SHREW* by Arthur Spaeth is worth quoting:

The Negro actors refused to be awed by long poetic speeches and they reduced them to the flavor of workaday discourse without tampering with phrase or meaning. They simply refused to sing the lines and the result was refreshingly different and new . . . . There was a naive freshness to Shakespearean poetry steeped in softness and native natural slur of Negro-American speech. It achieved a new and pleasant music and the whole amiable farce of *THE SHREW* took on new fun and unexpected qualities.\(^3\)

Rowena Jelliffe, in a long letter to her son, Roger, then a Harvard student, in response to his request for information on arena staging, wrote enthusiastically of *SHREW*, and urged him to consider it unless he thought it was overdone:

> It seems perfect to me for arena. It is so gay, so

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\(^2\)"The Bard at Karamu," III, No. 12 (Oct., 1948), 36-40. The audience, at least at the performance shown, is almost completely white.

tongue-in-cheek. The opportunities to directly address the audience are frequent. (We even passed properties to them to hold.) It has no difficult set problems, only a good arrangement of levels on a part of the playing area.¹

By late 1947, Karamu knew that this temporary, interim theatre, was soon to yield to a new theatre building, across the parking lot from the Nursery where the Studio Theatre productions were held. The 1948-49 season would be the last of three in the second floor arena, and ground for the new Karamu Theatre was broken in May, 1948. The success of Studio Theatre confirmed the original plans of the Jelliffes to include arena in the new building, along with the fine, small proscenium theatre there.² The existence of two theatres in the new Karamu Theatre building has had important ramifications in shaping the nature of Karamu's drama program, and the constant presence of the arena theatre form has given a strong sense of experimentation and tremendous flexibility to the 1949-60 seasons which are covered in Chapter VII.

¹May 10, 1949, Mrs. Jelliffe's personal files. In this same letter she indicated that FAMILY PORTRAIT and ANTIGONE had been done "very successfully" in arena style. Her comments on arena are knowledgeable and perceptive, and reveal that--despite a relatively limited first-hand acquaintance with the form--she has understood its strengths and weaknesses; and, more important, she seems to have grasped arena's essential differences from proscenium staging--something not all arena directors have done.

²Interview, May 6, 1961.
CHAPTER VII

THE "NEW" KARAMU (1949 - 1960)

On Tuesday, May 25, 1948, groundbreaking for the new Karamu Theatre building took place, thirty-three years after Russell and Rowena Jelliffe began their Karamu work in Cleveland, and nine years after fire destroyed the old Karamu Theatre. Appropriate ceremonies attended the event, with Burgess Meredith present to make the keynote speech\(^1\) and pull the throttle on the steam shovel that would break ground.\(^2\) His speech was an evocative, deceptively simple statement of the significance of the existence of a Karamu in a world seemingly bent on depriving itself of a future: "At various locations in the country stockpiles of bombs are being accumulated which, if properly directed, could lift the entire Middle West one mile in the air, carry it to the Atlantic, and drop it in." He called Karamu more important than even the participants in the ceremony realized:

\[\text{I am sure it is generally considered a worthy}\]

\(^1\)Marian Anderson, scheduled to be a guest along with Mr. Meredith, was unable to attend because of illness. (CPD, May 26, 1948.)

\(^2\)Peter Bellamy, \textit{News}, May 19, 1948.
and progressive civic venture to which people can contribute a portion of their time and money, with resulting benefits to the dark man's culture and the white man's conscience.

Actually, however (now that we look around and see the state of things in 1948), the Karamu project is one of the few civilizing endeavors existent in the United States today!... (If that's an un-American statement--make the most of it.)

One observer called the groundbreaking "a rededication and an act of faith on behalf of one of [Cleveland's] most successful and nationally known experiments in democracy." Another knew that this "dream come true" was already giving way to a fresh dream for the Jelliffes: the completion of the total physical plant by the construction of a music center and administration building.

With a smaller ceremony to mark the occasion, the cornerstone was laid on November 5. In it were put the program for the current production, Saroyan's MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS; a copy of Karamu's articles of incorporation; pictures of Karamu House, the old theatre, and the original Gilpin Players; newspaper and magazine clippings; and, at the last minute, a workman exhorted his fellows to add "good luck" coins ("and I don't mean pennies!" he said).

By March, 1949, because of a mild winter, eighty-five per

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1Mimeographed, Karamu files.


4CPD, Nov. 6, 1948.
cent of the framework and exterior were completed, and construc-
tion was three weeks ahead of schedule.\textsuperscript{1} Everything
pointed to the fall opening of the new Karamu Theatre.

The asymmetrical structure closely approximates the "International Style" or so-called current "Universal" trend in architecture. It faces E.
89th St. at Quincy Ave. S. E.

... Without undue ornamentation, it is a simple, utilitarian structure gauged to the environmental requirements of this community.

Flat roofs with copper coping accent the horizontal illusion; smooth and textured wall planes and rectangular vertical piers are as severe and elementary as a Mondrian canvas ... with the lobby, auditorium, and scene loft forming a trio of levels.

Entrance to the lobby is from a portico. At the left is the foyer with cork covered walls where art exhibits will run concurrently with stage productions. Lighting is fluorescent and indirect from ceiling coffers ... Dome illuminated, the walls are covered with ply-tex wood ... .

The load bearing walls [proscenium theatre] of weather course brick with maroon mortar joints are both decorative and practical.

The walls will be enhanced with simulated African bark fabrics woven from rep cloth. Paul B. Travis, instructor at the Cleveland Institute of Art, collected the native textiles for African Art Sponsors and the Gilpin Players of Karamu in the late twenties. The uniform designs were printed by Harold Ware and his senior artists, in the same manner as Ekitondi, an African chieftain, or village craftsmen in the Belgian Congo reproduced the motifs ... .

At the rear of the stage is the heart of the theatre, the scene dock. It will serve as a workshop. Sets will be designed and painted in this studio. On the opposite side will be the arena theatre where in-the-round productions will be given. The seats circle the room.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Warfel, \textit{Press}, March 18, 1949.

\textsuperscript{2}Paul Metzler, \textit{CPD}, Nov. 27, 1949. Mr. Metzler is the \textit{Plain Dealer}'s Art Editor.
The Proscenium Theatre holds 223 people in very comfortable seats, and the floor is sharply sloped, affording each location an unobstructed view of the stage. The apron of the stage is a gentle semi-circle, with curved step units leading from the orchestra to the stage. These sectional steps are usually removed for dramas, retained for musicals, and they can be set up in toto or individually. The Karamu Arena Theatre seats 140 in three rows around the playing area, but is completely flexible and can be re-arranged for a variety of seating arrangements and staging forms.¹

Brooks Atkinson observed of the Arena: "It has so many practical advantages that the Gilpin Players . . . are not willing to abandon it although the new Karamu Theatre has a completely equipped conventional stage."² A third playing area at Karamu is the concrete outdoor stage integrated into the architecture of the theatre building. It is a flat, wide platform which was designed for summer presentations and so located that an audience of up to one thousand people might ultimately be accommodated.³

Ten years later, when Rowena Jelliffe was asked about memorable moments in Karamu's history, she recalled a visit

¹Exact dimensions of all theatre spaces in Karamu's buildings, and specifications of the theatre lighting systems will be found in Appendix III.


from Mary McLeod Bethune, great Negro leader and educator and founder of Bethune-Cookman College, to the just-completed theatre building. Dr. Bethune had been helpful in fund-raising, and "envisioned the importance of the cultural influence of Karamu's theatre program in integrated human relations."¹ When she arrived, she began to pray, "as only Mary Bethune could pray, as she walked with us," up and down the banked aisles of the Proscenium Theatre. "That was an everlasting blessing upon us."²

It was at this time that the lyric program of Karamu was born. The readiness to expand the range of operations was based on "early and prolonged efforts" of the Gilpin Players,³ whose theatrical expressions partook of drama, dance, and music; and on the catalytic presence of Benno D. Frank. Frank, who joined the staff in 1949 to undertake the lyric productions for Karamu Theatre, brought with him an impressive international background in theatre and opera, and a great reservoir of plans and ideas. He was to become—as Director of Musical Productions, the position he holds today—a key figure at Karamu and prominent in the Cleveland theatre world.

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, July 9, 1961.
²Quoted in Rey Gillespie, CPD, May 25, 1958.
³Mr. Jelliffe, quoted in McDermott, CPD, Dec. 4, 1949.
Frank was a former director of the Weisbaden and Hamburg State Theatres in pre-Hitler days, and of the Palestine Opera Company after leaving Germany.¹ During World War II, he served with the American Psychological Warfare forces, and after the war he was appointed Chief of Cultural Affairs in the American zone of occupied Germany by our Military Government.² It was his job to supervise the re-establishment of German theatres and orchestras, and "de-Nazify" them.³ Since the war he has been Director of the American League for Opera in New York,⁴ the head of the Opera Department of the Cleveland Music School Settlement,⁵ and he has been prominently connected with Cleveland's Cain Park Theatre.⁶ His staging of Menotti's THE CONSUL in 1952 at the Cleveland Playhouse (where he is a regular guest director) helped that organization "[take] the plunge into the mixed tides of opera and theatre."⁷

The person who has been given great credit for bringing Benno Frank to Cleveland, and helping to shape the concept of Karamu's music theatre program—particularly its

¹Pullen, CPD, July 12, 1949.
operatic aspects—is Harriet Bells.¹ Miss Bells, member of a prominent Cleveland family, has been associated with the musical theatre and opera all her life, professionally as a singer-performer and musical coach, and is a true friend and patron of the arts. She is a member of the Board at Karamu, the Cleveland Playhouse, and the Music School Settlement, and has been for several seasons member or head of the Judges' Committee for the regional auditions of the Metropolitan Opera Company.² One Clevelander has called her a "footlight lobbyist" in recognition of her interest in and support for theatre in general, as well as her volunteer coaching and musical assistant directing at Karamu.³

The Musical Directors who staff Karamu lyric productions today are two: J. Harold Brown and Helmuth Wolfes. Mr. Brown and Mr. Wolfes generally coach and direct the musicals and the operas, respectively, and will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, as will the other men who have held the position of Musical Director with Karamu Theatre since 1949.

²Mary Strassmeyer, CPD, April 22, 1960.
³Doris O'Donnell, "Footlight Lobbyist," in Cleveland in Full Face, 71-72. Actually, Miss Bells directed one production at Karamu, Menotti's THE OLD MAID AND THE THIEF, as part of a double bill in April, 1950.
Karamu's lyric program, "the first permanent regional lyric theatre in the country,"\(^1\) has encompassed opera and musicals since its inception. It boasts a proud record, including the mounting of some forty opera productions and the presentation of over a dozen world and American musical and opera premieres, and is generally acknowledged to be unique and a pioneer among musical theatres in this country. As John Beaufort has said of Karamu's musical and operatic choices: "Novelties are no novelty."\(^2\) As a rule, its operas are scheduled for runs of from twenty-four to thirty-six performances, as opposed to, say, the Metropolitan Opera's schedule of three or four performances a year for some less popular operas, and perhaps ten or twelve during the year for the best known. Karamu has certainly earned Arthur Loesser's epithet: "One of the major grass-roots opera companies of the land"; it is also well described by his comment: "From this [opera], they gain artistic strength, certainly not financial reward";\(^3\) Karamu affords an unparalleled opportunity for operatic training and experience to Negroes, who can gain essential theatrical skills in both music and dramatic theatre

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\(^{1}\)Herbert Graf, Opera for the People (Minneapolis: University of Minn. Press, 1951), 178, quoting Benno Frank.

\(^{2}\)C. S. Monitor, March 29, 1957.

\(^{3}\)Press, Nov. 16, 1955.
there.\textsuperscript{1} They perform, in the Karamu repertoire, in "an
amazingly varied cross section of musical styles, periods,
and manners,"\textsuperscript{2} and in the interracial atmosphere that typi-
ifies all of the institution's production: "The Supreme
Court doesn't have to hand down any decisions for Karamu.
It's just a matter of course that white people and Negroes
sing opera together there."\textsuperscript{3}

The choice of musicals at Karamu follows a somewhat
more orthodox path, with the big Broadway shows staged often.
But the "Broadway flop"—if it has artistic merit and/or
Karamu appropriateness will find a haven on the lyric
stage, and of the big musicals, those with worthwhile
thematic and human values are preferred to the overtly
commercial, escapist scripts, and pure popular entertain-
ment. Certainly this part of Arthur Spaeth's 1949 predic-
tion has come true: "I anticipate with confidence, too,
that the new Lyric Theatre group will strive to match the
artistic stature and craft of their distinguished co-tenant
of the Karamu Art Center."\textsuperscript{4}

The production record of Karamu's lyric and dramatic

\textsuperscript{1}"Seventy-five per cent of our performing talent is
Negro," estimates Benno Frank in "Karamu's Musical Produc-
tions," an unpublished article he wrote in 1959. (From his
personal files.)

\textsuperscript{2}Beaufort, C. S. Monitor, March 29, 1957.

\textsuperscript{3}Elmore Bacon, News, Nov. 8, 1954.

\textsuperscript{4}News, Nov. 30, 1949.
presentations is detailed in Appendix I, and there is no intention, in the following section of this study, merely to list and praise some of these shows. Each of the plays of the 1949-51 seasons that follows is included for an important, specific reason which offers added understanding of some of the characteristics of Karamu Theatre, its history, and its philosophy, as reflected by its play selection and production history. (A play can, of course, become "important" for a variety of reasons; the "why?" of each play's inclusion will be made clear.)

The new theatre building opened with a Festival Week, beginning December 6, 1949, and featuring repertory performances of two plays, two operas, a dance concert, a children's theatre production, and a vocal concert. Actually, Festival Week "stretched out" to early February, with the alternation, twice a week of the operas: THE WISE MAIDEN and THE MEDIUM, directed by Benno Frank; and the dramas: FAMILY PORTRAIT and ANDROCLES AND THE LION, staged by Gerald Marans. But quantity alone is not necessarily meritorious, as Brooks Atkinson, who came to Cleveland to cover the Festival Week, observed:

If the workmanship of the production were mediocre, a program as opulent as this would have no particular significance, but the Gilpin Players, ... [have] developed a tangible acting tradition. Cleveland theatregoers, and especially the sagacious William

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McDermott of the Cleveland Plain Dealer have long had a high opinion of the acting and imaginative direction of this non-professional theatre which has sent a number of its best people to New York stages. After theatre going and indoctrination in the new showshop, the Times-hired playgoer is happy to add his salute to an old enterprise that is now beginning the most ambitious period in its history and ought to become increasingly important in the story of the American theatre.¹

Atkinson called ANDROClES "exuberant and skillful," and THE MEDIUM, "exciting," and after his thorough discussion of new Karamu's plays and its theatre, he noted, in passing, the varied, stimulating bill of fare at the Cleveland Playhouse. Then, he wrote: "This week Broadway is graciously sending Cleveland a production of BLOSSOM TIME. No wonder Cleveland has to build its own theaters."²

THE MEDIUM, which starred Zelma George, deserves more than passing attention here. Its curtain-raiser was THE AFRICAN CHIEF, a cantata based on William Cullen Bryant's poem, composed and conducted by J. Harl Bron (J. Harold Brown's nom de plume as composer), with a chorus of thirty voices, but interest in this world premiere production could hardly match the excitement about Mrs. George and the Menotti piece. She was truly "the rare medium," as Jack Warfel wittily dubbed her,³ and Frank's direction was called more brilliant than Menotti's own.⁴ The set

design was by Henry Kurth, staff designer of Western Reserve University's Theatre Department, and an imaginative, talented, highly-skilled theatre designer.\(^1\) Television station WEWS gave the production a showing, which prompted the astute and level-headed Stan Anderson to call earnestly for a campaign to convince the networks that they should offer this local show, "and let the rest of the country see what cultural advances there are outside New York City." He wrote that he had not seen anything with THE MEDIUM's impact in over two years of watching television.\(^2\)

Dr. Zelma George, until recently an alternate United States delegate to the United Nations, is one of the country's prominent women. Her academic field is sociology, but her general breadth of approach and her knowledge of Negro folklore make her both stimulating and entertaining as a person and as a lecturer. Her husband, Clayborne George, prominent Cleveland attorney and civic figure, is the Chairman of Cleveland's Civil Service Commission. This background is not a typical one for performers, but Dr. George found herself a star performer, in Karamu's MEDIUM

\(^1\)This appearance as "guest" designer was Kurth's last for Karamu, however, for his own work prevents his considering "jobbing" elsewhere. He is wholeheartedly in accord with Karamu's philosophy of play selection ("You do the kind of plays I like to design") but, in addition to problems of time, he will not work as a volunteer (interview, May 12, 1961).

and on Broadway, repeating her role as Madame Flora in the well-remembered Hotel Edison arena production. She got rave reviews in New York, subsequent professional offers (one to play the Nurse in Olivia de Havilland's ROMEO AND JULIET), and was a triumph all over again in the Karamu revival of the opera in November, 1951.

Dorothy Heyward's SET MY PEOPLE FREE was performed in New York in 1949, under Theatre Guild auspices and with Canada Lee as the insurrectionist slave, Denmark Vesey. The production was not successful there, and the playwright came to Karamu to see its February, 1950, version "to make sure the play gets the sort of production treatment which she feels was denied it in New York." Apparently it did, for her visit, in the already-established tradition of playwrights coming to see their plays at Karamu, "seems to have inspired the Gilpin Players," and they put "drama" in this play of revolt, and were "earnest" and "exciting" in

1Times, Daily Compass, New York Journal American, Daily News, et al, all for July 20, 1950. Brooks Atkinson called her "a very happy discovery" for most New Yorkers; he, of course, had seen her performance during Karamu's Festival Week. He pointed out to his readers that her "current engagement is a natural extension of her performing in a Negro production" at Karamu. (Times, Sept. 3, 1950.)


4Pullen, CPD, Feb. 25, 1950.
the "emotional and actionful [sic]" play. Pullen predicted "a far more successful run then the Guild" had, since, as he saw it, SET MY PEOPLE FREE fits the Karamu actors' "talents admirably in vivid action, inspirational psychology, and picturesqueness of background."  

Perhaps more important than the history of success with this New York failure—something that is now considered almost a tradition at Karamu—is the fact that it exemplifies the persistence of that current of opposition to the Negro play which, though slowed, continued after the old theatre burned, went underground in the interim period, and came to light again with SET MY PEOPLE FREE. The generally friendly tone of Racul Abdul's comment may be accounted for, in part, by his frequent participation in Karamu productions, and by his personal earnestness and artistic interests: "Because this play is about the days of slavery and is the type of production too often provided for Negro actors, I felt it should not have received a showing."  

Rowena

2 Pullen, CPD, Feb. 25, 1950.  
3 Karamu's production of Sebree and Johnson's MRS. Patterson was an attempt to redress the authors' grievances over the Eartha Kitt-centered production they received in N.Y., by returning to the original text and its original values. It is a cliché in the theatre that a star can "make" a show, but it is equally true that the often delicate values and nuances and relationships in a play can be distorted by the presence of a personality or a performer, rather than an actor. Because of this, a "star-less" community theatre might succeed with a Broadway failure, if it devotes itself to an ensemble performance based on the script, not the box-office.  

4 C&P, June 24, 1950.
Jelliffe points out that the NAACP patronized the production, seeing in it Dorothy Heyward's high standards and the play's strong dramatic structure, as well as an incident of Negro history that should be remembered; but she admits that there were those who said, "It reminds us again that we were once slaves," and rejected it.¹

Menotti's THE OLD MAID AND THE THIEF, part of a double bill with Debussy's THE PRODIGAL SON,² is further evidence of the reciprocal affection between Karamu and the composer. (Five of his works have been staged by the lyric group: THE MEDIUM twice, and AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS five times.) When Menotti's agents asked higher royalties than Karamu could afford, he "himself saw to it personally that THE OLD MAID was made available to the Karamu."³

A Karamu Theatre brochure of 1960 indicates over one hundred performances of the Weill-Anderson LOST IN THE STARS. This "musical tragedy" based on Alan Paton's CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY, has been performed three times by Karamu, and each time it has been a hit. One paper reported, on March 3, one day after the opening, that "only

¹Interview, May 6, 1961.

²The first U. S. stage production of this work, according to a Karamu brochure, 1950.

³News, April 26, 1950.
116 tickets remain for performances up to April 20,¹ a result of the tremendous advance sale stimulated by the play. Winsor French described it as "a theatrical experience . . . as exciting and moving as anything I have met up with in a long, long time,"² and Omar Ranney called it "well-staged, beautifully sung, very moving."³ But perhaps Ranney's review of the second revival of LOST IN THE STARS best reveals the hold the play took on its public.

There is a general impression that everything new and important in the theatre in this country—all the latest innovations in stage design, all the creativeness in play and musical production—emanate from a central point known as "Broadway." But this is a grossly mistaken idea. For last night, Cleveland's Karamu Theatre trumped Broadway's ace with a beautiful staging of the onetime New York musical hit, "Lost in the Stars," giving it a production that employs some revolutionary techniques that were artistically exciting.

I first saw this . . . when it was originally done in New York. But what I saw last night in Karamu's Proscenium Theatre was far more moving . . . It is vastly more imaginative . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

So here is what can be done in a truly creative art theatre . . . Here is the most significant bit of theater staged in Cleveland in the last decade at least. This time "Broadway" should come to Cleveland's Karamu and have a look.⁴

It seems clear that the interracial content of this music-drama makes it ideal for Karamu Theatre's white and colored performers, despite the "problem" created by the plot that

²Press, March 6, 1951.
³Press, March 2, 1951.
⁴Press, April 25, 1956.
Negro and white actors feel "tensions toward each other." Director Frank said: "It was quite difficult to make the players feel this as they are so used to being integrated without conscious effort".¹

All of the LOST IN THE STARS reviews mention the use of projections on the front scrim. There were twenty-seven slides used in the 1956 version, designed by Katherine Kelley Cremer to indicate general and specific locales, as well as moods of the various scenes. The work of the choruses was singled out, as was the use of alternates in each of the major roles, a casting device used with some regularity in lyric productions.

A Brazilian stage and screen actress, Ruth Pinto de Souza, came to Karamu for experience and training under a Rockefeller Foundation grant in the 1951-52 season.² She was one of the founders of the "Theatre Experimental de Negro," which put on an annual, month-long festival in Rio de Janeiro, and also toured the smaller towns of Brazil with a rather heavy repertoire: THE EMPEROR JONES, OTHELLO, ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS—all in Portuguese, of course.³ While at Karamu, Miss de Souza played Barbara Allen in DARK OF THE MOON, though she also worked at Karamu in costumes, on children's theatre stage sets, as an usher, and

as stage manager for SHADOW OF A GUNMAN. Her grant, in the interest of the further development of the Brazilian Negro theatre, was also another link in the chain of advocacy of Karamu by the Rockefeller Foundation.

The second revival of PORGY was a great success, which necessitated an extension of the run from an original six weeks to nine. This created some difficulties for Frederick Walsh, the director, in maintaining the original cast. He recalls that there was some grumbling, and that he was required to make some substitutions.¹ The specific problem of sustaining long runs makes Karamu unique among most community theatres, and must be faced. Alternate, or double, casting is, of course, one approach to the problem.

Perhaps more important as far as PORGY, though, is the interesting observation made by Arthur Spaeth, then drama man of the Cleveland News, in the face of the usual dubiety on the part of a few about a Negro content play:

They [Karamu] have brought richness and fresh vigor to all types of dramatic literature. But missing from their play schedules in recent years have been those Negro dramas to which they gave warmth, vitality and high art that made each an unforgettable experience.²

Mr. Spaeth is consistent: on June 27, 1961, he wrote: "I would like someone to convince your actors they want to act again in Negro plays! I realize that fine drama is

universal but there is fine drama that is indigenous." Specifically, he mentions LITTLE HAM and other of Karamu's "yesteryear shows." The problem is not merely one of revivals, however, or even reluctance (which is not great) in regard to these plays—it is often a case of the play's lack of validity years after its composition, except, perhaps, as antique folklore or theatre history. Racial attitudes have "dated" more rapidly as dramatic subjects than other aspects of our contemporary society.

The five revivals of AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS make it a "highlight" in any theatre's schedule, but there are other points of interest and importance to this little opera. It is definitely a tradition at Karamu, and although it has not been staged since Christmas of 1956, no one doubts that it will return often in the coming seasons. Karamu received "first rights to stage" AMAHL, and the play immediately "took hold of the imagination of lots of people." The alternation of artists in AMAHL reached new heights: four Amahls, three Mothers, three Balthazars, and four pianists are listed in the March 14, 1952 program. And

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1Questionnaire, June 26, 1961.

2A Karamu Theatre brochure indicates over 100 performances of AMAHL as of 1960.

3Pullen, CPD, Jan. 19, 1952.

the Amahls were "Negro, Jewish, and Bohemian boys,"¹ a brotherhood somehow appropriate to the play's Christian context. Actually, as Rowena Jelliffe sees it, this theme of "faith restored" raises the play above even the melodramatic intensity and "splash" of the same composer's THE MEDIUM, and helps account for its enduring popularity.²

The production of CAROUSEL in January, 1953, marks the beginning of a close relationship between Karamu Theatre and the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, based on the personal friendship of the Jelliffes with the late Oscar Hammerstein (established, interestingly enough, first on their mutual interest in the World Federalist movement, then on theatre). Karamu has produced six of this team's works, and has revived three, continuing to find in them that significance of theme that fits them for Karamu's consideration. With several, Karamu was the first non-professional group to receive production rights, a gesture from Hammerstein which attests to his sympathy for the institution and its aims.

The Negro folk opera, GOLDEN LADDER, by Lehman Engel, with lyrics by Alexander King and Lewis Allen, and book by Joanna Roos, was premiered by Karamu in May, 1953. It was a true pre-Broadway tryout, with its attendant

¹Ranney, Press, March 5, 1952.
²WJMO, interview, May 21, 1961.
excitement, New York visitors, and glowing promises for the future which, however, did not materialize. The importance of this production lies in the function Karamu fulfilled for Thomas Hammond, the show's New York producer, who saw this Midwest, amateur theatre as a logical try-out place for his play. GOLDEN LADDER represents countless such arrangements at Karamu--some potential, some actual--in which the playwright and his production team are afforded the essential opportunity of a production--an inexpensive, yet capable, one.

Drama Director Junius Eddy also served as Playwright-in-Residence at Karamu, and the play SUN ON THE WATER was written by Lillian Gale, a member of his playwriting workshop. It was the first such Karamu original to be staged since ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE, a group effort of the Gilpin Players, almost fifteen years earlier. Though it was not conspicuously successful, its production was appropriate to Karamu's adventurous spirit in play selection, and to its sense of responsibility to the theatre world--to stimulate the work of new playwrights, to mount the best of these available, and to encourage audience support for them.

June, 1955, saw the birth of another Karamu custom: the staging of a "Musical Album" at the end of each season. Mr. McDermott described KARAMU ALBUM '55 as follows:

[It] consists of best songs from most successful and meritorious shows of recent years (musical),
well sung and enhanced by ballet dancing. The cast is quite large, including perhaps a hundred singers, actors, and dancers. It is probably the most elaborate venture in Karamu history and one of great popular appeal... Kind of a theatergoer's digest of recent musical plays... essentially an ensemble show of large proportions.

There have been ALBUMS in 1956, 1958, 1960, and 1961, and they seem a relatively simple and entertaining way to conclude the theatre season, which usually ends at Karamu around the first week in July.

"Getting to Know You"--the theme of person-to-person understanding from THE KING AND I--is what pleased Karamu as much as the success they had with this Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, a success one critic described as "complete." The Jelliffes were properly congratulated for securing initial rights after Broadway, and giving Karamu "its greatest first-night excitement since The Medium." THE KING AND I, with seventy-four children alternating as the Siamese Princess and Princesses, has had over one hundred performances in two productions at Karamu, and held the performance record until JAMAICA, in 1959. William McDermott,

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1CPD, June 15, 1955. There were forty-four in the cast, though many doubled or tripled.


3CPD, July 22, 1955.


5Karamu Theatre brochure, 1960.

6JAMAICA established this record in one production.
who would often visit the Karamu productions some days after
they began—if he did not cover the opening—wrote a joint
review of THE KING AND I and THE RAINMAKER, the drama con-
currently playing in the Arena Theatre, the first play at
Karamu of the new Director of Drama Productions, Reuben
Silver. McDermott declared that these productions con-
firmed Karamu's stature in the theatre world, that the musi-
cal was "one of the best performances [he has] seen at the
Karamu," and that THE RAINMAKER had "freshness and originali-
ty . . . high spirits and gaiety" and was acted with "gusti-
ness and skill."¹

Mozart's COSI FAN TUTTE, sung in English, was pre-
sented in the Arena, traditionally the home of Karamu's
operas, in November, 1956. It is, in a way, illustrative
of Karamu classic operas: a small-cast, melodic, "chamber"-
operas, without dancing or singing chorus. (Modern operas
are scheduled with some frequency, too.) Delibes' LAKME
in October, 1952, was an exception in the direction of
grand opera, but Mozart's comic masterpiece is more typical,
as were his ABDUCTION FROM THE HAREM, Rossini's THE TURK
IN ITALY, and Offenbach's PEPITE.

The availability of Clayton Corbin to play the lead
in Karamu's production of MR. JOHNSON, adapted by Norman
Rosten from the Joyce Cary novel, is another indication of

the high level of talent often at hand at Karamu. Mr. Corbin had understudied Earle Hyman in the New York production and played two small roles as well. He was a Karamu product to begin with, and when unemployed in New York would often return in order to keep growing as a performer. Karamu can, and does, occasionally fulfill this function for the professional actors among its former membership.

The staging of Guenter Rutenborn's THE SIGN OF JONAH at the end of December, 1958, may have begun another Karamu tradition. This short, complex, religious drama, already revived twice, made an immediate impact on the Cleveland community, and critics and public alike enthused over it, calling it "the most interesting . . . piece in the local theatre during the season,"\(^1\) a play of "startling dimensions, both theatrical and historical,"\(^2\) and expressed with "provocative passion."\(^3\) Brooks Atkinson's raves over the Union Theological Seminary's premiere production in May, 1957 ("In an hour's time it concentrates the passion of mankind."\(^4\)) resulted in over two hundred requests for permission to perform by June of that year. Karamu Theatre alone received the rights, adding to its list of "firsts" for Cleveland theatregoers. The play created a large, new

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\(^4\) *N. Y. Times*, May 2, 1957.
audience, attracting many church groups--some of whom had not been Karamu theatregoers before--and received many invitations to tour, both to local churches and out of town. Uniquely staged in the Arena Theatre, this Pirandello-like drama had importance beyond theatre, in keeping with the Karamu philosophy of education through the arts. As director, I can describe the rehearsals as "Biblical bull-sessions, gabfests," where the cast examined the play's provocative themes and defined its meaning. The atmosphere was like the classroom, and often heated, post-performance seminars held in the theatre with cast and audience were the rule, rather than the exception. Rowena Jelliffe spoke of the play as "an important milestone in [Karamu's] play-making" precisely because of its effectiveness in directing--"not only those in the cast, but many who were not associated with theatre at all"--to a "great deal of talking and exploring and digging-in to find out what the values of today's life are."¹

The first Langston Hughes play by Karamu in twenty years, SIMPLY HEAVENLY, closed the 1958-59 season and opened the 1959-1960 one, and almost made up, it seems, for the long hiatus in Hughes' brand of Harlem folk comedy. The first production was scheduled for five weeks, an average Arena Theatre run, was forced to extend for three, 

¹WJMO, interview, May 21, 1961.
and played a five-week run the following season. The notices were exceptional: "Staged with picturesque ingenuity as well as vibrancy in humorous action";¹ "I just had a hell of a good time . . . one of the happiest, most delightful shows I've seen in several seasons";² "best comedy of the season."³ More pertinent than the praise was the Press' observation: " . . . a tight, fun-filled play that shows the Negro is able to laugh at himself. Hughes is a writer who knows his people. His purpose is to show the warm, human heart of his race, and in this he succeeds admirably."⁴ 

Hughes saw several performances of SIMPLY HEAVENLY, and his "review" of the production compared it favorably with the recent staging of SIMPLY HEAVENLY in New York, where Melvin Stewart, a Karamu alumnus, starred as Jesse B. Simple. Hughes is not, as he says, "a great one for going to rehearsals," and his visits to Karamu have inevitably been during performances of his plays:

I do not particularly like to be involved in rehearsal difficulties and personality difficulties. I am much happier seeing the finished production to see what's been done with it, than to see it grow . . . . I avoid rehearsals as much as possible--I always do--in New York or elsewhere. Once a director is chosen, I trust my work to the director.⁵

¹Pullen, CPD, May 5, 1959.  
⁴Tbid.  ⁵Interview, May 7, 1961.
Another show, whose Broadway production displeased its authors was JAMAICA with Lena Horne. A success at the box office in New York in 1957, the musical never had E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy in its audience all during its long run.\(^1\) Harburg, who had hoped that Harry Belafonte could fulfill his notion of a lyrical, Caribbean folk-musical, felt that with Miss Horne, the Broadway JAMAICA was "a violation of the entire idea and conception and a misinterpretation on every level."\(^2\) Working closely with Karamu performers and Director Benno Frank, who were readying the show for its September 22, 1959 opening, Harburg and Saidy sent lengthy letters and "instruction sheets" clarifying their original intentions. They advised that the commercial recording "not be followed in any way," that the songs

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\ldots \text{are jazzed up out of all recognition and so vulgarly sung for the most part that their spirit and meaning, both lyrically and musically, are almost totally lost. I hope no one involved with the show will listen to them.}\(^3\)
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Later, on a return visit to Karamu, Harburg was milder, and said that the singing in New York had "more skimming sophistication than real feeling."\(^4\) Here was a novel function for an amateur community theatre: to give an author who has had a commercially successful New York


production an opportunity to see his play as he intended it.

The Karamu JAMAICA was a smash hit. "Superlative seems an understated adjective in describing one of the finest shows ever produced at Karamu—or in Cleveland for that matter. It merits national acclaim."¹ The News called it "most professional Karamu musical in many a season,"² and GlennFullen commented on more than the production when he said: "The kind of picturesque calypso-flavored musical comedy that the Karamu Players seem to handle particularly well."³ The real test came on Saturday, October 17, when Harburg and Saidy attended the performance. Harburg was "all astonishment and delight when he noted the vitality and talent"⁴ of JAMAICA and SIMPLY HEAVENLY (then running in the Arena Theatre), and Saidy, called up on the Proscenium stage at JAMAICA's curtain call, said:

It was strange that we have had to come this far from Broadway to find what we had wanted JAMAICA to be in the original New York production. It certainly repays us for the heartaches we had in New York to find the heart glow here.⁵

The seven-week run ended, DARK OF THE MOON, Reuben

²Hudson, Sept. 23, 1959.
³CPD, Sept. 23, 1959.
⁴Spaeth, "Theatre, Cleveland," 77.
Silver's revival of Frederick Walsh's 1951 hit, had a four-week run, and JAMAICA was returned to the boards. This time it was scheduled for six and a half weeks, and then added three more. All in all, JAMAICA played ninety-seven performances, establishing the Karamu record. During its revival, JAMAICA was again visited by New York professionals: Harburg, again, and Frank Perry (Theatre Guild producer) and others. There were hopes for a summer tour of the Karamu package (regrettably magnified by a natural anxiety), and a number of summer theatre producers--particularly music tent operators--scouted the show. Harburg revised and polished, restoring some of his original material, and the cast, alert to and excited by the possibilities of a professional tour--despite the lack of any really firm plan or commitment--responded to the extra rehearsal calls with enthusiasm. The revival was praised, by Harburg and Perry and the local critics, in tones perhaps best summed up by Arthur Spaeth's observations:

It is no new experience to be captivated by the Karamu troupe whether they are concerned with drama or [music], nor is it a novel experience to find on occasion [Karamu] giving a more beguiling performance than Broadway did with the same work. "Jamaica" is a point in hand . . . a delightful ensemble performance . . . . At Karamu these nights they may have to substitute imagination and invention for the lavish mounting Broadway provided, but the ginger is back in this lively show which was all but watered out in Manhattan staging.¹

But despite the success of Karamu's JAMAICA, the hoped-for tour did not evolve. Some producers felt that the absence of a star would hurt the package's commercial prospects; other Theatre Guild officials had some reservations about the production; another company, with night club talent à la the Lena Horne version, was organizing in the East. Notwithstanding the collapse of the tour idea, Karamu's value to the commercial theatre was reinforced.

The world premiere of William Branch's A WREATH FOR UDOMO was another production with Broadway overtones. New York producer William Chambers, who saw it at Karamu, took an option on the African drama, and as recently as the summer of 1961, was planning a Broadway production. Playwright Branch, a Guggenheim Fellowship winner, had written A MEDAL FOR WILLIE and IN SPLENDID ERROR, both produced off-Broadway, and came to Karamu for the opening night of his newest play. He made a moving speech from the stage praising the company, and Karamu, and added that "he would have made Cleveland his home, had he known earlier the great advantages Karamu offers a writer for the stage."¹ He stayed in Cleveland for several days, and made himself available for questions from cast and director, and participated in many stimulating discussions on topics from his thoughtful, occasionally controversial play. In addition

to the excitement of working with him, I was pleased by the opportunity to direct the world premiere of a play based on the novel by Peter Abrahams, South African writer and journalist, whom I met in Jamaica in 1957 on my State Department assignment there.

The production borrowed talent from Karamu's music areas. African dances and stage movement were by Maurice Nystrom, director of Karamu's theatre dance troupe, and the original drum score was composed and performed by Rudy Brown and William Wingfield, the latter a staff member. A WREATH FOR UDOMO is only one of many plays at Karamu that effectively utilizes the available talents of Karamu artists in other than the theatre area. Assistance, advice, and personnel from music, dance, art, and children's theatre are always available to the directors of adult drama and musicals.

William Inge's A LOSS OF ROSES was a notable Broadway failure, and the playwright has written frankly about it in his introduction to the published play. But I felt that the script had sufficient merit to warrant production, and as the newest show of a major American playwright, should not be scrapped. It was scheduled for May, 1960, and had a successful run in the Arena Theatre, which was re-arranged in modified proscenium form to accommodate a unique set by Ray Woods (the designer of the impressive UDOMO set). Each of the reviews emphasized the director's contribution to a
greater extent than usual, in apparent recognition of the play's earlier failure and its current success. Stan Anderson's review put it this way:

Not William Inge's best play but we find how important a director can be when he has the ear of the playwright . . . . Silver is the director and he is a hard-working idea man who has the professional touch . . . . His editing is to the point and we get a rather moving drama . . . moving enough to hold attention. Now Silver has sense enough to believe in the writer's creative forces. It shows up in his direction. He is a good analyst . . . . He can advance the author's intention by being an astute director and this he does . . . . This production is truly an interestingly experimental theater, thanks to Reuben Silver.¹

Playwright Inge surprised Karamu by an impromptu visit. He had read the advance publicity and wanted to see the Karamu production, for he shared my feeling that the play had more worth than its professional failure indicated. Inge's three-day stay was gratifying on several counts. The cast was pleased, of course, that he saw two performances; Inge himself was "grateful" to the local theatre for what it had done for his play--"the production gave me a lot of confidence," he said; and Karamu was gratified by his estimate of their effort: "On Broadway there was lots of finish and an absence of dynamics. It was just the opposite here and I'll take dynamics over finish any day."²

²These remarks were made by Inge in an interview at the home of Stan Anderson, Press drama critic, and appeared in the Press on June 6, 1960.
Mr. Inge proved a friendly, easy person, and like other visiting Karamu playwrights, made the cast social functions he attended stimulating opportunities to question him and listen to him on a variety of pertinent theatrical subjects.

Although Karamu Theatre knew it would ultimately stage the prize-winning A RAISIN IN THE SUN, it was impatient at the delay in securing rights. From a business point of view, Karamu hoped to secure permission to perform prior to the professional road tour, which played Cleveland, but this proved impossible. Even after the road company left Cleveland's Hanna Theatre, there was delay—the movie version complicated the issue—until playwright Lorraine Hansberry interceded personally, and gave Karamu first off-Broadway rights to her work. This news swept through Karamu, and caused lasting excitement in theatre members as well as in theatre audiences, to whom Karamu's coming productions are announced, each evening, in the pre-curtain welcoming talks by Russell Jelliffe (in the Proscenium Theatre) and Rowena Jelliffe (in the Arena). The turnout at auditions was overwhelming, and the spirit of competition was far higher than usual. The leads were won by Minnie Gentry, a twenty-five year veteran Karamu performer of the Robeson and Gilpin Players; and by Al Fann, experienced musical and drama man, who had taken lead roles in GOLDEN BOY, THE RAINMAKER, JAMAICA, GUYS AND
DOLLS, and others. The outstanding stage set was by Paul Marantz, the theatre's new Technical Director, and the overall production level was definitely higher than average, largely because of the affection held for the play by all of its personnel.

The public reception bore out Karamu's feelings. Stan Anderson wrote: "Karamu has its season's triumph by the horns here. And the triumph comes as much through the acting as it does through the direction." He called Fann's performance a contender for best of the year among all of Cleveland's theatres.\(^1\) Pullen acknowledged karamu's prestige in securing early release of RAISIN, as did Anderson, and noted the rarity with which Karamu Theatre produced Broadway plays, unless they could find one like this, "reflecting all of their own idealistic sentiments." He singled out Minnie Gentry's performance in a cast which "capture[s] the original spirit of the play," and offers characterizations with "dimensionally honest feeling" and "powerful impact."\(^2\) The play grossed some $11,000 for forty-three performances, setting attendance and box-office records for a Karamu drama.\(^3\)


\(^3\)Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 11, 1961. "We did A RAISIN IN THE SUN at the time when we normally don't sell anything. March, Easter Week, bad weather. RAISIN was a 'freak.' With the exception of maybe ten nights out of the run, the house for RAISIN was packed, with extra chairs set up.\(^*\) (Interview, Wilhelmina Roberson, Karamu Director of Public Relations and Box Office Manager, July 6, 1961.)
From the opening on, the cast hoped to host Lorraine Hansberry, but Karamu had to content itself with a visit from her husband (producer Robert Nemiroff) and her letter, a model of sincerity and graciousness from a potentially significant American playwright:

I have seen the reviews of your production of RAISIN and, needless to say, I am as thrilled and overwhelmed as I am certain all of you must be. It is perfectly and magnificently clear that you have offered the Cleveland community work of vigorous distinction. Please accept my warmest congratulations.

Mrs. Jelliffe has been gracious enough to give me a sense of the spirit with which the work was approached; I assure you no author could ask for more. The critical estimate that you won is a prime testimonial to that.

For many years now I have longed to visit Karamu and to have been able to come under the present experience would indeed have been a crowning moment in my life. Alas, I am committed to this typewriter in the ambitious expectation and desperate hope that I might create something else, in time, which will once again compliment the American theatre and such distinguished talents.

I wish each of you long, rewarding, creative and productive lives in the theatre.

Also, to each, a rousing, "OCOMOGOSIAY"! With deepest appreciation.

In answering an interviewer about the "most important plays" at Karamu, Rowena Jelliffe included A RAISIN IN THE SUN.

She felt that the perspective of time would prove the play significant because "it has something very important to say about the world we live in," and brings that forcefully...


1Feb. 25, 1961. Copies were duplicated and given to each member of the RAISIN company.
to the minds of its audience. All of the important critics have noted the play's "human" treatment of the Negro family, the absence of what Brooks Atkinson called "the formulas of protest, on the one hand, of racial solidarity, on the other,"¹ and this universal approach, a novelty when dealing with the stage Negro, found solid approval at Karamu. Everyone had an example or a story about the beneficial effect of the play on race relations,² and the box-office reported an increase in Negro attendance, as well as significant numbers of people--white and Negro--who were watching live theatre for the first time.³

Langston Hughes' SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM presented a number of problems: It is short--about fifty-five minutes--and thus requires a curtain-raiser; it is all poetry, and therefore hazardous commercially; it has no story line.

¹Mr. Atkinson was speaking of Louis Peterson's TAKE A GIANT STEP, and his remarks are printed in the program for Karamu's first production of that play, April 2, 1954.

²The dogged persistence of the opposition to Negro themes and characters onstage is nowhere better revealed than in this anecdote: Mrs. Jelliffe was called by a woman who, though she admitted she had not seen the play, objected to it, and urged dropping plays like RAISIN which "show our people in a bad light." When Mrs. Jelliffe questioned her further, the caller, referring to the minor character of Willie Harris, who never appears, said: "The man who takes the money and runs away with it--he's colored, isn't he? We don't approve of plays that call our people thieves and embezzlers!" (Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, April 9, 1961.)

³Wilhelmina Roberson, interview, April 15, 1961. Miss Roberson adds: "I think RAISIN will affect attendance of all the plays at Karamu (interview, July 6, 1961)."
hence surrenders one of the theatre's key weapons in commanding interest. The play (at Karamu) was described by one reviewer this way:

Vastly unorthodox in form, it should be called a fragmentary mood piece of steadily interesting vignettes set to throbbing jazz music. They are all excellent character studies of the earthy joys, heartaches and yearnings of likable people whom the author knows so intimately . . . .1

According to Mr. Hughes there had been three previous productions, all staged by Robert Glenn, who adapted these poems (most of them from Hughes' Montage of a Dream Deferred) into SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM: one at the White Barn Theatre, one for the ANTA Matinee Series, and the third at the Forty-first Street Theatre in New York. In none of them was the curtain raiser quite satisfactory.2

The Karamu curtain-raiser was a short dance piece, choreographed by Maurice Nystrom to jazz music, and interspersed with other poems of Langston Hughes. It was given the title, TERPSICHORE IN HARLEM, and was an attempt to set the mood for the major work by repeating the SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM "formula": poetry and jazz--but with dancing instead of acting characterizations. The Press man called SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM an "impressionistic montage," and a "hit," but noted that its episodic nature made the overall effect uneven: "Many of the episodes are

1Pullen, CPD, April 19, 1961. 2Interview, May 6, 1961.
very good but a few fall flat. There is no story line so those which appeal stand apart from the inferior ones.\(^1\) Karamu was aware of the risks in scheduling this off-beat Hughes play, but felt it was within the wide latitude of the theatre. (As William McDermott has said of Karamu and the Jelliiffes: They have "determination, and the persistent quest of novelty and experimentation.")\(^2\) A Harlem mood piece by Langston Hughes seemed appropriate despite the utter unorthodoxy of form.

Hughes was in attendance at two performances, and his comparison with the former productions is both flattering to Karamu and revealing about himself as a writer. He described the results of Robert Glenn's approach to the material as follows: "Very serious, poetic, beautiful—not very humorous," and noted that this was the chief difference between Glenn's and Karamu's production: the accentuation and development of the humor.

Here [Karamu] a great deal of the humor—in fact ninety per cent of the humor that I had intended comes out. And this production is therefore funnier and livelier in the purely entertainment sense, which I think is all to the good—and the poetry is there as well—so that this production is more box office, more entertaining to the general public . . . . This one also is extended in that there is more music, more dancing interludes, more movement . . . . This extends the possibilities of the script even further than the original productions did, and shows what one can do with nothing but poetry really . . . . It could be very static—

\(^1\)Mooney, April 19, 1961. \(^2\)CPD, June 21, 1954.
almost a reading—with less movement than you
gave it. This could easily be a "sleepy" evening,
but the direction made it alive. I thought it
was very well staged.¹

The Hughes technique: penetrating social observa-
tion through humor, is as well defined in SHAKESPEARE IN
HARLEM as in SIMPLY HEAVENLY, where it reaches a peak of
perfection. Many white audiences have had the unique ex-
erience of sitting in Karamu's intimate Arena Theatre and
being, as it were, eavesdroppers on Negro in-group humor.
After they overcome any initial embarrassment, they reap
the benefit of seeing Negroes able to laugh at themselves,
and detect a humanity and a universality many of them had
never observed in Negroes before. Hughes' plays have, how-
ever, irritated some Negroes who are concerned lest whites
see the anti-heroic, all too human Negro individual, and
attribute (or continue to attribute) his faults and flaws
to the race. Langston Hughes' Harlemites drink, dance to
jazz music, and seek pleasure out of life, and there are
some who feel these attributes, magnified and theatricalized
onstage, contribute to a racial stereotype. When he was
asked if there weren't some poems in SHAKESPEARE he would
not write today, because of the new, international concept
of a vigorous, emerging Negro (a contrast—perhaps over-
simplified—to the "Harlem type"), he denied it. And to

¹Interview, May 6, 1961.
my concern as to whether the emphasis given certain bar characters—the Sick Man and Sick Woman, say—was too strong in the staging, Hughes replied: "I don't think so—it is very amusing. I don't think it would be offensive. It's done so entertainingly that you don't take it as a sociological study. At least I don't!" These questions came up when two local television stations asked to televise the stage version of SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM, and Karamu was forced to consider the distinctions between the media, their audiences, and the "Harlemites" within Karamu's walls as opposed to his image out of the Karamu context on the home screen. Hughes himself was very eager about televising, though he agreed several of the "bar characters" might require "toning down" for the television audience. He added: "It is a satisfactory image for me—from the race-conscious point of view. I can't say it would be satisfactory for everyone."2

During the 1949-60 Karamu theatre seasons, in which all of the above-mentioned plays fall, there were twenty-two people who directed (adult) dramas.3 All of them were under Rowena Jelliffe as Executive Director of Karamu Theatre. Eleven of them were guest directors and three were "student"

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1Ibid.  
2Ibid.  
3Their names and plays will be found in Appendix I.
directors\(^1\) (all were supervised, more or less, by staff personnel); two were staff theatre directors, in other than adult drama positions; one was Rowena Jelliffe herself; and five were staff Directors of Drama Productions, who held the position for a one-year period or more. These directors and their tenure are Gerald Marans, 1947-50;\(^2\) Frederick Walsh, 1951-52;\(^3\) Kurt Cerf, 1952-53; Junius Eddy, 1953-55; Reuben Silver, 1955 to the present.

Frederick Walsh came to Karamu with a background of teaching at Ohio and Bowling Green Universities. His undergraduate work was at North Carolina State College and his graduate work was at Stanford and Western Reserve Universities, where he received his Ph.D. in 1952 while Director at Karamu. In 1949, he established the Huron Playhouse in Huron, Ohio. From Karamu, Walsh went to North Dakota State University, where he is Chairman of the Department of Speech and Drama and director of the Little Country Theatre.

Kurt Cerf’s background has a professional theatre orientation. Before coming to America from Germany in 1936, he studied at the Leipzig Municipal Theatre, acquiring training in dance and mime. In New York City, prior to

\(^1\)Each directed one of the three one-acts which comprised THE EARLY YEARS. The entire production was supervised by the Director of Drama Productions.

\(^2\)From 1946-47 he was Assistant Director.

\(^3\)Guest Directors served in the 1950-51 season.
his year at Karamu, Cerf taught pantomime and acting at the
Katherine Dunham School, created and directed the Children's
Theatre there, taught at the Dramatic Workshop of the New
School, and had miscellaneous directing and writing experi-
ence. After leaving Karamu in 1953, he taught for one year
at Bennington College, and now heads his own acting studio
in New York City.

Junius Eddy, who came to Karamu as Playwright-in-
Residence in 1951, had, like Walsh and Silver, a background
that was primarily in educational theatre. He received
his B. A. degree from Antioch College and his M. S. from
the University of Wisconsin in 1949. He taught for two
years each at the University of Wisconsin and Baylor Uni-
versity. He was editor of the Wisconsin Idea Theatre
Quarterly (now called Wisconsin Stage) and wrote extensively
for television and the stage. Since 1957, he has been
associated as a writer with Wilding, Inc., an industrial
film company.¹

In order to gain information on and insight into
Karamu Theatre, from the directors' point of view, ques-
tionnaires were submitted to the four former, full-time
Karamu Directors of Drama.² Their answers are illuminating,

¹Biographical information on Gerald Marans is found
above, Ch. VI, p. 331. The writer's biography will be found
at the end of this study.

²See Appendix VIII.
in that they comprise far more than a mere record of opinion and experiences: they may be read as a "profile" of a theatre, revealing procedures, philosophy, attitudes, problems, strengths, and weaknesses. The following discussion is based on the completed questionnaires.¹

All of the directors report freedom of choice in play selection, and where Rowena Jelliffe, as Executive Director was involved in the choice, it was on a suggestion or consultation basis. Her taste in play literature is excellent; she knows the Karamu audiences through long experience; her contacts in the theatre world, especially for new plays, are extensive; and her knowledge of previous productions in Cleveland is invaluable, particularly when she feels that a certain play has been so memorably done that audiences might associate it "exclusively" with another theatre organization. It would be foolish to discount her advice; and she has never, apparently, chosen a play unwelcome to any director.

Walsh alone, of the four, mentions his personal interests ("plays which I desired to direct") as a basis

¹The questionnaires were returned as follows (all dates in 1961): Walsh, March 13; Marans, March 22; Eddy, April 1; Cerf, April 24. In the section that follows, where specific quotations are made, they come from the questionnaires (unless otherwise noted), and no footnoting will be done. Quotations from Mrs. Jelliffe are all from interviews.
for choice, though he adds talent and theatre facilities as factors. Cerf speaks of choosing plays that "do the most good" for the casts, and implies his concern for audience education as well. Marans leaned toward modern American drama and the classics. Eddy indicated several considerations: a balance between "light" and "heavy" works; sufficient roles for women; adaptability to Proscenium or Arena;¹ one American "classic" per year; original scripts when available; and at least one Negro and/or "race" play per season.

Since the nature of a theatre may, in part, be described and comprehended through the scripts it chooses to do, each of the directors was asked if he felt there were a definable "Karamu-type" play. The broad range of plays performed over the years suggests almost unlimited choice, but their fluctuating success might indicate a varying acceptability and appropriateness because of type. Two of the directors replied that there is no such thing as a "Karamu" play; one is as suitable as another. Walsh pointed to the diversity of his five productions as proof of this, and added that the range of choice is as great at Karamu as anywhere. Eddy, who is an experienced writer, playwright, and teacher of playwriting, and whose connection

¹Directors, normally, alternate their productions between both theatres.
with Karamu covered four years, felt otherwise. He concludes that a "Karamu" play is slightly off-beat (GRASS HARP, BAREFOOT IN ATHENS), a world- or American- classic (TIME OF YOUR LIFE, SKIN OF OUR TEETH), one with good roles for Negroes and whites, and with unique staging possibilities. "Either gentle, warm and whimsical; or earthy, strong, powerfully realistic. The allegory or symbolic play, certainly."

Perhaps the area can be negatively defined: what is not a "Karamu" play? Eddy says sophisticated comedies are unsuitable (Coward), as is the standard, warmed-over Broadway release (SEVEN YEAR ITCH, GIRLS IN 509, TUNNEL OF LOVE, GOLDEN FLEECING). Rowena Jelliffe has observed many times that Karamu would lose audience if it selected that kind of play, which so many community theatres think they need to schedule to survive. She has also said: "As we have grown in our skill and in our understanding of the place of theatre, so the Karamu play has changed. It is conceivable that now all plays are Karamu plays." She exempt plays of mannered refinement, however, though she does not think that means Karamu cannot succeed with sophisticated or philosophical plays (SIGN OF JONAH, SLEEP OF PRISONERS). Mrs. Jelliffe is particularly sensitive to insincerity in play selection, resenting anything "gimmicky," anything which seeks merely to capitalize on interracial or Negro casting. She feels that the public resists Karamu Shakespeare, and though these productions
have had value for the membership, she is reluctant to court the risk of empty houses.

To me, the question is somewhat academic. The range of available talent at Karamu is broad enough so that an equally broad choice of play is possible. Further, the responsibility—to the community at large and to the membership—is so serious that no one genre of play should be permanently excluded from consideration. The variety of reasons for choosing a certain play may be so great that, at a given time, they may outweigh the variety of reasons against. Karamu does avoid the "arty," the too avant-garde, but there are often sound aesthetic reasons for this, as well as the concern a public institution of the arts has for its public image. High comedy of the drawing-rooms is an extremely difficult form for any actors with more experience than training, more "punch" than polish. Trivial, artificial plays are not only shunned by a theatre like Karamu, they are far more difficult to do well—demanding, as so many of them do, actors with superb timing and endless technical trickery—than "heavier" plays, whose generally substantial characterizations and less artificial situations can be an aid to amateur performers.

All of the directors cast by means of open auditions, and three said specifically they would not cast a role without a reading (although one might call an actor to come and read for a specific part). Marans admitted to
some pre-casting, and now and then cast a role without a reading when the play was selected with a specific performer in mind. In an attempt to eliminate the rumors and accusations of favoritism and pre-casting from which no amateur theatre organization seems free, I have held firmly to an open-audition system, and refused to cast a role without a reading, public or private. This meets, I believe, with almost universal approval; the few exceptions are generally "old-timers" who, though extremely capable performers, are poor readers, and somewhat reluctant to expose themselves. There are one or two veterans who feel they have earned the right to be cast without the need of competing.

The directors' freedom of play selection was paralleled by their freedom of casting. There are no "casting committees" at Karamu, and with one exception, the drama directors all felt that suggestions from Rowena Jelliffe--"We're using so-and-so too much" or "too little"--or even stronger differences of opinion, never deprived them of the ultimate casting decision. The exception is Marans, who wrote that he was not in complete charge of casting and that he felt "official pressures." It is possible to speculate that since he was the first full-time director, the transfer of authority from Mrs. Jelliffe went slowly, and that in subsequent seasons, Marans himself might have enjoyed fuller casting control. Two of the directors
declare that their authority in this area was clearly agreed on in advance. I cast in complete freedom. Mrs. Jelliffe does not attend my tryouts, except as she may occasionally have a brief "look-in"; if she knows any castings before the actors are called, it is because I may have asked for advice on a specific actor, or may have notified her as a matter of administrative courtesy.

Interracial casting is a principle of Karamu Theatre, and it is worth noting that, without exception, all Karamu directors believe it to be compatible with good theatre. They also all cast freely interracially, except for one director, Eddy, who specified the following casting circumstances where he avoided it: passionate love scenes, and even here, he made occasional exceptions;¹ and families in realistic plays, but not in "symbolic" plays. He adds that, personnel permitting, he attempted to balance whites and Negroes in major and minor roles, but that this was, of course, not always feasible. Many observers believe in the necessity of "protecting" Negro actors from being swamped by whites, who have access to any community theatre.

¹In American social history, the dominance of the Southern white male over the Negro female is a fact; the "white world" is not as likely to tolerate a similar relationship--onstage or off--between the Negro male and the white female. Some audiences accept neither onstage; some whites accept the former and not the latter; some Negroes resent the former, and may or may not urge the latter as "proof" of equality.
in Cleveland, with the potentially superior experience such entree may give them. In six years at Karamu, I have not had to do this in any way, even though I am aware that the problem may arise, and I do check to see what the racial make-up of my casts is. If it is evenly mixed or predominantly Negro, I am satisfied; if it is predominantly white, I regret it somewhat; in no case do I alter my casting. I think that Negroes prefer to compete equally for roles than to gain them because of special treatment. If some attempt were made to discourage the (white) "play-hopper," who does not affiliate, but picks and chooses among the city's theatre groups--and this is a desirable effort in and of itself--it would have the effect of reducing competition not merely for the Negro actor, but for the white actor who is looking not only for a part to play, but for a group to belong to as well.

It should be pointed out that there is one major exception to mixed casting: plays which deal specifically with Negro content or racial matters are cast appropriately according to race. MR. JOHNSON, MEMBER OF THE WEDDING, A WREATH FOR UDOMO, and TAKE A GIANT STEP, for example, are all plays in which the racial relationship of the various characters is an integral part of the drama, essential to an understanding of the action and the meaning. Cerf cast SUMMER AND SMOKE with an all-Negro cast because he felt "the 'sameness' of the characters was necessary for the locale
of the play; Walsh, on the other hand, produced O'Casey's
SHADOW OF A GUNMAN with an interracial cast, and felt no
need for racial "sameness" despite its nationalistic nature.
Karamu audiences, by and large, know and accept its casting
policies. Most of those to whom mixed casting is new, ac-
cept it, find it interesting and even exciting. Some few
reject it, and Karamu loses their patronage.

Production procedures vary, of course, from director
to director. Walsh and Cerf recall a five-week rehearsal
period, with five or six meetings per week; Eddy and Marans
had somewhat tighter schedules, twenty to twenty-five re-
hearsals over a four to five week span. Eddy and I share
the feeling that four weeks is too short, although if ne-
cessary, adequate. I prefer five weeks for a technically
heavy show, and up to six weeks for verse drama or Shake-
speare. Although Walsh ran a 7:00 to 10:00 P.M. schedule,
rehearsals now normally begin at 8:00 and run to 11:00 P.M.,
Monday to Friday, with 2:00 to 5:00 P.M. rehearsals on Sun-
day afternoon. Daytime rehearsals are rare, and impossible
except for individual unemployed actors or the occasional
student or housewife with a few free hours.

A more serious problem arises out of the director's
need to begin preparing a second show shortly after the
first opens. This means that the director is unable to re-
turn to his first show except on Saturday or Sunday nights,
say, when he is not in rehearsal. The burden of keeping the show "up" falls, therefore, on the stage manager, a volunteer usually, and with varying degrees of theatre and personnel experience. This is potentially troublesome, for one thing which amateur actors lack (whatever their talent) is the technique and discipline required to "set" a performance which has attained a satisfactory level. Also, cast morale, in a subtle way, can to some extent be affected by something as vague as their knowledge of the director's desire to be with their show (even if he is not actually present) -- as opposed to his seeming to forget them in favor of his current preparation, or taking the night off when he is not rehearsing.

The long runs of Karamu productions have obvious advantages for actors. Walsh states them well:

The opportunity to dig into a role, to acquire the experience of playing before a variety of audiences, to acquire a degree of confidence based on continuity of experience, and perhaps, lastly, achieving a sense of fulfillment in seeing a production through to a reasonably lengthy run.

In reviewing the disadvantages, two of the directors mention the personal hardships on the actors, and note that critics of the long run have called it "exploitation." One suggests reducing the run to five nights a week -- perhaps even four for some shows, and two spoke of the

\[1\] This director added the phrase: "Arena shows especially." It is sometimes true that the least commercially successful shows are staged in the Arena, and with
need to make replacements during very long runs.

The use of alternates and/or understudies would seem to be a solution for these complaints, but there exists a reluctance to prepare more than one person in each role during a limited rehearsal period. Once, when one director did alternate two actors in a major role, he felt that the character relationships and the show suffered from the disparity between their performances. Another, who used both alternates and understudies, felt that the procedure was "very good if you can give them the same 'creative momentum' as the 'first cast' people." Walsh observed: "Frequently, the use of understudies encourages absenteeism," and I have known of understudies who asked the person they were understudying to "skip" a night, and let them go on. I use alternates only when forced to do so by casting exigencies, but I plan to make more use of understudies in the future. It is possible to give beginning people experience this way and, at the same time, insure certain roles against emergencies. The problem is that there seem to be too few actors who, as understudies, are good

a capacity smaller than that of the Proscenium, a cut in the number of performances would mean a smaller (potential) loss of income. Operas, for example, are always performed there, and difficult dramas are scheduled at times to take advantage of the intimacy of the theatre. Also, there are patrons who prefer the Proscenium, either for its greater physical comfort, its supposed "prestige," or its orthodoxy.
enough to play the role if needed, and yet patient enough to invest the necessary time and risk never playing. One solution might be to offer an actor or actress several roles to understudy, thus emphasizing the increased learning opportunity; another, which I believe improper, is to let understudies play on a low-attendance night. Perhaps the best solution for the problems touched on above, is a careful briefing of actors beforehand—so that they are prepared for the sacrifices a long run entails—and the development of good cast spirit and high morale—so that actors may find pleasure and advantage in their performing a long run.

Harry Dalva in his study of Karamu, paints a gloomy, exaggerated picture of poor theatre discipline, which can be explained only by his insufficient contact with Karamu; conferences with too few—and excessively disgruntled—members; naïveté; or by an improbable, atypical series of mishaps and misfortunes at the time of his stay. Interestingly enough, he concludes as follows:

This lack of discipline and organization might well prove disastrous to the theatre were it not for the ESPRIT DE CORPS which exists among the theatre participants and among the entire membership of Karamu House.¹

Dalva is correct, however, in referring to actors who, on occasion, fail to appear. Eddy cites "accidents, illnesses, traffic tie-ups" as reasons; Marans said absences happened

"very seldom"; and Walsh recalls none in four out of five of his shows. On the other hand, Cerf says "about ten missed performances during the year," Eddy recalls one or two due to irresponsibility; and in Walsh's fifth show, absence became, he claims, "a common rather than an unusual experience." When these were last-minute absences, with no prior notice, the directors or crew personnel went on, or actors in lesser roles doubled. Ironically, it is the long run—one indirect cause of absence—which trains and prepares the cast for such a contingency.

Two of the four directors queried declared that they had no knowledge whatsoever of the theatre budget, and they preferred not to know. If something they wanted was disapproved for budgetary reasons, they adjusted or "made do." The other two had "general knowledge"; one said he was not hampered artistically by this kind of limitation; the other said he was, and felt that more than the minimal budget of "maybe $100," should have been expended "to get things right." He believes that the director should have show-by-show budget knowledge from the start, rather than simply being under pressure "not to spend much money."

Marans, the earliest of these four directors, had the responsibility of publicity for the dramas; Cerf, Walsh, and Eddy did not, although the latter often prepared material for Dargan J. Burns, then in charge of Public Relations for Karamu. It is no surprise, and certainly it is not
intended as criticism of Mr. Burns, that the directors felt the amount of publicity received was unsatisfactory. It should be noted here that Karamu does no newspaper advertising, and relies on reviews, releases, news stories, public affairs and institutional material, human interest items, and its "free" listing in a box in the entertainment pages (along with the downtown movies) for newspaper publicity. (Karamu does maintain large mailing lists and sends out a variety of mailings and printed announcements with information on all shows, concerts, and so on.) Two of the directors believe that Karamu should alter its present policy, and begin paid newspaper advertising. One of these is convinced that the casual playgoer overlooks Karamu, and that the box office might be spared numerous routine "information" calls if there were modest ads in the daily papers. The Jelliffes feel that Karamu cannot afford advertising, and point out that if they were to do so, they would naturally want to use the Negro press also, thus making the budget problem even more serious. In the early thirties, they ran ads for about six weeks in the Call and Post, a "trial flight," as Rowena Jeliffe put it, but to no advantage. Also, the Jelliffes firmly believe that buying paid advertising would result in a loss of the "public service" support the institution now receives. While much of Karamu's patronage now comes from the advance booking of miscellaneous
theatre parties, and while this income is basic, essential, and must continually be expanded, ways and means to increase door sales must be developed.

Some of the guest directors listed for this period in Appendix I are there because of what appears to be an insoluble, annual problem for Karamu Theatre. Because the musicals almost always run longer than the dramas, there is an "unevenness" in the scheduling and, at least once a season, a production comes up which neither the Director of Musical Productions nor the Director of Drama Productions can prepare. Hence, the need for an occasional guest. The normal scheduling difficulties experienced by a theatre, are compounded by Karamu's two theatres, as well as the need to plan Children's Theatre productions, dance concerts, and other public programs as well.

The true success of any program depends upon the degree to which its participants understand it and its philosophy. Sixteen Karamu members, three of them from staff, were interviewed on selected points taken from the directors' questionnaire. Their answers seemed to be of sufficient interest and value to include them here, and they form Appendix VI. An examination of the Karamu Theatre philosophy from the directors' point of view, as well as a discussion of their attitudes, follows.

The answers of two of the four directors reveal them to be ignorant of, vague, or completely wrong about
Karamu's philosophy. One of these directors reveals throughout his questionnaire a lack of "engagement" with the program and the institution, as if he had deliberately limited himself to the minimum requirements of the position. The second has made a distorted judgment of Karamu and the Jelliffes' role in its history, charging them with self-aggrandizement. Of the two whose answers reflected an understanding of Karamu Theatre, one declared, simply, that the "official philosophy" was "to help people, especially Negroes, to fulfill themselves." The second agreed that this was the philosophy, but that Karamu was now making a transition to a second phase of that philosophy, a phase oriented toward genuine interracial experience in the theatre. He adds that though this phase may have existed before, it is practiced far more now. Kurt Cerf felt that some of the Karamu performers "who were by talent, inclination, and desire entitled to professional treatment, were hampered by the emphasis on amateur theatre." This observation suggests that he wants a shift in the Karamu function and philosophy toward professional training, an idea which runs counter to the Jelliffes' oft-stated emphasis on human development (which may lead to high quality skills), rather than on skill-building itself. A second director asks if there is not a discrepancy between philosophy (which he is vague about) and practice, when the demands on the volunteer participants are so great as to vitiate whatever Karamu gives them.
All directors are unanimous in praising the help of other staff members and the resources of the theatre-related areas of Karamu House. The advantages of a practicing Children's Theatre, Music, Dance, and Art departments to a theatre director ought to be quite clear. It is the superiority of an arts center over an isolated theatre organization. It seems worth mentioning that Miss Ann Flagg, director of Karamu's Children's Theatre, is singled out for her assistance and cooperation.

Cerf, consistent with his earlier concern for Karamu's "professionals," described his greatest source of satisfaction at Karamu as his having been "instrumental in providing the opportunity for brilliantly talented performers to perform." Marans, Eddy, and Walsh all found satisfaction in their opportunity to direct "more interesting and challenging plays than are usually done outside of the educational theatre," and in the people they worked with: "dynamic, hard-working actors." But Eddy, speaking with pleasure of this chance he had to work in "a challenging human relations situation," adds a third, and highly significant, source of satisfaction:

... the chance to become friends, in the deepest sense, with people of the Negro race. I remember vividly the day in staff meeting--after I'd been at Karamu for many months--when I suddenly realized I was looking across the table and talking to people as people--not as Negro or white. It had taken place gradually, and I'd been doing it for some time--but it hadn't struck me until
then that I was thinking of and speaking to the person, . . . rather than the Negro . . . . I was not thinking in terms of color at all any longer. And this was perhaps the single most valuable experience of all my work at Karamu—the fact that this happens without your knowing it, if you only have the opportunity to let an acquaintance grow and shape itself over a period of time in a normal day-to-day kind of work and non-work situation.

On discussing their sources of dissatisfaction while at Karamu, only one director, Eddy, took the time to develop his answer with enough thoughtfulness so that it tells us something about Karamu and Karamu's problems. Cerf pressed his point in re professionalism, expressing discontent with what he felt to be the lack of encouragement given to some actors at Karamu "who were far superior to the best people who were working on Broadway at that time"—encouragement to go to New York for careers in theatre; Harans expressed a cryptic, unspecified unease with "management"; and Walsh spoke primarily of the inevitable artistic frustration of falling short of the ideal, "though whether this is attributable to faults of Karamu or faults within myself is a question."

Eddy wrote first of a conflict of philosophy and practice with Benno Frank, the Director of Musical Productions, over "pre-casting, largely," which disconcerted him; the discussion of Frank's philosophy, which follows this section, may shed some light on these differences. Eddy also expressed dissatisfaction with what he called
an "attitude" that resulted in the musical productions getting greater emphasis than the dramas. This point is a matter of some concern with many of the Karamu people who participate only in the drama part of the theatre program. Many of them have spoken to me about what they consider "unfairnesses," or concessions, or favoritism toward musical productions. The musicals bring in more income than do the dramas; it may be that some members see this somehow as a reflection on drama. Benno Frank is a forceful, almost flamboyant figure, whose personality and methods make the musical arm of Karamu "emphatic." One active, long-time member expressed her concern as follows:

The drama people don't get the support even from the Board of Trustees that the lyric theatre gets. This has given the drama people a "complex." Drama is the most important, because you need the drama to do these musicals successfully. It was really the foundation of the whole thing and I don't see where it should be the stepchild.¹

The "paradox of Karamu" .... This refers to "professionalism": two houses, a large number of annual productions on a pre-committed schedule, paid admissions, critics' reviews; versus "amateurism": operation by volunteer personnel who may or may not be completely responsible and disciplined. On this question, Junius Eddy develops the position that a higher professional quality for Karamu plays would result from what he calls "a less competitive

¹Interview, May 25, 1961.
[professional] production schedule." He feels that more
time is needed for training and that it must come from
"shorter runs, fewer shows a week, perhaps even fewer shows."
In a statement reminiscent of other community theatres, he
observes that the volunteer system "always seems to be on
the verge of breaking down." He theorizes that it maintains
itself because Karamu continually attracts a new group of
volunteers who find that the opportunities and advantages
of performing at Karamu outweigh the drawbacks. Marans
agrees that the volunteer system was less than satisfactory,
particularly in "technical preparation and execution." (It
should be noted that he did not have a staff Technical
Director during his entire tenure.) Walsh felt that the
volunteer system grew weak in direct proportion to the
length of a run, and that in the case of three or four week
runs, there were no problems. He questions whether or not
the "professionalism" is excessive, and "uses the talent of
the participants to a degree which is not necessarily in the
best interests of social or amateur theatre." Cerf, alone,
of all four directors, could say that the volunteer system
"worked perfectly for me."

It is true that there is a "paradox," but the inher-
ent contradiction is reconcilable. The volunteer basis of
Karamu productions is as good as the effort made to organize
it. The difficulties apparently lie in 1) the seemingly
less desirable, backstage positions, and 2) in the "walk-ons" or "group" roles. Crew personnel are harder to find than actors, true, but if a steady recruiting effort is made, if the training opportunities available are made known, and if an attitude of giving the real importance of a backstage assignment its due is developed, a sizeable body of technical volunteers can be formed and maintained. My approach—and it seems to be relatively successful—may be summed up as follows: Production people must be properly supervised, their interests aroused, and their abilities challenged by their tasks, and a director must be as alert to a crew's going stale as to onstage performers. In the second case, that of the lesser roles, it is not enough to say, "There are no small parts, there are only small actors." There are small parts, but they have a unique function in the play, and the actor must understand what it is. If they are "group" roles, i.e., members of a crowd, First Man, Second Woman, and so on—the actor must be encouraged to create a characterization where none may exist, he must be stimulated to develop appropriate business, he must understand that any part—big or small—can be done well or it can be done badly. If an actor needs additional assignments to prevent boredom or horseplay, let him understudy a role, or double as a crew member. Teach him all he can absorb—respect the time he gives you. In the community theatre,
perhaps the most important thing is the satisfactory human relationship. Without it, the volunteer system will surely, ultimately, break down.

Karamu, as an institution, is unique, and people react strongly to it, never in a neutral way. Cerf emphasizes that save for certain conditions, he "would have wanted to stay at Karamu for life," and even granting his criticisms and reservations, this is high institutional praise. Walsh calls his experience "pleasant" and "exciting," and "one which solidified many of [his] views on the values of good production, the essential necessity for good theatre practice regardless of which theatre one is working in."

Eddy notes that his previously held race relations attitudes were confirmed, but that he gained "a far greater insight into the mind of what is loosely termed 'the American Negro'--and the sense to see that there ain't no such person as THE American Negro."

The Jelliffes have often commented on the difficulty they have had in obtaining good staff personnel. If Karamu were "all" school, then qualified educators would do; if it were "all" theatre, professionals could staff it. Dalva quotes the Jelliffes as saying: "There is now no place where people can be trained for such a situation as exists at Karamu."¹ It seemed valuable to have men who

were staff directors evaluate this situation, and give their answers to the question: "In order to be a good director at Karamu, what qualities and abilities would a candidate require?" They agreed that talent, imagination, know-how—all these qualities a good director at any theatre would require, are requisites; also, the ability to organize productions on a long range basis; the ability to enforce artistic discipline, both on himself and on all others; the enjoyment of teaching and the patience of a good teacher. Only one mentioned the need for the qualities of the social worker, or settlement house worker.

In regard to Karamu's interracial nature, one director cited the need for a generally mature approach to race relations, modifying that to "a genuine skill in human relations overall," and modifying that further to "the ability to work well with people under pressure." One director emphatically made the following point the most important attribute of all for a director-candidate at Karamu: "A firm conviction that Negroes are intellectually and emotionally equal to whites—socially, it goes without saying."

My list of the qualities and abilities for a prospective Karamu director is as follows:

1) He must have as high a degree as possible of the normal professional skills of theatre director and teacher;

2) he must sincerely like people;
3) he must have a sense of integrity, honesty, and respect for the human being in his relations with them;

4) he must prefer good drama, and believe in its ability both to succeed with the public and—if properly used—to develop sound human values;

5) he must be dedicated to the purpose of the entire institution, and interested in all its areas.

During the 1949-60 period, while five drama directors were employed by Karamu, there was only one Director of Musical Productions: Benno D. Frank. His eleven seasons with lyric productions put him in a unique position as a commentator, and in anticipation of information and insights beyond what the four former drama directors could supply, Frank was interviewed at length by this writer, on two separate occasions. The basis of the interviews was, roughly, the same questionnaire sent to the former Directors of Drama with allowances for existing differences between musicals and dramas. What follows is an analysis of those interviews which are, like the directors' material, revealing of the man and the institution.

Benno Frank exercises the same freedom of choice in selecting his plays as did the drama directors. In musicals, he is, of course, limited by what has been released for production, and since musicals normally take in more

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1May 7 and May 16, 1961.
money than dramas, they must be chosen with more concern for the box-office. In choosing operas Frank has far fewer restrictions, but there is an interesting variance with Helmuth Wolfes, one of Karamu's two Musical Directors, whom Frank calls "the champion on our opera team." Wolfes' approach is generally classical (Mozart, Haydn, Rossini), and he tends to resist Frank's preference for the modern, usually atonal, highly dramatic work (THE TRIAL, HE WHO GETS SLAPPED). Wolfes observes, quite accurately, that classical masterpieces are easier to prepare than modern works of as yet undetermined greatness, because of the conventional musical background and training of Karamu's singers. Availability of the proper voices is another key factor in choosing operas and, to a lesser extent, musicals. In opera, no compromise can be made; if the role calls for a high coloratura, then an ideal mezzo won't do. In choosing musicals, too, Frank feels that "availability of the cast is decisive," and this has convinced him of the need to, as he puts it, "safeguard the operational process by a certain amount of precasting."

He sees the typical Karamu play as one which has "the climate or aroma of color," i.e., Negro or Oriental subjects, or an atmosphere of exoticism (JAMAICA, LOST IN THE STARS, RAISIN IN THE SUN). He looks forward to scheduling new musicals like FREE AND EASY and KICKS AND Co. because they are the plays which will attract wide audiences who
don't otherwise come to Karamu, and he bemoans this lack of security on the part of the American audiences: "They don't want to be cheated, and don't try experimental theatregoing." He considers works with large choruses "non-Karamu," because he cannot recruit chorus members—whose egos are insufficiently gratified in any long run.

Benno Frank's philosophy of casting is determined by the extended runs of Karamu productions. He cannot do the "ideal" thing: cast the best person for the part, because the "best" person may not be dependable, or able to sustain the schedule, so he must often "take a second best." The pressure represented by the long run weighs heavily on Frank: "I have never thought that the effort put into producing a show compares with the keeping it up after it opens." He has also said that there is never a day during a show when he can feel: "It is done." This creates a problem in guest directors for him, because regardless of their professional skill, they may be unable to "guarantee" the play, i.e., meet the multitude of personnel problems upon whose continuous solution the run depends. It is generally acknowledged that the larger casts of the musicals mean a larger percentage of people who are "not really very well worked into the theatre structure, who don't feel a great deal of responsibility, and are concerned really with what they personally can get out of it."¹ This fact

accounts for some of Frank's problems. How much he can do to alleviate it, and to what extent it is inevitable—these are moot points.

The requirement of Karamu membership for all participants is a sore point with Frank. Because of the musical training required for opera and many roles in musicals as well, he deals with more "professionals" than does the drama director. Many of the lyric participants are conservatory, music school, or university-trained musicians—people who have earned or are earning all or part of their income from music, singing, or related work. Frank declares that certain of these people will not pay $2.50 a year for membership, despite what Karamu can offer: the coaching of men of stature, the training, and the additional experience of performing in long runs. "They have a professional point of view and will not pay," he says. He feels that "membership should be necessary in every area but theatre," because here the administration "determines the calendar" and makes demands greater than those on personnel in non-theatre areas.

I would be willing to abandon my attitude against membership for people in shows, if once a week there were a class . . . for which the people would pay membership. If, by chance, they are also cast—fine! If they are not cast, still they can come to this class for which I feel I have a right to ask membership fees. Considering that there is no class, and that they are only coming to make this show possible [emphasis mine] . . . then it is no longer a "personal" thing for the actor.
Frank does not mention the possibility that performers may not join such a class, may be in the cast, and still not want to pay membership. One also wonders what their attitude would be if he supported the membership requirement.

Fundamentally, Benno Frank is a "professional theatre man" more than a "community theatre man." Many of his frustrations and criticisms spring from this professional orientation, and his lack—prior to coming to Karamu—of amateur theatre background. He tends to promulgate and to favor ideas and approaches which promote greater "professionalism." For example, he feels that getting each performer to sign a written contract with Karamu, for a token, weekly payment covering his expenses, would insure his obligation to the production. He speaks of small subsidies to actors in the form, perhaps, of weekly carfare, for he feels that though the experience Karamu gives is wonderful, it is "too expensive for an average person." Regular carfare payments, he feels, would "give dignity to this relationship we have" with actors, and would remove the indignities some of them face in borrowing money from parents, say. He finds the integration of a cross section of economic classes at Karamu an exciting feature, and believes some sort of subsidy is essential to keeping that up. He talks with genuine concern of the ethics of advance sales for an announced show which is not yet cast, and offers the analogy of an industry selling a product before they hire the labor to
manufacture it. Another of his ideas is subsidization through scholarships to Karamu theatre artists, with funds supplied by foundations. He compares Karamu to a graduate school for singers, who have limited professional opportunities after they graduate from college, and are often channeled into teaching. These scholarships would provide "internships" for singers, who could gain that necessary, added experience that might permit them to consider professional careers. He claims that many singers feel it is "not feasible to do what actors do: work eight hours a day and come in the evening and sing. They cannot physically do that. It is too frustrating, too exhausting, even on an alternate basis." Subsidization would eliminate the need for full-time jobs, at least. Scholarships would also attract more talented musical performers to Karamu, Frank declares.¹

In his casting, Director Frank is freely interracial, except in love scenes, and he has noted a touchiness on the part of some audience members in any scene involving a Negro male and a white female, particularly where a physical relationship or violence are present.² He notes

¹Kurt Cerf and Junius Eddy made statements on the "amateur-professional" theme: Cerf, whose "professionalism" is apparent, declares that he sees "no reason why certain people who are really deserving shouldn't be paid"; Eddy states: "I think it [Karamu] has to continue as an amateur community theatre."

²See above, p. 388, n. 1.
that in opera, "because it is unreal, the skin becomes secondary to sound," and even the prejudiced spectator does not object to stage intermarriage. Frank has interested himself in a project in makeup research, which is designed to permit the Negro actor to be able to play white roles. (Here, again, his professional point of view is apparent, for, of course, at Karamu Theatre, the Negro playing "white" roles is an established and accepted tradition.) If successful, such an experiment (Frank believes) might remove some of the casting limitations on the Negro in the professional theatre.

Frank avers that his lack of knowledge about Karamu's budget is a "tragic" thing. He has been "hampered artistically by ignorance of the budget," and by his resultant inability to plan.

He is in favor of adding concurrent, subsidiary activity: classes, discussion groups, workshops; though he admits that such activities in the past "fell apart because of lack of time." He also expresses care about workshops losing members to productions, because "this feeds the criticism that people are only being used [in shows] but never being taught." (Again, this statement suggests that Frank does not view the rehearsal period and the production period as "teaching" devices, that his approach is "production-centered"—the "professional" attitude, as
it were, rather than the "arts-education" approach.)

Frank subscribes to the idea of paid theatre advertising: "I am bothered by how we can guarantee that audiences come without paid publicity." He asserts adopting this plan would "undoubtedly increase business."¹ Frank also supports what he calls the European notion that "the play is not the thing," the actor is. He insists that "European theatre succeeds better than American theatre" because of this belief. There, he explains, repertory and state theatres do not invest publicity money in plays, but in personalities, capitalizing on their glamor and promoting them as individuals in order to reap the investment whenever the actor performs. In this way, "regardless of the success or failure of the play," Frank insists, the public will attend, because "theatre is a human, social art," and audiences go for the stars. Karamu has the personalities for such an approach to publicity, but not everyone will agree with Frank that "the play is not the thing," particularly in the amateur theatre. At Karamu, I feel that the play is very much "the thing."

Benno Frank questions whether Karamu can rightly call itself a "community theatre" because of what he sees

¹Wilhelmina Roberson, in charge of public relations and the box office, disagrees: "I have never felt the pinch of not having paid advertising . . . I don't think paid advertising would affect our attendance" (interview, July 6, 1961).
as hard, professional policies—particularly, a pressure that "the show must go on" despite absences and with inadequately prepared substitutes:

If the show has to go on, then it is not a community theatre. In a community theatre there is an agreement between the audience and the people on stage that out of a sense of accomplishment, of a mutual spirit of volunteer enjoyment, out of artistic and social feelings, something will take place. And it is a wonderful feeling. But as soon as this factor of necessity, of commodity-selling takes place, you lose this community theatre spirit.

On the other hand in what seems a contradiction, he reports one incident in which a leading singer of his was unable to perform and her alternate was unwilling, because she would have to forfeit a concert fee elsewhere for that night. Frank "felt that the safety and security of the show had to be guaranteed. [He] was not willing to cancel," and paid a not inconsiderable sum to the performer so that the Karamu show could go on.

Frank suggests that Karamu, as an organization, is "only geared for getting the curtain up." That is, there is insufficient personnel for maintaining the show at a high level of standards, once the run has begun. He feels that a theatre where the employment of professional directors like himself and Reuben Silver is warranted, must have equally professional, equally well-trained, lighting men, for example; and he despairs of the numerous occasions when extensive initial planning in the technical area is wasted, or the achievement of a polished, beautiful moment onstage.
by an actor or actress is ruined by the actions of irresponsible volunteer crews. He rejects the notion that the volunteer stage managers can take over once the directors leave one production for another, because--in general--they lack sufficient artistic judgment, and may have joined the show late in its rehearsal. He believes that if more emphasis were laid on recruiting scholarship students who are potentially directors, rather than technicians, as now seems to be the case, they could more effectively serve as assistants to the director and thus sustain a show's quality. He repeats that his desire for security in the run of a play has, "in almost every instance," led him to avoid selecting the "better" performers--those who would not be willing to play the long run, or who would not surrender their opportunities for part-time income through singing, by committing themselves to Karamu six nights a week.

The fact that Benno Frank does not work with his personnel from the beginning of the play production process to the end accounts, in part, for some of these problems noted above. Many of Frank's performers spend a great deal of time with the choreographer, or with a musical coach, and meet their stage director somewhat later in the rehearsal period. This divides their "loyalty," as it were;

1See below, Ch. VIII, for a discussion of the Rockefeller Foundation Scholarship Student program.
Benno Frank may seem just another "supervisor" along the way to opening night, and there is less personal contact and relationship than in the dramas, where only one man works with the cast throughout. Frank's tryouts are generally acknowledged to be sessions at which he casts secondary roles and chorus, and a rare lead if a previously unknown or unfamiliar singer turns up. In such a case, he must, at times, dislocate a singer he has previously cast, or relegate him to alternate status, and this may lead to friction. His own enthusiasm and exuberance often lead him to "over-sell" a medium-sized or small role, because his very genuine theatre sense knows what a professional actor can create with such a part; but an amateur who is persuaded thus to accept a role, often ends up disgruntled because he cannot detect or realize its potential. Also, his professionalism leads him to make decisions about alternates, understudies, who will play on opening night, and so on, in such a way as to, at times, overlook human values in favor of theatrical values. These things may have a tendency to impersonalize the situation, and make it seem more coldly professional, rather than give it the spirit of "community theatre."

Benno Frank has had conflict with Ann Flagg, Director of Children's Theatre, over the question of procedures and attitudes in his use of her youngsters for adult musicals. Miss Flagg's responsibility is one of inculcating certain
values into her students and determining their readiness for performing, and she believes that their indiscriminate use in adult theatre may destroy these values and render the children unwilling to return, or incapable psychologically of returning, to youth theatre activities. This would seem to be an instance, again, of Benno Frank's "professionalism," which makes him unfamiliar with the "social-work" aspect of Miss Flagg's theatre work, and his "production-" rather than "people-centeredness." He feels that where a lack of cooperation exists between departments, it is because "channels [of authority] are not arranged properly," or there is a conflict of interest between staff members. Despite conflicts, however, he has, of course, made extensive use of the other resources of Karamu and, referring to expansion of programming and inter-departmental cooperation, he says: "There are wonderful potentials in this which I feel we are not making use of now."

Frank acknowledges that, in these interviews, he has "picked on the negative things," though "there are many good things, of course." He cites the high aesthetic standards of Karamu, observing that in its decoration and furnishings, the "institutional" look is avoided. He attributes the treatment and beauty of the whole Karamu atmosphere to the Jelliffes' personal standards and discrimination of taste, and he is convinced of the value of different classes of people coming to Karamu and being exposed to "quality."
Implicit, even in his criticisms of certain aspects of Karamu, are these "good things" which keep Frank there, despite the obvious incongruity of his position, in so many ways, with the philosophy of the theatre: the freedom of opportunity to direct a wide range of theatre productions, many new, and particularly operas; the talented personnel attracted by Karamu; the chance to train, perfect, and deliver to the professional world of theatre and music many aspirants; the "commonwealth of arts" concept of Karamu (the potential for it, he would say); the uniqueness of his position nationally, particularly in regard to Negro content musicals; and others. Benno Frank is an effervescent idea-man and he has, at Karamu, the liberty to try out many of the ideas he is continually developing. Older than the other departed directors, he recognizes these opportunities, and has clearly been willing to endure what he considers difficulties and problems because they are outweighed by the "good things." He has had a great success--public and critical, professional and personal--at Karamu, as the existence and achievements of Karamu's lyric productions attest. A dedicated and able theatre worker, whose theatricality of thought and behavior are not a pose, but real, he radiates impressiveness and energy. He projects, despite his generally impersonal treatment of the majority of his large casts (or, perhaps, because of it), a quality of importance, of fame, even; and he is himself, in turn,
impressed by names and positions. His own persuasive personality, his overriding "star-consciousness," and the network of worldwide theatre contacts which he maintains, give his associates the impression of being at the fountainhead of theatre events. It would be hard, now, to conceive of a Karamu without him.

Subsidiary theatre groups and theatre-related activities, always active in the past, continued their activity in Karamu's new theatre facility. The Children's Theatre program, formerly a dispersed activity under Mrs. Gerald Marans, was centralized with the acquisition of the new building. Patricia Herron became director in the fall of 1948, and noted that "with the new proscenium a more formal program for children is possible," and she specifically mentioned the new scenic possibilities. Miss Herron, a graduate of Principia College, in Elsah, Illinois, did her graduate work at Iowa. When she resigned in 1950, she was replaced by Joan Rorimer, who had an M. A. from Western Reserve University, and who had been a lecturer on television with their staff. She, in turn, was shortly succeeded by Olive Thurman, Vassar graduate, with an M. A. from Iowa. Miss Thurman is the daughter of Rev. Howard Thurman, Dean of Marsh Chapel of Boston University, and principal speaker at Karamu's Fortieth Anniversary.

\[1\] CPD, Nov. 30, 1949.  
\[2\] CPD, May 11, 1950.
celebration, in November, 1955. Under Olive Thurman (who also served as volunteer Costume Mistress for Karamu Theatre) Children's Theatre concentrated on "the development of creative expression in the children,"\(^1\) through written published scripts and through plays which "were either written or adapted by"\(^2\) her.

Ann Kathryn Flagg, who joined the Karamu staff in 1952 as Director of Children's Theatre, still holds this position today. She was born in Charleston, West Virginia, and received her B. A. at West Virginia State University, where she studied theatre under Dr. Fannin S. Belcher. She was a teacher in a West Virginia High School before coming to Karamu. Miss Flagg has just been granted a one-year leave from her Karamu position for the 1961-62 season to accept a graduate fellowship at Northwestern University, where she will pursue the M. A. in Children's Theatre under Winifred Ward, a national authority in this field. Her long Karamu tenure has enabled her to shape and develop the program there, and bring it to its current high level of activity and quality. In the light of its importance to the total Karamu Theatre picture, it seems worthwhile to examine the activity and its philosophy.

Children's Theatre at Karamu produces an average of four productions during the season, each for from four

\(^1\)Karamuse, June, 1951.  \(^2\)Dalva, op. cit., 43.
to seven performances, all on Saturday afternoons. It is forced to arrange its schedule "around" the adult program, and performs in the Proscenium or Arena depending upon which adult stage setting lends itself best to the technical requirements of the children's script. Shows are cast in open readings, and the actors are drawn from Ann Flagg's Creative Dramatics classes,¹ which meet in the late afternoons or early evenings.² She has utilized the existing children's dance groups and also the Karamettes, the Karamu children's choral group, for her productions. In addition to the experience thus gained by her children, such joint activity fosters excellent interdepartmental cooperation. In addition to her complete responsibility for the selection, preparation, and production of the children's plays, Miss Flagg instructs and supervises numerous teen-age volunteers in her area, some of whom staff her production crews. She plans and supervises field trips to other children's theatre groups which offer formal or informal programs. Often she gives specific assistance, instruction, and supervision to volunteers or other children's theatre workers who audit or observe her classes in the "Magic

¹From time to time, Miss Flagg calls upon interested actors from the adult theatre program for specific roles in her plays.

²The schedule of these classes is shown in Appendix IV, Program Activities of Karamu House and Karamu Theatre.
Carpet" Room and then return to their own organizations. Provision is made for a scholarship student to assist in Children's Theatre (he or she would also take charge of all theatre costuming), but such assistance has not been available for the past several years.

Ann Flagg feels that her principal task is to stimulate and develop the innate creative imagination of children. This she does by balancing formal, with informal, creative efforts, and building an atmosphere which is neither too rigid--"that could be death to creativity"--nor too flexible--"that could be bad for orderliness." A second objective for children's theatre, as she sees it, is to provide the members with adequate preparation for participation in formal children's and adult theatre performances. Third, to develop an awareness of the role and function of cultural activity in a given community, and to create a desire--on the part of the parents as well--to be contributive to such a community-wide project.

Rowena Jelliffe feels very strongly the importance of the children's theatre at Karamu, even though it does not supply the income, reach the public, or publicize the institution in the manner of the adult theatre. Mrs. Jelliffe has found in Ann Flagg a teacher who shares her

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1This paragraph is based, largely, on a personal interview with Director Flagg (April 21, 1961) and a brief questionnaire she submitted (April 24, 1961).
conviction that the theatre is a powerful educational tool, and particularly valuable in the personal development of children. Karamu's advantage over the public schools in this area of youth education and training lies, in part, in the fact that children want to come there, can relax and create there, and are not stultified by schoolroom discipline, or classroom and teacher shortages. Aware that there are some teachers and many parents who lack the ability properly to gauge children's creative capacities, Rowena Jelliffe feels that, but for Ann Flagg, many of these youngsters might "go down the drain."\(^1\)

In a typical year for the Karamu Children's Theatre, the 1957-58 season, twenty-four performances of four plays were given for a total audience of 4,882. An aggregate total of 1,290 young adults and children attended daily classes.\(^2\) Representative productions are ALI BABA AND THE FORTY THIEVES (adapted by Wadeeha Atiyeh), with a cast of twenty-three, including drummers; and SIMPLE SIMON (adapted by Aurand Harris), with a cast of forty-three—both staged in the Proscenium; and Masterlinck's THE BLUE BIRD (Arena Theatre), with a cast of sixty children and adults—all

\(^1\)Interview, May 25, 1961.

\(^2\)Karamu House—A Statistical Picture of the Year, 1957-58, a mimeographed brochure compiled by Virginia Grady, Karamu Registrar, based on monthly attendance reports of staff and volunteers. (Karamu files.)
three with music and choreography by Karamu staff members; and BARNABY (Proscenium), by Robert and Lillian Masters, produced with a cast of twenty-one youngsters and adults.¹

The Karamu Student Theatre (formerly Junior Theatre) is also under Ann Flagg's direction. Composed of fourteen to eighteen year olds, it comprises regular weekly training meetings, at which instruction in acting, music, dance, and theatre production techniques is given; and experience in these areas through participation in the regular Children's Theatre plays. In addition, Student Theatre presents an annual program of one-act plays (in either theatre), in which thirty-two students, for example, participated in 1959.² These programs have included such plays as MOON-CALF MUGFORD, THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL, BOX AND COX, ILE, THE DREAMY KID, WHERE THE CROSS IS MADE, ENTER THE HERO, and others. The programs for these productions indicate the support of adult theatre members: "Their devotion to theatre, their generosity and understanding, have been a source of inspiration and encouragement to us all."³ In January, 1954, the student group under Miss Flagg staged OUR TOWN, with an adult actor in the Stage Manager's role, for a

¹This information is taken from Karamu Theatre programs for the productions mentioned.

²D'Isidoro, Drake, and Wolfe, op. cit., 62.

³Program, Student Theatre, July 27, 1953.
two-week run in the Arena Theatre. In March, 1956, they prepared Booth Tarkington's SEVENTEEN, adapted as a musical by Sally Benson, and presented it in the Arena Theatre for a four-week run. Both OUR TOWN and SEVENTEEN were part of the regular Karamu Theatre schedule for their respective seasons.

It is quite pertinent to observe that, in the face of the commercial theatre's fitful efforts to persuade young people to theatregoing, the Karamu Children's Theatre, under Ann Flagg, is building theatre audiences, and producing a steady supply of supporters for the theatre of tomorrow.

From time to time in this history, workshops and informal theatre classes of one kind or another have been mentioned. The Rockefeller Foundation, which had sent Ridgely Torrence to Karamu in 1939, expressed its interest in, and approval of, Karamu again, in 1951, when it awarded Junius Eddy a grant to teach playwriting and be Karamu Playwright-in-Residence.\(^1\) Eddy, who had taught playwriting at Baylor and the University of Wisconsin,\(^2\) quickly enrolled twenty-four students, and the project was underway. His grant, of $5000, was renewed for a second year by the Foundation in 1952.\(^3\)

\(^1\)CPD, Sept. 21, 1951.  
\(^2\)CPD, Sept. 27, 1952.  
\(^3\)CPD, Oct. 13, 1952.
Mr. Eddy's class resulted in several full-length plays from his students, one of which, Lillian Gale's SUN ON THE WATER, has been mentioned. Two student-written one-acts were staged by student directors: THE BIRTHDAY CAKE, also by Mrs. Gale, and KID BROTHER, by Herbert Greggs, and the evening provided the class, which had turned out a number of other one-acters, and the audience, an opportunity to discuss, criticize, and analyze. Eddy wrote several plays of his own during his two-year tenure as Resident Playwright, but he says they were not very good, and, "in any case, they were not regarded as 'Karamu' plays.'"

Rowena Jelliffe, speaking as a member of a theatre panel discussion group, commented that, in their eagerness to do original scripts, people overlook the fact that "you do not make a playwright overnight." Referring to Eddy, whom she called an "excellent man," she pointed out that though only one class play was produced, the course "was a very valuable experience for the actors and for the writers." The new Nursery and Theatre buildings stimulated workshops and classes, although such activity had always been a part of the Karamu program. Most of the courses were concentrated in the summers, when production activity was lessened, and covered playwriting, acting, musical

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1 Above, p. 361.  
2 Questionnaire, April 1, 1961.  
3 KYW broadcast, April 30, 1961.
theatre, technical theatre, and so on. My own long tenure as Drama Director has given me an opportunity to regularize the workshop program, and I have offered six annual summer programs including: Beginning and Advanced Acting, Beginning Directing, Acting in Classical Comedy and Classical Tragedy, Acting in Shakespeare, and Introduction to Theatre (which featured field trips to local summer theatres, slide lectures, and a visit to the Theatre Arts Gallery of the Cleveland Museum). All of the Karamu workshops are open to the Cleveland public, though I have always attempted to enroll current members and establish a sense of continuity between the regular season just past, the summer, and the season ahead, in the hopes of improving the talent for subsequent Karamu productions. Two courses are offered each summer, and the fee has ranged from $2.00 for one, to $7.00 for both. A Karamu membership (currently $2.50) is required to enroll.

In-season workshops have not been neglected, but problems inherent in the demanding production schedule have made them less regular than summer-time activity. In 1959, the Lab Theatre, or Karamu Workshop, established a sound program of exercises, pantomime, and improvisations, but an emergency forced the group leader, Roger Askew, to withdraw temporarily and turn the group over to two of its advanced members. Ultimately, after a series of classroom
scenes and meetings which featured readings of both classi-
cal and contemporary plays, Askew's group presented staged
readings of Ibsen's THE MASTER BUILDER and Strindberg's THE
FATHER. In 1960, a new lab program was introduced, taught
by Lawrence Barclay, veteran Karamu actor, and Dorothy Sil-
ver, free-lance actress and director, and wife of the cur-
rent Drama Director, Reuben Silver, who supervised the
operation. This program featured bi-weekly meetings, the
first of which was, chiefly, a playreading section; and the
second was devoted to improvisations based on the play read
earlier. This new workshop activity was designed to en-
courage "floaters" (actors who were between productions) to
gain additional theatre education, and yet not involve them
so deeply as to make them unavailable when auditions and
casting began again. The plays chosen ranged from OEDIPUS
to STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE, with every major dramatic period
represented. There is no fee for in-season activity of this
kind, which is open to all Karamu members.

The Karamu dance group, which had flourished in the
interim period, embarked upon a series of annual concerts
when it had a proper home in the new theatre building.
It has been known, for some years, as "the oldest continuous
modern dance group in the United States."¹ Like the theatre
company at Karamu, it is an amateur group, "in the sense

¹CPD, Jan. 1, 1956.
that none of the members make their living by dancing," and like the theatre in its field, it is "professional in its attitude toward the dance and its effort to achieve excellence in it."\(^1\)

Helping the Karamu Dancers achieve their success, a constant stream of teachers and advisers have supplemented the coaching of Eleanor Frampton. The late Doris Humphrey conducted an all-day dance seminar at Karamu in 1950;\(^2\) Charles Weidman taught the second such annual seminar in 1951;\(^3\) and Karamu dancers have had master classes from Pearl Primus and Jose Limon.\(^4\) The troupe has, for twelve years, attended the annual American Dance Festivals at New London, Connecticut,\(^5\) where their attendance "at the Connecticut School of the Dance has been unusually valuable due to extra-ordinary privileges granted to [them] there at [Doris Humphrey's request], courtesies which are not extended to the school in general."\(^6\) Miss Humphrey was more than a teacher and a friend, as Karamu's tribute to her

\(^1\)Program, March 19, 1957. \(^2\)CPD, April 22, 1950.

\(^3\)Karamuse, June, 1951. Both Mr. Weidman and Miss Humphrey have permitted Karamu the use of music and certain movement themes created originally for them. (Program, Dance Concert, March 22, 1957.)


\(^5\)The June, 1957 Karamuse reports the Dancers' ninth annual trip, and they have gone every year since.

\(^6\)Karamuse, Feb., 1959.
on the occasion of her death indicated: "No one has, more than she, stimulated and inspired our Karamu Dancers over the past years. She had a very personal interest in this group passing on to them certain of her original cherished dances . . . ."

A Karamu dancer who was once called "a close successor to the great Doris Humphrey," Christine Buster was a starring member of the Karamu troupe. In the 1954-55 season, she began choreographing the Karamu musicals, and thus stimulated the development of a small nucleus (within the parent Karamu Dancers), who began, more and more, to participate in dramas and musicals where dance was required. Miss Buster choreographed ONDINE, WONDERFUL TOWN, MR. JOHNSON, SOUTH PACIFIC, GUYS AND DOLLS, and others, and was the forerunner of Maurice Nystrom's current Theatre Dance Group. Mr. Nystrom, a former professional dancer with Broadway experience, has been choreographer for Karamu Theatre since 1957 and, in the pattern of the older, established Concert Dance Group, has given several annual concerts which emphasize jazz dancing and "great fun in a wide variety of hoofing."3

The strength of the Karamu dance program is, of course, in the regularly scheduled classes of instruction,

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though the performing troupes get the limelight and bask in the reflected glory of their "graduates," who performed in Broadway shows like CARMEN JONES, PINIAN'S RAINBOW, BEGGAR'S HOLIDAY, ON THE TOWN, and many others.\(^1\) There were some two hundred in Karamu dance classes in 1956,\(^2\) and Appendix IV shows the great age range served as well as the variety of styles taught by the dance staff. Children's dance activities, for example, have been extremely popular, and a recent children's dance concert featured 120 three to four year olds.\(^3\)

The relationship of music to the Karamu Theatre program is one which goes back to the earliest years of the Gilpin Players. Mr. J. Harold Brown and Mr. Helmut Wolfes, staff Musical Directors, rehearse and play for the musicals and operas respectively, and offer a range of classes, coaching sessions, and choral activity, as well. Jazz bands meet at Karamu, "composed of eager youth of the community who cannot practice at home," and they are given guidance on care of instruments as well as on musical arrangements and ensemble playing.\(^4\) An instrumental ensemble was organized, though it did not succeed in its hope of becoming "available for future operas and musicals";\(^5\) and a

\(^1\)Program, Dance Concert, April 21, 1950.


\(^5\)Karamuse, Feb., 1958. Benno Frank has expressed a particular interest in such a group achieving such a goal. (Interview, May 16, 1961.)
large instrumental band group and drum classes ("Percussion Studies") have added to the din of activity at Karamu.\(^1\)

The staff Musical Directors are, of course, most important to the theatre program, and attention to them and their music backgrounds seems worthwhile. Walter Anderson\(^2\) is well remembered, though he was head of Karamu's music staff almost twenty years ago. He maintains a helpful, friendly relationship with Karamu today, often recommending and advising on music scholarship students. Leonard Shure, who was a teacher of Walter Anderson, was with Karamu for only a short while, in the 1949-50 season. A former staff member of the Cleveland Music School Settlement, he hoped to "build an orchestra from Karamu talent" while Karamu's Musical Director.\(^3\) Rowena Jelliffe describes him as a fine musician, particularly with difficult piano music, and remembers his work at the Aspen (Colorado) Music Festival with pleasure.\(^4\)

The two current musical directors have been mentioned, but without any biographical information. Helmuth Wolfes, Musical Director for the operas, was born and educated in Germany, and joined Karamu Theatre in September, 1954. He

\(^{1}\)See Appendix IV. Both the instructor and members of the drum group have played important roles in a great number of Karamu productions, dramas and musicals.

\(^{2}\)Above, Ch. VI, p. 327. \(^{3}\)CPD, Nov. 15, 1949.

\(^{4}\)Interview, April 25, 1961.
had been guest Musical Director for their production of von Einem's THE TRIAL during the 1953-54 season, and prior to that, performed similar duties for the New Orleans Opera Company and the music workshop of Loyola University. His Karamu opera work has included not only vocal coaching and piano accompaniment for all performances, but translating and adapting several of the chamber operas as well. Although all Karamu operas are sung in English, Wolfes offers coaching in Italian, French, and German.

J. Harold Brown, a native of Florida, holds degrees in music and composition from the Conservatory of Kansas City, Fisk, and Indiana University. He has studied orchestration with Virgil Thompson and with Dr. Arthur Shepard at Western Reserve, and has taught at Hampton Institute and in the schools of Indianapolis and Kansas City. He has been Director of Music at Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. He was, and is today, the director of the famous Karamu Quartet, as well as coach and Musical Director for lyric productions.

Founded by its current manager, J. E. Cooper, and under J. Harold Brown's direction since 1948, the Karamu Quartet has acquired a national reputation, extending its appearance beyond Karamu and Cleveland to the country-at-large via radio, television, and extensive touring. CBS Radio carried the Quartet, whose repertoire ranges from
classical selections to spirituals, in a weekly Sunday morning program originating from Cleveland's WGAR,\textsuperscript{1} from 1951 to 1955, over as many as eighty stations. In 1954, the Quartet embarked on their third tour of the South, "bringing their art to music-hungry small towns, with concerts in colleges, churches, town halls."\textsuperscript{2} An invitation from the Ohio State Fair to do three programs daily from August 23-31, 1957\textsuperscript{3} followed their established pattern of extensive public performances in the Ohio area. The current members of the Quartet are Charles W. Tomlin, first tenor; J. E. Cooper, second tenor; Gerald Harris, baritone; and Glenn Settle, bass. Tomlin and Cooper are members of the original group.

Another vocal group, whose existence represents an interesting extension of children's activities, is the Karamettes, which was created in the summer of 1957. Children from nine to thirteen years of age were organized, under the direction of Mrs. Thomasena Davis Allen, into a thirty-two voice choral group which almost immediately began to make public appearances. At Karamu, they were the chorus in the Children's Theatre production of Humperdinck's \textsc{Hansel and Gretel}.

\textsuperscript{1}News, Dec. 19, 1951.
\textsuperscript{2}Karamu House....A promise fulfilled, a goal in sight (Karamu House publication), 1954.
\textsuperscript{3}Karamuse, June, 1957.
AND GRETTEL in March, 1958; and in December, 1959 they shared the stage with Karamu's children's dance group in a dance and vocal recital. The philosophy and the goals of the Karamettes are set forth in the following statement: "To increase musical enjoyment through singing good music; music appreciation; to enjoy group participation, to gain self-confidence and poise through public performances." As the skills of the group matured, they progressed to full-scale production at Karamu, though the major part of their activity remains choral work. They gave two performances of THE SLIP OF A SLIPPER, an operetta, in May, 1960; and Mozart's THE MAGIC FLUTE, presented for five performances in April and May of 1961, and three more in July. For this opera, the Karamettes joined forces with the Karateens, a recently organized lyric group also under the direction of Mrs. Allen, and encompassing the musical talents of thirteen to sixteen year old boys and girls. There can be very little doubt as to the values, social and artistic, which the youngsters of the Karamettes and Karateens gain through their experience in these organized activities. They have had great success with their audience, both at Karamu and away, are in constant demand as "entertainment," and play

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1 Karamuse, Feb., 1958.
2 Karamuse, April, 1958 and Feb., 1959.
3 Karamuse, Sept., 1957.
an important role in the relationship of Karamu with its community-at-large.

Still another way in which it meets its community, is Karamu's recently-formed Cultural Arts Series. Offered as a bonus to attract greater numbers of season-ticket purchasers for the theatre,¹ this series, now only two years old, is too new to have had a measurable effect. As Appendix V shows, Karamu eschewed popular, light entertainment for its Cultural Arts Series programs, paralleling its play selection policy, and attempting to generate added interest through a variety of attractions.

The Karamu Art Department, a considerable entity on its own, has always been theatre-related. Artists like Zell Ingram,² Richard Beatty,³ Fred Carlo, and James Batie participated extensively in theatre projects in addition to their art department work. Many Karamu art students are drawn to theatre, join production crews, and assist in a variety of ways. Elmer Brown was "with Karamu House for ten years, active in Gilpin Players productions, and designed costumes and scenery";⁴ and John Balazs, practicing

¹Season books offer ten coupons for $12.00, and each coupon may be exchanged for one admission on Sunday through Thursday nights. A coupon plus $.50 is good for a Friday or Saturday night admission. Single tickets are $1.50 on week nights; $2.00 on Fridays and Saturdays.

²See above, Ch. IV, p. 155, n. 5.

³See above, Ch. VI, pp. 297-98.

⁴Press, Milt Widder, April 23, 1942. (See also Ch. V above, p. 212.)
artist and member of Kent State University's art faculty, is a "graduate of Karamu House's Art School [sic],"¹ and designed one of the outstanding Arena Theatre sets for A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM in June, 1950—"functional and beautiful."² Leonard Dryansky, who joined the staff as Director of the Karamu Art Studio in 1954,³ has taken graduate work in stage art at New York University and Western Reserve,⁴ and has designed over fifteen Karamu productions. In 1959, this voluntary interdepartmental activity was given official recognition when Dryansky was named to the newly-created position of Art Director on the theatre staff. In this capacity he himself will design or select designers for all Karamu productions, and supervise their work.

A subsidiary group which has "welded actors, singers, and technicians into a strong cooperating group in support of all the facets of theatre,"⁵ is the Karamu Theatre Guild. Formed in 1951, the Guild members pledged themselves "to the task of maintaining the high standards and traditions set by our predecessors, the Gilpin Players."⁶ An

¹CPD, Nov. 3, 1955.
⁵To the Friends of Karamu House, March 26, 1951, a Karamu newsletter, mimeographed, from the Karamu files.
⁶Constitution, Karamu Theatre Guild, 1951, from the preamble (Karamu House publication).
indication of the areas and ways and means in which the Guild seeks to augment and strengthen both lyric and dramatic productions, is given by the committee structure of the organization: Hostess and Hospitality, Promotion and Public Relations, Membership, Costumes and Wardrobe, Dressing Room and Building Decorum, Stagecraft, Playreading, Entertainment and Social Affairs.\footnote{Ibid.} One important, regular contribution the Guild makes in the area of social hospitality for the personnel of all productions (as well as for special guest groups) is the preparation and serving of dinners on the "all-day" Sunday rehearsals preceding the first public performance on the following Friday.\footnote{This is a "preview" performance, the first of three: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. After a "dark" Monday night, Karamu productions then have their official opening on Tuesday. The reviewers attend this performance.}

An important extension into drama for the community was taken this year when the Karamu Theatre Guild assumed the preparation and presentation of the American Theatre Wing community plays, written by Nora Sterling for such organizations as the Family Service Association, the Department of Public Health Nursing, and others. Direction and casting of these one-act plays are from within the Guild membership, and to date, they have performed three of the playlets for a total of nine performances for
various greater Cleveland community groups. This activity offers supplemental acting and directing training for Guild members, an effective representation of Karamu before the public (cast members often participate in the discussions which follow the performances, and inevitably answer questions about Karamu House and Karamu Theatre), and more important, an opportunity for direct community service. Though the effectiveness of the Guild in past seasons has fluctuated because of a lack of continuity of effective leadership, Rowena Jelliffe believes that the current Guild is capable of a significant contribution to the parent body, and describes it as possessing "a very real loyalty and understanding" of House and Theatre principles.¹

Ten years after the theatre building--the home of all of the major theatre, subsidiary theatre, and theatre-related activities discussed above--was opened, Karamu's Community Services and Music Building was dedicated, completing the institution's overall physical plant. "I get weary of people calling it a dream house. It's the result of a down-to-earth program to accomplish facilities for people, projects and programs that we have worked on for forty-odd years."² With these words, Rowena Jelliffe reflected the pride all Cleveland could take in an effort

¹Interview, April 25, 1961.

²Mrs. Jelliffe, quoted in CPD, May 17, 1959.
that had resulted in a $1,350,000 group of buildings. The $500,000 indebtedness for the second of that group, the theatre building, was paid off in 1952, at which time Russell Jelliffe observed that "ten years ago, we could have built for half the amount we eventually had to pay, due to increased building costs."¹

Fund raising for the new building began immediately, and a Capital Fund of $500,000 was the goal.² Hard work and the record of past achievement brought in the contributions: from individuals, corporations, foundations, and the house-sponsored "Kara-Brick" campaign. This was a plan whereby local contributors of small amounts could purchase "bricks" for the new units, and hundreds of Karamu members, neighborhood supporters and Cleveland citizens joined the campaign, bought their "Kara-Bricks," and raised over $6,000 for the drive.³ In 1958, the Rockefeller Foundation, in still another tangible gesture of support, offered an outright $30,000 gift to cover spiralling building costs.⁴ Karamu succeeded in the campaign, raising a total of $650,000.⁵

¹CPD, July 22, 1952.
²Karamu House, Promise Fulfilled, 1954.
³Mr. Jelliffe, interview, July 5, 1961.
⁴Mr. Jelliffe, interview, July 9, 1961.
Ground was broken in a simple, but dramatic ceremony, at midnight on November 1, 1957, after the close of the performances in both theatres, with the audiences invited to participate.\(^1\) Eighteen months later, in a more elaborate way, came the dedication.

There were 1,600 people assembled at Karamu on May 24, 1959.\(^2\) Many of them were former Karamu members from the earliest years, who had come back for a "Homecoming Weekend," complete with tours, plays, dinners, a dance, and the ceremony.\(^3\) The original plans had called for two buildings, an administration unit and the music unit, which would form "a quadrangle" with the theatre and nursery buildings, "resembling a college campus,"\(^4\) but the bugbear of rising costs forced a compromise. The two units were telescoped into one, and that one was joined to one end of the theatre building, making one large L-shaped building instead of two. The large audience of well-wishers sat in "Karamu Court," the area within the angle formed by these two wings of Karamu, and heard Cleveland's Mayor

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Karamu House-Statistical Analysis, 1958-59. (Karamu House publication, Karamu files.)

\(^3\)Invitation and Program, Karamu Dedication and Homecoming Weekend, May 23-24, 1959. 350 attended the dinner on Saturday night.

\(^4\)Metzler, CPD, Nov. 27, 1949.
Anthony Celebrezze, himself a former resident of the 38th and Central neighborhood and, in his youth, a Playhouse Settlement member himself; Charles Hickox, President of the Board of Trustees;\(^1\) Hazel Mountain Walker, who had given Karamu its name; Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, who accepted a plaque from former board president, Judge Charles White, dedicating the new building to them both as founders; and Oscar Hammerstein II, who made the main dedicatory address.\(^2\)

Hammerstein, who had toured the building the previous night and had seen half of each of the current productions (SIMPLY HEAVENLY and CAROUSEL), was a long-time Karamu adherent. "What I like about Karamu," he said on Saturday night, "is that they don't continually talk about doing things. They just do them."\(^3\) On Sunday, he made an equally straightforward talk, congratulating the Jelliffes, the city of Cleveland (for having "a gem like Karamu right in the center of it"), and adding: "While we're at it, let's not forget to congratulate the human race, which comes in for quite a bit of criticism sometimes." He rapped racial supremacists, saying that anyone who thinks one man is better than another because of his color is "an ignorant fool who can get support only from other ignorant fools."\(^4\)

\(^1\)Karamu Statistical Analysis, 1958-59.

\(^2\)CPD, May 25, 1959.

\(^3\)CPD, May 24, 1959.

\(^4\)CPD, May 25, 1959.
One portion of the ceremony which will have continuing ramifications was the presentation by trustees of the Leonard G. Hanna, Jr. Fund of a one million dollar check to Karamu House. The gift, "in the spirit of Hanna's longtime interest in Karamu, its program and philosophy, and the Negro people," was to be the final one of a seventeen-year series of annual grants of $30,000 to $35,000.\footnote{CPD, May 10, 1959.}

The income from the million dollar bequest will mean a guaranteed yearly amount equal to these earlier gifts, but it will "not mean that we will have a big cookie jar to dig into, and it does not mean that we will not have to continue to seek other help, but it does mean that now we have security."\footnote{Ibid., quoting Mrs. Jelliffe.}

Although Rowena Jelliffe did not mean total "security," the word certainly characterizes the "new" Karamu period, the 1949-61 seasons, more than earlier eras in the institution's history. The physical plant was completed, the introduction of lyric productions gave a new character to the total theatre program, and the second uninterrupted twelve-year span of productions increased the scope and potential of Karamu Theatre by bringing it to the attention of a wider local, national, and international audience.

\footnote{CPD, May 10, 1959.}

\footnote{Ibid., quoting Mrs. Jelliffe.}
CHAPTER VIII

KARAMU THEATRE TODAY

Chapter VIII will focus on the institutional nature of Karamu Theatre: its staff and board, its financing, an estimate of it from Cleveland theatre critics, its contacts with the local, national, and international theatre communities, its "secrets of success," its problems, and a look to its future.

The theatre staff, headed by Rowena Woodham Jeliffe as Executive Director, includes both full and part-time members: Director of Musical Productions, Director of Drama Productions, two Musical Directors, Director of Children's Theatre, Technical Director, Art Director, Director of Public Relations and Box Office, Scholarship Students and volunteers. Volunteers are the heart of the theatre program, for they are the performing personnel and the production workers and crew members. They work under staff supervision, of course, and receive training from staff members, but occasionally assume degrees of administrative responsibility as production Stage Managers or Assistant Stage Managers. The Scholarship Student program deserves detailed attention.
For the past ten years, Karamu Theatre has offered from three to five theatre scholarships of from $1500 to $2000 per annum to graduate students working with Karamu and pursuing advanced degrees (normally the M. A.) at Western Reserve University. This program was initially underwritten by the Rockefeller Foundation and, at the end of a three-year period, by a similar grant from the Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund.\textsuperscript{1} Usually, the recipients are graduates of accredited southern Negro schools (who, it was hoped, might wish to return to teach and direct in Southern community theatres\textsuperscript{2}), and the contacts maintained by Karamu with many prominent university theatre leaders like Fannin Belcher of West Virginia State, Randolph Edmonds of Florida A. & M., and James Butcher of Howard, have helped maintain the program.\textsuperscript{3}

The Scholarship students serve in a variety of capacities at Karamu and, in doing so, earn six credits of the thirty required for the M.A. at Western Reserve. Some

\textsuperscript{1} Mr. Jelliffe, letter to Dr. Robert W. July, Rockefeller Foundation, Nov. 2, 1960, Mr. Jelliffe's files.

\textsuperscript{2} News, Oct. 17, 1952.

\textsuperscript{3} Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961. The Jelliffes have made several Southern tours over the years, answering requests for assistance from community theatre groups and meeting with prospective scholarship students. The CPF, May 15, 1951, refers to a tour to "eleven Southern colleges, interviewing fifty candidates." The case of Ruth de Souza represented a different kind of Rockefeller Foundation scholarship aid. (See above, Ch. VII, 357-58.)
of them receive their degrees in one year, others in two. They do their practical work as stage technicians, costume assistants, in the music area, children's theatre, dance, and so on. Many of them direct or assist in the direction of a given production.\footnote{Mr. Jelliffe, letter to Dr. July, Nov. 2, 1960.} Although some problems arise out of the pressures of Karamu production together with the academic load at Western Reserve--compounded by an occasional student's inability properly to budget his time--Barclay Leathem and Rowena Jelliffe believe that the program represents a splendid opportunity for the participants and is a successful reciprocal arrangement which will continue.

Mr. Leathem praised it as an "example of use of community resources"\footnote{"From Stock to Television," Stevens, op. cit., 144.} from the University's point of view, and has said: "It certainly is satisfactory. We get talented men and women in residence at [Western] Reserve because they're brought by Karamu."\footnote{Interview, May 12, 1961.} Other "special" students are occasionally attached to the Karamu theatre staff, from Bennington or Antioch Colleges, for example, and they receive academic credit on their work assignments, but they are not paid by Karamu.\footnote{Mrs. Jelliffe, interview, May 6, 1961.}
return of these trained students to drama work in a variety of theatres, it must be considered successful. Russell Jelliffe indicated "that the purposes of [the] grant to our Karamu Theatre have been largely fulfilled." And he added: "We have been very pleased with the results." Students have been accepted from Florida A. & M., Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Wilberforce, Lincoln (Missouri), Kentucky State, Oberlin, North Carolina State, Marietta, and others. Many have returned to teach in these same schools; some have gone to Broadway; some to the Cleveland public school system; and two have been retained as Karamu Theatre staff members.  

Karamu's Board of Trustees is an interracial group of forty men and women representing Cleveland's industry, professions, arts, newspapers, and municipal and civic organizations. Not merely a "policy-making group which sits together once a month in an advisory capacity," it asks of its members that they ally themselves actively with a functioning committee or a volunteer project, and acquaint themselves with the ideas and efforts of staff and clientele. Many of them have been quoted publicly

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1 Mr. Jelliffe, letter to Dr. July, Nov. 2, 1960.

2 William T. Brown is a typical example. He served as Karamu scholarship student and Technical Director from 1952-59, while earning his M.A. from Western Reserve, and is now on the Howard University drama faculty.

on their view of, and affection for, Karamu; and this objective: "the creation of good racial patterns in Cleveland,"¹ is stressed by many, in different words, as a key to Karamu. Board member Rey Gillespie puts it this way: Karamu "has meant a new understanding of people, a new concept of human worth and human dignity."² He also emphasized the programming, as many Board members do, when he said: "One of the ironies of creative talent among Negroes is that many who have it never get the opportunity to fully develop it. At Karamu the emphasis has been on participation and training rather than genius."³ Dr. J. J. Nassau admitted to a common misconception:

Like so many other people in our community I thought Karamu was confined to the theater only. I was amazed and delighted to see the many artistic and humanitarian activities that were so efficiently and enthusiastically carried out by the small staff and one hundred or so volunteer workers.⁴

Board member and past President Charles W. White, Judge of Common Pleas Court and a product of Karamu himself, spoke of the meaning of Karamu when he called it: "That dim light in the far future when men will practice what they profess to believe. It is a place where people with


²Ibid. ³CPD, May 17, 1959. ⁴Ibid.
burdened souls and tired hearts can go in and come out feeling free.\textsuperscript{1}

The financing of an organization with an annual administrative budget in excess of $200,000\textsuperscript{2} is a complicated thing.\textsuperscript{3} Total operating costs for Karamu House have risen to that sum from approximately $125,000 in 1951-52. The capital investment of Karamu House is $1,364,000.\textsuperscript{4} Karamu earns more than one-third of its total budget, and as a constituent agency of the Cleveland Welfare Federation, receives another one-third from the annual Community Chest campaign. In addition, it is financed from numerous corporate and individual gifts for special purposes, membership dues, room rentals, the Friends of Karamu, nursery income, and its theatre and dance productions and art products. Karamu Theatre, with a capital investment of $600,000, is designed to be totally self-supporting; i.e., it receives no Community Chest funds. Its annual budget in 1960-61 was $64,000; in the 1951-52 season, it was about $42,000. In all seasons, the highest single factor in the theatre’s budget is staff salaries. Karamu Theatre has yet to meet its

\textsuperscript{1}Jewish Review and Observer, March 13, 1942.

\textsuperscript{2}Mr. Jelliffe, interview, May 16, 1961.

\textsuperscript{3}For details from representative years, see Appendix VII.

\textsuperscript{4}Mr. Jelliffe, interview, July 7, 1961.
budget entirely from box office funds, although it has come close, and the tenacity and dedication of the theatre seem the greater in the light of this fact.

Constant effort to boost the sale of season tickets, and attract the attention of a variety of theatre parties, mark the fund-raising program of the theatre. The sale of one thousand season books is the current goal, which would provide a pre-season $12,000 on which to build toward the annual budget. Theatre parties, "given by women's clubs, church, civic, industrial, professional and educational groups," may vary in number and size from season to season, but they form the solid base of ticket sales for the year.

Benefits have aided Karamu: Libby Holman, the famous blues singer, held benefit programs for Karamu in October, 1951, and April, 1953, giving two concerts each time; the Phil Nelson Trio performed "Concert Vignettes"

1Karamu House, Promise Fulfilled, 1954, 9.

2The growth in number of groups indicates the widening contacts of the theatre, but does not necessarily mean more people. For example, in 1954-55, there were 136 theatre parties, for a total group attendance of 16,629; in 1957-58, groups jumped fifty per cent, to 204, but attendance was almost identical. (Mrs. Virginia Grady, Karamu Registrar, interview, July 7, 1961.) "Groups" are twenty-five or more people, so the total number of groups is not proportionally related to the total attendance.


4Rena Holtkamp, CPD, April 12, 1953.
for Karamu in February, 1952;\textsuperscript{1} the Cleveland Buckeyes and the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro American Baseball League raised $5000 for Karamu at a benefit game in Cleveland's League Park in 1949;\textsuperscript{2} and the Jays Recreational Club sponsored its first Horse Show in 1956 for Karamu's benefit,\textsuperscript{3} and has made it an annual occasion since. Modest funds have been raised through the sale of memorial seats in the 223-seat Proscenium Theatre, at $25.00 each. These purchases have been made by individuals and by club groups,\textsuperscript{4} and have honored the memory of Karamu friends and former participants through small brass plates affixed to the back of the seats.

The Longwood Friends and the Friends of Karamu are both volunteer organizations which help support the work of Karamu. Friends of Karamu is by far the earlier group, now twenty-one years old, and made up of contributors of from $5 to $100 in six types of membership;\textsuperscript{5} some are from out-of-town, and may never even have seen Karamu; many are House members who believe that they receive more from participation in House and Theatre activities than the cost


\textsuperscript{2}C&P, Aug. 6, 1949.

\textsuperscript{3}Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 22, 1956.

\textsuperscript{4}Program, Dec. 19, 1951.

\textsuperscript{5}Program, Oct. 20, 1950.
of their annual Karamu dues, and wish to show their appreciation of that fact. The idea for such a group was Attorney Harold T. Clark's, one of Cleveland's most prominent civic-minded citizens, and its current goal is $5,000. Friends of Karamu receive all issues of Karamuse, invitations to special House functions, and elect two special trustees to the Board.¹

The Longwood Friends is an organization which arose spontaneously in 1959, out of the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. J. Elmer Reed, original members of Playhouse Settlement. They diligently contacted other of these earliest members, and set up their group as a semi-social activity designed to strengthen Karamu House. Their major project to date is the purchase of a $4000 addressograph machine for the Karamu office, which has greatly facilitated its mailings, particularly regular theatre publicity (about 7000 pieces per mailing). Longwood Friends have raised funds through card parties, bake sales, theatre parties, and dances.² The annual dues of almost 4000 Karamu members is a $5,000 item on the operating budget; room rentals provide between $4,000 and $5,000.

The Cleveland theatre scene, against which Karamu Theatre as institution will be viewed, is a rich one.

Brooks Atkinson said: "According to the record, Cleveland is one of the most progressive theatre cities in America."\textsuperscript{1} In 1954, a Cleveland critic, the late Omar Ranney, presented an impressive list of statistics on the local live theatre record: eighty-two productions for the 1953-54 season, by only seven organizations. (The great number of the city's community theatres—well over forty in the greater Cleveland area currently\textsuperscript{2}—were not included.) Of this number, there were seventy-five different shows: twenty-five comedies, twenty-four dramas, twenty-three musicals, and three miscellaneous. Ranney judged that "in musicals particularly . . . Cleveland is far ahead of any other city outside of New York."\textsuperscript{3}

Even in a theatre-rich city, Karamu stands out. Atkinson, while praising the city, had this to say about the theatre:

[It] has become a theatrical institution with trained, interesting, and original actors and a tradition that is very perceptible to a theatregoer who sees a Karamu performance for the first time. The work is serious in its point of view, genuinely artistic in quality, and vital in spirit. It can stand on its own feet as a valid interpretation of plays of recognized merit.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{N. Y. Times}, Dec. 13, 1949.
\textsuperscript{2} Joseph Hudson, \textit{KYW} broadcast, April 30, 1961.
\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Press}, Nov. 30, 1954.
On the assumption that those Cleveland drama critics who have attended Karamu Theatre productions with some regularity would also have some observations to make, brief questionnaires were circulated which would permit them to assess Karamu's current "image," its progress over the years, and its successes and failures. The following section represents a digest of their views.

Harlowe Hoyt's dominant impression of Karamu is one of its "uniqueness." Pullen, too, calls it unique, describing it as "more interested in the arts and humanities" than other Cleveland groups, more "daringly experimental than the Cleveland Playhouse," and courageous in producing "worthwhile and progressive plays" and "out-of-the-ordinary social dramas and comedies." Anderson stresses the

1The questionnaires from the critics were returned to this writer as follows (all dates in 1961): Harlowe Hoyt, April 18; Valena Minor Williams, June 5; Arthur Spaeth, June 27; Stan Anderson, July 2; and Glenn C. Pullen, July 13. Where specific quotations are made, they come from the questionnaires (unless otherwise noted), and there will be no footnoting.

2Harlowe Hoyt, the author of Town Hall Tonight, has been drama critic for several papers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is currently Drama Editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. His theatre activity includes playwriting, acting, directing, publicity, management, and lecturer on the drama. He describes himself as "the oldest dramatic critic still functioning in the U.S."

3Glenn Pullen, theatrical columnist and associate drama critic of the Plain Dealer, joined the paper in 1925 as William McDermott's assistant. He has a jazz music background as well as college and little theatre experience. In addition to free-lance writing for The N. Y. Times and other out-of-town papers, he is the Cleveland correspondent for both New York and Hollywood Variety.

4Stan Anderson served as actor, playreader, and
"imagination" he finds at Karamu, notably in the direction which, he notes, often uses experimental theatre techniques to cope with strict budgetary limitations and amateur or semi-pro actors. Spaeth's view is one of Karamu's "vital, 'free,'" nature—free from professional theatre's taboos and limitations, as well as off-Broadway's "affectedly 'arty' over-reachings." He also echoes Anderson's point, that at Karamu "imagination, invention, and adaptation . . . make up for lack of financial resource." Elsewhere, Spaeth has praised Karamu's use of originals and experimental plays, as well as giving "fresh slant to scripts the professional theatre has tried and failed with, or had so little faith in, it never sent them out on the road."^2 Mrs. Williams^3

playwriting instructor at the Cleveland Playhouse from 1935-42. He was an Instructor of Speech and Drama Production at Kenyon College. For the past nineteen years, he has been associated with the Cleveland Press, as book reviewer, radio-TV critic, and, for the past several years, as drama critic.

^1 Arthur Spaeth, currently drama critic for the Cleveland Heights Sun-Press, served in that capacity for the Cleveland News for twenty-eight years. He was also city editor of the News, and has been a contributing writer to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Cincinnati Enquirer, Indianapolis News, Theatre Arts, and other theatrical publications.


^3 Mrs. Valena Minor Williams, one of Cleveland's leading Negro women, is currently Women's Director of Radio Station WABQ. She has been a play reviewer since 1943 for the Call and Post, the Cleveland Courier, and, now, for WABQ where she has a prizewinning daily program. A graduate of Bennett College, North Carolina, Mrs. Williams has done graduate work at Western Reserve University and Boston University.
makes the same point, that Karamu features "new ideas"—"offbeat, unusual, theatrical," and not imitations of Broadway. All of them note and "accept" the interracial nature of Karamu. Spaeth declares Karamu original "in a national theatre that gives lip service to equal opportunity but rarely the practice." Hoyt notes merely that "its plays are unusual in having mixed casts," and Anderson suggests that the theatre possesses the requisite powers of imagination to succeed with its policy of using casts of colored and white performers. Pullen states that Karamu's "work in interracial themes, promoting tolerance and understanding of . . . sociological problems, is intensely valuable to Greater Cleveland."

Spaeth flatly states that Karamu "is at the top level of Cleveland theatre." Hoyt praises it less emphatically: "Its standard is the highest among little theatre groups." Anderson feels it possible to rank it "with most non-commercial theatres either on a local or a national level," because it fulfills what he calls "the challenge of special needs under unique limitations." Pullen says "it would be unfair or misleading to compare it to community theatres" in Cleveland or elsewhere, because of its uniqueness, but "in the field of ethnic plays," Karamu is the "most brilliant and perhaps the most outstanding ensemble of its kind in the nation"; and he adduces the high regard of New York playwrights and producers as corroboration.
Valena Williams compares it favorably with professional theatre, but faults the chorus work (singing and dancing) in the musicals. She repeated a widely held opinion that some of the performances in Karamu's A RAISIN IN THE SUN were superior to the professional company.

A "critic's-eye-view" of Karamu's growth by Arthur Spaeth defines three stages of change: 1) the vital, spirited, earthy Negro plays of the Central Avenue days; 2) the experimentation with the classics, "whether Shakespeare, Wilder, or what have you"; and 3) the current program, which he describes as a crystallization of the experimentation, in productions that have a scope and a vitality "that is alien to the professional theatre where slickness and overproduction have taken the heart out of art."

He cannot imagine Karamu "past its peak," and feels it will continue to exercise "happy voodoo" in overcoming the challenges it faces. Valena Williams feels that only the facilities have improved, but that only the facilities needed it—for Karamu has been consistently successful—("whether the box office receipts say so or not," she asserts) in its efforts to offer audience and participants an antidote to the commercial theatre. Anderson and Hoyt see steady progress; the latter "in every way," though he

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1 The questionnaire included this phrase in one question.
speaks only of the plant and the greater "extent of the proceedings." Anderson cites Karamu's "positive attitude" toward new scripts (PENCIL OF GOD, A WREATH FOR UDOMO) and its willingness to experiment with established ones (JAMAICA), and calls this "progress" because the theatre has not succumbed to the lesser standards around it. Pullen, like Spaeth, remembers well the Central Avenue days and plays, and the Gilpin group's "imaginative, earthy performances in unique folk plays." Some "static and turbulent eras" followed when the theatre became "too arty and imitative" and strayed to "alien" themes, but Pullen observes that such "errors in judgment in picking vehicles, however, are fortunately few."

Valena Williams states: "Frankly, I have never seen a failure at Karamu .... The goal is there, and the people measure up, and the direction follows through." She notes that operas don't do well, "but they succeed"; and the fact that she then points to Victoria Harrison and Leesa (Elizabeth) Foster (two Karamu singers who have had success in European opera\textsuperscript{1}) as examples—"They couldn't have made it without Karamu"—suggests that she has "never seen a failure" because the growth in individual talents achieved by every production make them all "successes"! Anderson feels that Karamu has had success in developing an unusually harmonious

\textsuperscript{1}Below, 466-67, 473.
relationship with their audiences, which "can be felt during a performance." He calls this asset "two-way empathy," and urges the fortunate performers to guard it carefully. Spaeth observes conspicuous successes in the area of "mystical drama" (no examples given\(^1\)) in the current era, and in the Negro plays (LITTLE HAM) of the earlier days. Pullen declares that Karamu "particularly shines in the vivid imagery of its productions," managing to "capture the heart and essence of a play they like with a vitality and vividness that compensate for ragged edges in individual performances." It has an "admirable program" of giving students both a "basic background in the fine arts and a driving desire to conquer them." Though he mentions no specific plays, he notes that many of the in-the-round productions have been "resourcefully staged" and, because of their "simplicity in pattern" (which he considers "the keynote of real artistry"), possess more "imaginative integrity" than some of the Proscenium Theatre offerings.

As to Karamu's future course, Hoyt says, simply: "Continue as you have." Fullen, in some detail, urges an even wider scope of play selection in the future, though he cautions against "plays that are overly obtuse or overloaded with freakish symbolism." He suggests "European classic

\(^1\)He is surely referring to THE SIGN OF JONAH, for one.
folk plays that could be adapted or streamlined," and which carry a double dividend: they illustrate the fact that "racial bigotry is an age-old problem," and their production would provide the community with "a wider appreciation" of this area of dramatic literature. Anderson makes two suggestions: one, like Pullen's, that the theatre could capitalize on that "two-way empathy" by extending even further its spirit of venturing and origination in play selection; and two, that it utilize to a greater degree than at present in such experimentation, Karamu's other arts and crafts areas. Spaeth says Karamu's "failures" have been limited "to the occasional trite comedy and/or musical," and believes the theatre is "at the mercy of the playwrights--or the paucity of good ones." Pullen criticizes occasional excessive "razzle-dazzle trickery" in staging, and asks whether the Proscenium Theatre attractions "have an insidious magic in charming directors into festooning them with too many flamboyant, grease-painted decorations" (again, his preference for "simplicity"). He states flatly: "An over-produced show is comparable to an over-orchestrated symphony piece in which the listeners can not see the trees for the forest." Spaeth's chief wish for the future, based on his deep nostalgia for Karamu's past, is a revival of the Negro shows of yesteryear: "I realize that fine drama is universal, but there is a fine drama that is indigenous." He suggests the invitation of a big-name Negro performer
(Poitier, Belafonte) as theatre guest star—though he is aware of the financial problem this represents—for "the future [Karamu's] isn't so much in upgrading its performances, but in attracting a wider audience to see them." Valena Williams feels that "there should be more Negro support of Karamu," and notes that the unwillingness to affiliate and support the institution on the part of some prominent, successful Negroes, is attributable to a kind of "settlement house stigma." Happily, she believes, this feeling is declining.

The goodwill of the critics toward Karamu is apparent, whether they speak of its quality as a producing theatre ("Internationally recognized"—Spaeth; "high batting average in enterprising, thoughtful entertainment over the years"—Fullen; "constantly reliable incubator for talent"—Anderson\(^1\)) or as a social agency ("the greatest aid to the solution of the segregation problem"—Hoyt).

It is evident from all the foregoing that the critics, as a group, have a good understanding of the challenges facing the institution, and its problems, and share a genuine concern for Karamu and its future. This statement by Spaeth symbolizes this concern, as he sadly notes the world of the theatre's occasional neglect by audiences. Calling Karamu a "temple of the drama," he writes: that its "high and

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\(^1\)Press, Dec. 30, 1957.
lively art . . . add[s] to our way of life is pretty generally conceded and, alas, too often taken for granted. Art nourishes on audience, and none more so than that of the theatre.¹

The "image" of Karamu Theatre and its local community does not depend upon critics' reviews of its performances, however, for theatre staff and personnel meet that community with frequency, "inside" Karamu through its range of programming, of course, but also "outside," in a variety of ways. In the 1957-58 season, for example, the staff members and the Directors made 110 speeches to a total audience of 9,099; and the next season, 194 speeches to 28,625 people. That same year, eight House groups totaling 411 members, made forty-four separate appearances before 13,661 people.² Also, Karamu actors, as individuals, have been active in many Cleveland theatres, who naturally and automatically turn to Karamu Theatre when they need performers, particularly Negro ones. The record is a long one, with appearances by actors, singers, and dancers at the Cleveland Playhouse, Cain Park, Western Reserve, Musi-
carnival, Lakewood Little Theatre, Theatre Cleveland, Penin-
sula Summer Playhouse, Kenley Productions at Warren, Ohio, Chagrin Valley Playhouse, and other amateur and professional

¹News, Nov. 15, 1952.

²Mrs. Virginia Grady, interview, July 7, 1961. As Karamu Registrar, Mrs. Grady is in charge of House attendance records, and compiles statistics for Karamu and the Cleveland Welfare Federation.
theatres. At the time of Ethel Waters' appearance at Cleveland's downtown Hanna Theatre in MEMBER OF THE WEDDING, Karamu's Zelma George was appearing in THE CONSUL for the Cleveland Playhouse. William McDermott called attention to the fact that, possibly for the first time, "the stars in two current plays are members of the Negro race," and observed that the success of these ladies in dramatic parts Reflects Change In Times. In December, 1960, Benno Frank directed Stravinsky's THE SOLDIER'S TALE at Severance Hall in cooperation with Robert Shaw, Associate Conductor of the Cleveland Symphony. Music was by members of the orchestra, and the cast was from the Cleveland Playhouse and Karamu Theatre; the concert was a repetition of the one given in 1958.

The cumulative record of local radio and television appearances also attests to the frequent community contacts of Karamu. In 1957-58, 156 Karamu members participated in radio and television programs, and the next year there were 189. Some were publicity appearances in connection with current productions, but there were many programs of music, dance, drama, and opera, televised from Karamu as well as

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1CPD, March 7, 1952. (Headline.)
from the radio and television studios.\(^1\) The Karamu story was shown to the country on NBC's famous Home Show, in July, 1954, with scenes from the art studio, the theatre, the nursery, and a variety of House social activities. The Plain Dealer approved:

If it never accomplished another thing, Karamu already has done much to give the lie to vicious Soviet propaganda about our racial practices and policies. At Karamu, American life can truthfully be observed in all its balance and good sense. We believe the country as a whole is lucky to meet Karamu.\(^2\)

Two years later, CBS Television also met Karamu on their Let's Take a Trip program,\(^3\) and the print of that show has been shown by Karamu on several occasions since as an introduction to the House for visitors and guests.

Visitors to Karamu often ask about performers who have "become famous," or who have "made it" in the professional world, implying that this is either the aim or the way to measure the institution. Although Karamu values the average talent equally with the rare one, it has its share of "graduates" who have used the arts vocationally, and

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\(^1\)For example, the Karamu chorus from AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS broadcast on WTMX during a run (Press, Dec. 20, 1953); "the excellent Karamu Dancers" have performed on WEWS-TV (Press, Feb. 14, 1948); Gerald Marans' production of Torrence's RIDER OF DREAMS was done on WEWS-TV (Press, Aug. 8, 1949); and COSI FAN TUTTE was the subject of a WEWS remote telecast in 1956.

\(^2\)July 8, 1954.  \(^3\)Press, April 27, 1956.
whose work—by its nature—gets publicity. Clayton Corbin, in the cast of Broadway's TOYS IN THE ATTIC, is a good, recent example of the Karamu actor who sought and found a measure of success in the professional theatre. He has played in numerous off-Broadway shows, television, and several Broadway shows, and often returned to Karamu between professional engagements to continue his training. In a recent interview,¹ he praised the Karamu staff for their patience with his earlier, less-disciplined behavior, and for the help and training they gave him. He says that he has "seen people spend $600 for a training course of a given number of weeks that doesn't give them one-third of what an actor can obtain for a $1.50 yearly membership card at the Karamu." He notes caustically that even within the rigid casting situation for Negroes in New York, there is further type-casting—"You are either considered too light or too dark"—and bemoans the neglect of makeup. He concludes: "Broadway is still so far behind Karamu. Maybe some day it will catch up."

Melvin Stewart, performer in many Karamu productions, has been seen recently in Broadway's THE CONNECTION, and THE HOSTAGE,² and he captured the role of Jesse B. Simple in

²CPD, Nov. 27, 1960. His replacement in the role of Sam in THE CONNECTION was another Karamu alumnus, Leonard Parker, who says "his diverse acting experience at Karamu equipped him for the job." (CPD, June 25, 1961.) John McCurry, also of Karamu, has also played the role.
the New York premiere of Langston Hughes' SIMPLY HEAVENLY, coming in ahead of another Karamu veteran, Nolan Bell. Stewart, like Corbin, "gives great credit to Russell and Rowena Jelliffe." Isabelle Cooley, who played the lead in ANNA LUCASTA in New York, "attributes much of her success to Russell Jelliffe ... who trained and encouraged her." Miss Cooley has worked professionally in Europe and Hollywood films, as well as on Broadway. Ivan Dixon, former Karamu scholarship student, has been in numerous on- and off-Broadway plays, and most recently re-created his stage role of the African student in the film of A RAISIN IN THE SUN. John Marriott, "our most successful professional," Frances Williams, Royce Wallace, prominent choreographer Walter Nicks, and Charles Moore are some of the older performers the Jelliffes mention as "graduates to professional theatre."

The interest of New York producers and casting directors helps to define Karamu's "image" nationally. 

Theatre Arts has reported on their scouting of Karamu players

1Anderson, Press, Sept. 12, 1957.
2CPD, Nov. 8, 1947.
5Above, Ch. V, 277, n. 2. 6Interview, July 9, 1961.
and productions for shows like FREE AND EASY, PORGY AND BESS, SHOWBOAT, the Katherine Dunham Dancers, and so on.\(^1\) Billy Rose used six Karamu artists in his original production of CARMEN JONES;\(^2\) Milt Widder reported on seventeen professionally employed in 1946;\(^3\) Jack Warfel wrote that "twenty actors from Karamu Theatre are now on Broadway or in Hollywood" in 1948, and he lists both dramas and musicals, adding that several actors are in London productions and professional dance and ballet troupes.\(^4\) No single production has given more prominence to more Karamu performers than PORGY AND BESS. In 1952, when the show's national tour began, Karamu performers Sherman Sneed, Howard Roberts, and Leesa Foster were selected for the roles of Porgy, Robin, and Bess, respectively.\(^5\) Before the opera reached Broadway, John McCurry was added (as Crown),\(^6\) and this foursome was feted by Karamu groups when they toured the Gershwin show to Cleveland,\(^7\) after their New York success. The quartet was with the famous State Department's touring company, which played in many countries all over the world,

\(^1\)Spaeth, "Theatre, Cleveland," 77.
\(^2\)Ebony, III, No. 12 (Oct., 1948).
\(^5\)Press, March 22 and March 26, 1952.
\(^6\)Press, Ranney, March 11, 1953.
\(^7\)CPD, May 2, May 6, and May 10, 1954.
including the Soviet Union. Leesa Foster, recently returned from Europe, was performing in Karamu's 1960-61 revival of STREET SCENE, when she was called to New York by Producer Jean Dalrymple for a two-week engagement as Bess, opposite William Warfield's Porgy in the recent City Center revival. Karamu singers Gwendolyn Walters and Victoria Harrison were also in the cast.

The unique work of Karamu in the opera field was featured at the third annual Central Opera Service Conference, in New York, when Benno Frank and a small group of Karamu performers staged scenes from Bloch's MACBETH, in a demonstration of arena-style rehearsal techniques and methods. This appearance helped inform singers nationally about Karamu's program, and demonstrates its uniqueness as the only vehicle whereby "Negro graduates of music schools and universities throughout the country ... [can] gain actual performing experience in musical and opera repertory." Karamu has frequent and extensive international contacts, too, and members and staff have the opportunity of meeting hundreds of foreign visitors each year. In 1952,

2Pullen, CPD, May 2, 1961.
3Program of the Conference, March 29 and 30, 1957.
three hundred foreigners from fifty countries visited the House;\textsuperscript{1} and in the 1957-58 season, that figure jumped to 546.\textsuperscript{2} They came at the recommendation of the United States Department of State, UNESCO, the Institute of International Education, and the Council on World Affairs and, in 1958-59, they represented forty-eight countries.\textsuperscript{3} The Karamu guest books read like an international Who's Who: cultural teams from NATO;\textsuperscript{4} the Managing Director of the Greek National Theatre;\textsuperscript{5} Dr. Ralph Bunche, the sister of India's Nehru, an Egyptian Marshall Plan team;\textsuperscript{6} Mr. and Mrs. Henry Luce, the Indonesian Ambassador;\textsuperscript{7} a large Soviet group (who had dinner with a Karamu group, and saw PIPE DREAM afterwards);\textsuperscript{8} a small delegation of Soviet women doctors;\textsuperscript{9} the Ambassador of Ghana;\textsuperscript{10} and many others. One annual event, which is eagerly anticipated by Karamu because of the pleasure and stimulation it brings, is the visit of a large delegation from the Cleveland International Program for Youth Leaders

\textsuperscript{1}CPD, April 28, 1958.
\textsuperscript{2}Karamu House Statistical Picture, 1957-58.
\textsuperscript{3}Karamu Statistical Analysis, 1958-59.
\textsuperscript{4}CPD, May 7, 1955.
\textsuperscript{5}CPD, Oct. 4, 1952.
\textsuperscript{6}CPD, Oct. 26, 1957.
\textsuperscript{7}CPD, Oct. 4, 1952.
\textsuperscript{8}Karamuse, Sept., 1951.
\textsuperscript{9}Karamuse, June, 1951.
\textsuperscript{10}Focus, 1960 (Cleveland annual).
and Social Workers. This pioneer group was formed in 1956 by its current director, Henry B. Ollendorff, and brought a group of twenty-six Germans to Cleveland for a tour-and-work term. Members of the program are professional youth workers or social workers who this year represent as many as twenty-two countries, and are eighty-three in number. They visit important Cleveland social and cultural institutions, and are then given a variety of social work assignments in Cleveland, other Ohio cities, and surrounding states. Many of them return to Karamu for a second or third visit, individually, after they complete their assignments, when they gather in Cleveland preparatory to their return home.¹

Whether they are youth leaders, diplomats, businessmen, artists, musicians, theatre officials, engineers, students, or journalists—the foreign visitors to Karamu are capable of influencing public opinion in their homelands. To them, Karamu attempts to supply three "important ideas for export":² 1) Karamu as an integrated, democratic "society," where brotherhood is lived, not preached about, and which may serve as an antidote to the distorted impression many foreigners have of our racial policies;³ 2) a

¹Henry B. Ollendorff, interview, July 8, 1961.
²Karamu House, Promise Fulfilled, 1954, 17.
³"A night in the Karamu Theatre here is the U. S. State Department's recipe to counteract bad publicity abroad
brighter view of American cultural standards than the one given by most of our exported movies; and 3) the successful existence of a cultural institution in no way state-supported or controlled, but rather maintained privately, by a great many individuals who believe in a better community.¹

From these foreign visitors come invitations abroad, and Karamu has received many. Arthur Spaeth wrote of Karamu being "wooed again and again by London's Old Vic and the international festivals of Edinburgh, Zurich, and Stockholm."² A visiting Scottish journalist declared: "Karamu from incidents like Little Rock . . . Asians are surprised and Russians are amazed when they see white and Negro actors working side by side, with the color bar completely removed." (Morris Duff, Toronto Daily Star, Jan. 11, 1958.)

¹One German visitor to the United States, Dietrich Mende, wrote a serious fifty-one page diary on his six weeks here, and printed it in Germany. Of his brief stay at Karamu, he wrote of the high quality of the performances, the uniqueness of the after-theatre "coffee hour" for audience and cast, of how impressed he was with the volunteer backbone of the institution, what it represents, and its activities. But the most important thing, perhaps, is his recognition of what he felt the Karamu spirit to be: one of "happiness and selfless devotion . . . a striking example of what genuine Christian spirit can still achieve in this age" (28); and his relating this recognition to his visit to Harlem, which he explored in the "going to a show--or circus--spirit," because Negroes were so new and exotic for him. He concludes by saying: "I left the Karamu Theatre with deep gratitude for the revelation of a work which inspires awe and happiness, and it was on this evening that I felt ashamed for my expedition to Harlem three weeks before." (Six Weeks in America, [Frankfurt/Main: Dietrich Mende, 1954], 29.)

²"Theatre, Cleveland," 77.
has been twice invited to send actors to Scotland to perform their plays at the Edinburgh Festival of Music and Drama.\textsuperscript{1} Karamu Theatre has never appeared at any of these festivals, and the history of the Zurich invitation illustrates the problems involved. In the late fall of 1949, Dr. Kurt Hirschfeld, co-Director of the Zurich Neue Schauspielhaus, visited Karamu—then in the process of preparing for the opening of the new theatre building—and attended play rehearsals. Convinced that Karamu would "give a clear picture of intention and efforts of American theatre to the European public," he invited them to participate in the June, 1950 International Theatre Festival at Zurich, to which the Old Vic, Comedie Francaise, Milan Theatre, and Moscow Art Theatre had all been invited.\textsuperscript{2} Russell Jelliffe cabled a tentative acceptance,\textsuperscript{3} though he recognized two key problems: loss of pay and possible loss of jobs by the twenty or so performers who might make the trip,\textsuperscript{4} and the knowledge that though the Festival would meet the troupe's expenses while in Zurich, funds for round-trip transportation were lacking.\textsuperscript{5} Negotiations with the State Department for support, private foundation funds, and individual solicitations--

\textsuperscript{1}Press, Nov. 15, 1957. \textsuperscript{2}CPD, Jan. 5, 1950.  
\textsuperscript{5}Sam Zolotow, N. Y. Times, Feb. 17, 1950.
all fell through, and with them, the trip. Rowena Jelliffe noted that this took place in the earliest days of the new building, "when we were just struggling to get money ... and to keep our program going." She indicates that the Karamu Dancers have had invitations to go to West Africa, but that the problems of transportation and employment of personnel are too difficult to overcome. Government assistance, at least in the past, may have been withheld by the prejudice on the part of some individuals against sending a mixed group abroad, despite the obvious propaganda effects of such a visit.¹ Rowena Jelliffe also cautions that not all of the inquiries from foreign festivals to Karamu represent firm invitations, despite the rumors and desires which quickly make them seem so.² For example, representatives of West Germany's Federation of Labor, in the United States at the State Department's invitation, saw CAROUSEL at Karamu, and promised to send an official offer inviting the production to tour Germany under the auspices of the German Labor Party.³ Though the report of this caused a good deal of excitement among Karamu members, no official invitation ever came.

Although no Karamu troupes have gone abroad, a number of individuals have "represented" Karamu, officially

and unofficially, in numerous foreign countries. Leesa Foster, who was in the PORGY AND BESS company, has lived for several years in Europe, recorded, and soloed in concert and opera in several countries since the famous tour. She wrote from Milan, where she sang the lead in AIDA at La Scala:¹ "It could not have been but for Karamu, and the wonderful opportunity it afforded me and so many others to completely exercise our talents. Thanks."² Victoria Harrison, Karamu singer, was the winner of the American Opera auditions, and earned a season's coaching in Italy as her award.³ William Ray, former Oberlin College Conservatory of Music student and Karamu member, has had great success abroad in two ways, according to Rowena Jelliffe: in the assistance he has given to other American Negro singers who have gone abroad for training, and artistically and personally. In 1955, assisted by Benno Frank's European contacts, he sang Melchior in AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS in Vienna, in a three-week State Department-sponsored run;⁴ he has appeared in his Karamu-trained roles as Amonasro and Rossini's Figaro;⁵ and he has recently sung the lead role

¹Widder, Press, June 24, 1960.
²Postcard to Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe, 1957. (Personal files.)
⁵Linda Kraus, "Opera at Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio," unpublished article [1961]. Mrs. Kraus is a reviewer and associate editor for the Cleveland weekly guide, Fine Arts.
of Oberon in the newest Benjamin Britten opera, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, premiered in Berlin.¹

Both of Karamu's directors have helped take the idea of Karamu abroad: the writer to Jamaica and Benno Frank to Germany. In 1957, I was selected as United States Drama Specialist by the American State Department, and sent to Jamaica for a three-month tour of duty, at the request of Jamaican drama organizations. There, I visited all of the island's drama groups, some twenty-five, and worked with them on their current productions, generally one-act plays they were preparing for the country-wide, annual Adult Drama Festival, to be held in Kingston's Ward Theatre. I also made a series of Drama Week-ends, lecturing on the theatre, and often describing Karamu's program and showing slides of its productions. I taught at the University College of the West Indies, in their Creative Arts Summer School, staged two plays,² and served as Public Commentator for the week-long Festival. I have twice been invited to return, and have received unofficial inquiries concerning a similar assignment in Turkey.

Benno Frank's month-long German tour was made at the

¹Harris, loc. cit., 4.

²THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE at the Ward Theatre, and THE MAN WHO MARRIED A DUMB WIFE at the University. The latter was an outdoor production, the first arena-style play given in Jamaica.
request of the German government. He was a member of a small delegation of prominent Americans (Glenn Hughes, Brooks Atkinson, Walter Gropius, et al) who were invited to spend September, 1960, observing and evaluating the state of the arts in Germany since the war. Frank had been Chief of Cultural Affairs for the American Military Government in Germany and was thus able to witness the progress of much that he had initiated in the post-war period. While in Germany, he addressed the International Theatre Festival in Berlin, and part of his talk concerned Karamu Theatre.¹

The institutional image of the Karamu Theatre has shifted as the drama program has become more substantially interracial. This shift was in the direction of reflecting the increased participation of a "new" Negro in the more integrated mainstream of American society in the past fifteen years, since the war. Karamu Theatre has helped disseminate the concept of this "new" Negro in important ways. Through a conscious philosophy of play selection, certain ideas and attitudes have been regularly available to the personnel of Karamu, and through them, to their audiences in the community-at-large, providing significant two-way "windows." Musicals like the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, AMAHL, and LOST IN THE STARS "have a message to convey which

¹CPD, Aug. 22, 1960.
we [Karamu] are interested in."¹ Plays like TAKE A GIANT
STEP, A WREATH FOR UDOMO, and A RAISIN IN THE SUN deal
seriously with the American and African Negro, and his role
on the local and world levels.

Karamu also fulfills this institutional responsi-
bility because it has succeeded as a training ground, and
the local, national, and international communities use
"successful" Karamu personnel in a variety of ways which
facilitate the "outward" progress of this "new" Negro as
citizen and artist. And Karamu helps to relate the Negro
minority more successfully to a majority America in the "old,"
original way: through the strengthening of the individual
himself, through the stimulation of his "creative ventur-
ing, the beginning of intellectual curiosity"--his arrival
at a moment, where Life "may have taken a turning and may
never again be common-place."²

* * * * *

The boys and girls out here are taking a great
interest in dramatics and we have turned up some
real talent, ... and we are planning to stage
other "theatricals" if our maiden effort is en-
couraging.³

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, quoted in Larry Friedman, CPD, March
5, 1961.

²Mrs. Jelliffe, speech, St. Louis People's Art Center,
March 4, 1954.

³CPD, Feb. 16, 1922.
Thus spoke Russell W. Jelliffe before the first production of the newly-named Gilpin Players of the Playhouse Settlement, almost forty years ago. His tentative tone is, in part, explained by the shift in programming just instituted by the Jelliffes at Playhouse Settlement, a shift which put them squarely on the road to education through the arts. As Mr. Jelliffe observed, some years later: "If we had continued along the lines we started, our young men and women today would have no greater problems than whether their basketball sweaters should be blue and gold or red and black."¹

To anyone reading this history, the significant role of Russell and Rowena Jelliffe should be clear. It is almost superfluous to acknowledge it as a Karamu "secret of success." The inescapable fact of Karamu's uniqueness places a high premium on the contribution of these two people. With the kind of hard-working leadership they offered and the philosophy they held and evolved, Karamu succeeded, though not without besetting dilemmas, and the everpresent threat of financial extinction; without such leadership, or with a philosophy of less integrity and conviction, no organization--so constituted--could hope to exist, even if it were free from crisis and fiscally secure.

The approach to the building of Karamu was a serious

¹Randall, CPD, June 16, 1940.
one, carried out with devotion, even in the face of critics who derided both the arts and the Negro's relation to them. The effort itself arose in a period of cultural flowering, when seriousness with regard to the arts was a national characteristic; the success may in large part have sprung from Karamu's birth "at a time when theatre was taken seriously in this country." An orientation toward the group characterized Karamu in its formative years, and the Jelliffes consider that "a great strength as opposed to being production-centered." Group-centeredness meant time and effort spent in the indoctrination of values; and it meant the "privilege," as Rowena Jelliffe puts it, of slow growth—and private growth, too—both of which permitted knowledge of people, as well as of the task, to develop. These were seminal years, of which Rowena Jelliffe believes: "Without that solid kind of rootage, we would perhaps not be surviving today." Group-centeredness instead of production-centeredness resulted in a sense of affiliation and loyalty, as the membership sensed and understood the greater, overriding concern: the use of the arts, not as end alone, but as means—and as end, if inclination and talent make that possible.

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2 Interview, May 6, 1961. 3 Ibid.
4 WJMO interview, May 21, 1961.
The arts-education philosophy was never diminished in the face of pressing "social work" demands. Play production won out over pot-holders, and this victory led to the establishment of high standards—"professional" standards, some would call them—not in disregard of human growth, but because "you never in the wide world would do good social work with poor art . . . . If you lower your standards, you're not really doing the best possible education, and I assume that's what you mean by social work."¹ (Italics mine.)

Karamu's great sense of dedication to what might loosely be called the "arts center with the settlement house touch," permitted it to take risks in its programming, to move with boldness beyond safe, popular levels, since fulfillment and education were more important than material success. This kind of conviction and assurance are possible in an institution with continuity and a firm point of view, and it is precisely the lack of these things that may be enfeebling the American theatre. As Howard Taubman, drama critic of the New York Times, has written:

How many producers and producing combinations in New York's theatre have a point of view beyond a desire to be in show business and to make a dollar? How many of these can afford to indulge a consistent taste and philosophy without compromise.²

²Sept. 11, 1960.
The fundamental soundness and rightness of the core concept must be assumed, or the body of moral, financial, press, and public support would surely not have been forthcoming, and would not have continued for Karamu. The recognition of the spiritual excellence in the Karamu idea has brought these various streams of assistance into confluence, has created a present climate of outspoken sympathy with the institution’s aims, from the theatre audiences with their "two-way empathy" for the productions; to Frederick O’Neal’s belief that a "Karamu" in Harlem would be an excellent prospect that would "raise the cultural level of the community";¹ to a staff and Board of Trustees and executives who have "very carefully planned and conceived, very patiently and slowly evolved, very completely understood and embraced" the "new alignments, new ideas, new understanding and tolerance" which Karamu provides;² to Louis Seltzer’s educated guess that without Karamu, there would have been race riots in Cleveland.³

There are things which Karamu does today that might be considered smart showmanship, but they arose from a definite philosophy; the only so-called "smart showmanship"

¹ *Amsterdam News* [New York], Sept. 9, 1959.
lies in having retained these things today. Karamu seeks to fulfill human potential and to integrate its members with their community, and one obvious way has been through success in the arts. A less obvious way, but one that represents Karamu in microcosm and will stand as a symbolic example of this kind of community relations, is the coffee hour. Begun in 1927, with their acquisition of a permanent theatre, the tradition of meeting the audience socially is one Karamu performers have always followed. It means the audience can share with the actors and crews their pleasure in the evening's work, one of the important rewards for any community theatre cast; it means a social experience as well as a theatre experience, and for some in the audience, an early and pleasant interracial encounter; it means an opportunity to ask questions and get answers; and it frequently leads to subsequent contacts with Karamu, from merely touring the building or seeing the current art exhibit in the spaces where refreshments are served, to possible membership in one or another Karamu department. The macrocosm of Karamu's cooperative relationships is, perhaps, best described by this statement of purpose:

To maintain a functioning relationship with other educational, social, cultural and civic agencies in the community and the nation, meshing its programs with them without duplicating such services but adding another dimension and profiting through them, at the same time retaining its own identity.¹

¹Goals and Objectives of Karamu House, Karamu House mimeographed publication, Sept. 15, 1960, 2.
The interdepartmental relationships at Karamu enrich the program far beyond the capacity of any single area there. Even the practical assistance one department may expect and receive from another, and the multiplicity of activities made possible by the existence of such a variety of programs, do not represent the total value of Karamu's organizational makeup. There is an added factor which springs from these resources: the creation, development, and maintenance of an atmosphere conducive to creativity and hospitable to culture. Thus, art activity seems natural at Karamu, and the widest possible membership can more easily be attracted. But theatre has been "the force which has vitalized it all": "Theatre has been the meeting point, not only for the various art forms which form the backbone of the Karamu House program, but of the life experiences and interests of its participants."¹

Many believe that the key "secret of success" of Karamu lies in the Negro himself. A whole reservoir of capability—disregarded, if not actually shunned, by America for decades—is tapped by a program like Karamu's, and that aptitude, with encouragement and training, has become talent. Whatever the Negro's inherent facilities and capacities, he found an outlet for them at Karamu, and if—as one observer saw it—"nowadays the art, so to speak,

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, "Karamu: 'Place of Enjoyment,'" 15.
wags the welfare— it is because genuine excellence and a felicity of performance have often arisen out of mere aptness and readiness. There is no escaping the fact that "our theatre has had the tremendous enrichment of the Negro people. I suppose we will have to be a whole lot older than we are now, to know how great a factor that means." Often overlooked is the more practical matter of potential support from the neglected Negro audience, largely untapped by the general theatre world. Karamu has slowly, but with sureness, been cultivating an increasing consciousness of theatre among all classes of Negroes. Wilhelmina Roberson, Director of Public Relations, came to Karamu in 1952 and has been closer than any staff member to the Cleveland public and ticket sales and development of theatre parties. She says that Negroes were generally "not very theatre conscious in 1952," at which time they formed twenty-five percent of Karamu's audience, attending mostly as individuals, rather than in groups. Today, Miss Roberson reports a one hundred per cent increase, "with a high rise in groups," more Negro season ticket subscribers, greater latitude in Negroes' preference in types of productions, and a broader cross-section of the Negro community attracted to theatre.

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1Fritchey, loc. cit.
3Interview, July 6, 1961.
A corollary to this belief in the consequence of the Negro's contribution to Karamu, is in the institution's interracial composition. It is not accurate to call Karamu a Negro theatre, and a great measure of its influence and excitement theatrically, and of its uniqueness and importance socially, is in its true interracialness. "Karamu stands as a place where, for a period of forty-five years, integration has been practiced and no great disaster has befallen the community which supported it. Instead it has gained increased prestige on the basis of its ideology and its acceptance." Karamu's success as an interracial organization should be a matter of great interest to community centers and other theatres, in these times, all across the country.

But success, to be retained, must be won over and over again. There are problems ahead for Karamu, despite the achievements of the past and the present. "No battle is ever fought for the last time . . . . You have more people on your side now, that's all." This is the way Rowena Jelliffe puts it, forty-five years after she and her husband established Karamu. One problem which seems resolved (though it crops up occasionally) is the very point of interracialism:

Forty years ago, even twenty years ago, those

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1 Goals and Objectives of Karamu House, 7-9.
2 Interview, April 9, 1961.
of us who worked for the wholesome integration of the American Negro into the civic and cultural life of our community and our nation were on the defensive. Those who espoused segregation were rampant.

Since that time, there has come strong support of the policy of integration in our great educational and religious institutions. It is a matter of definite national policy today. The segregationists are on the defensive. The tables are turned at last.¹

Excessive professionalism may be considered another problem, and a threat to the Karamu idea. This should not be taken to mean that exacting standards may not be demanded of staff and personnel, but rather that the community theatre nature of the institution should be maintained. Theatre people are attracted to the notion of a professional or semi-professional resident theatre, and Karamu could, theoretically, become one—but only with serious diminution of its original purposes and values, if not, actually, a major alteration of those goals. Certainly, refinements and changes may be expected—are, indeed, always going on at Karamu—but they must be undertaken with a sense and feeling for the long view, and in the light of principle, not expediency. The "art" must not be allowed "to wag the welfare," if the dichotomy thereby represented means "art" in the vocational sense and "welfare" in the sense of "life-enrichment."

¹Mr. Jelliffe, CPD, May 25, 1958, quoted in Rey Gillespie's column.
Continued opposition to Karamu’s program can be anticipated from those who see it as one of frills, who see future leisure time as geared to the material gains of our more and more industrialized society, rather than keyed to pursuits which deepen or give significance to individual lives. "As leisure has increased, so has the amount of time given to unproductive and often aimless activities," says August Heckscher, in discussing American culture and goals,¹ and it is hard to argue the fact that today’s recreational activities seem more and more to be merely releases from pressure— compulsive escapist activity—rather than truly "re-creative." Also, the technical, scientific bent of our times, and our race for space, may swamp the arts, unless their spokesmen and their guardians remain alert to that danger; and unless national foundations and governments seek every opportunity to play their role vis-à-vis the arts on a wider scale than heretofore, and with increasing vigor and commitment.

In the future, Karamu must be concerned with the maintenance of a good racial balance, not out of protectiveness for its Negro membership, or any empty principle of people merely being together, but out of a realization that this is a strength of the institution— that from this contact

come reciprocal teaching and learning both for the program participants and the observers. Care must be exercised lest an imbalance develop among the separate areas which is so great as to render individual or mutual activity ineffectual or even impossible. Flexibility in programming should be preserved, should go hand in hand with periodic re-evaluations, both formal and informal. Standards should be sustained, and driven higher in those areas where their achievement will give greater benefit and pleasure to the membership, without discouraging them or preventing a steady climb in their number.

To these present and future concerns, we may add the inevitability of Karamu's coming change of administration, as the Jelliffes approach their fiftieth anniversary of leadership in 1965. This event is critical, but not to be feared. The Future Plans Committee of the Board of Trustees has surely considered the issue, as have the Jelliffes, and although there has been no public airing of the question whatsoever, there are indisputable certainties in the matter, deductible from history. The Jelliffes' efforts to establish greater--perhaps even permanent--financial security for Karamu will reach a peak before they consider retirement. They will want maximum assurances of the perpetuation of proper maintenance, and their present and continuing executive vigor suggests that they will get them. They will seek to bolster and increase their staff. And,
surely, they will seek and find superior administrators who comprehend and can achieve the fullest possible continuity of Karamu's principles and practices.

It has been said that we have seen a dream come true, and this is not so. The dream is longer than that and farther reaching. Good dreams, I think, have no ending. As one part of it is translated into actual fact, into accomplishment, into living experience, another need arises and the dream extends to the measure of the need. This ever extending of the dream comes not from mere restlessness but out of human aspiration, out of the reach and rise of man's spirit.

It will go on far beyond our span of time and I believe that others will find in its ongoing the satisfaction which we—and you—have jointly found. Neither is it our dream alone.¹

The significance of Karamu and Karamu Theatre goes beyond the thing itself, even beyond the building of other "Karamus." The example of a true achievement may, in any society, set in motion forces for good far greater than the initial effort, forces which may be unmeasurable, but which, nevertheless, are valid and valuable. Karamu has put meaning into lives, and if this history of Karamu results in the "personal mobilization" of even one individual (an act which—in Norman Cousins' phrase—"represents the basic form of energy in a society"), and through him the potential involvement of his whole society, it will have rendered the assistance it hoped to give, and justified its undertaking.

¹Mrs. Jelliffe, remarks made at Karamu's Fortieth Anniversary Program, Nov. 5, 1955. (Mimeographed, in the Karamu files.)
APPENDIX I

PLAY SCHEDULE

Code
A - Arena Theatre
D - Drama
G - Guest Director
M - Musical
N - Negro playwright
NC - Negro content
0 - Opera
P - Proscenium Theatre

Theatre Facilities (unless otherwise indicated)

6th - 18th seasons (1927-1939): Karamu Theatre, 3807 Central
26th season (1949) to present: Arena and Proscenium Theatres of Karamu House, 2355 E. 89th St.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all productions listed are documented by either program or newspaper evidence.

The Gilpin plays during the first seven seasons (to 1927-28) were one-acts, unless otherwise indicated.

Director column - Where two names are listed, the first is the Director and the second is the Musical Director.

Full Names of Drama and Musical Directors

Askew, Roger
Barclay, Lawrence
Baskerville, Charles W.
Bianchi, Donald
Blank, Charlotte
Brennan, Tom
Brown, J. Harold
Burroughs, Baldwin
Buster, Christine
Cerf, Kurt
Davidson, Gerald
Davies, Griffin
Eddy, Junius
Eells, Harriet
Ellenstein, Robert
Fink, Harold
Flagg, Ann K.
Frank, Benno D.
Griffiths (Mrs. Ruhlman), Rose
Henderson, Ethel
Heydemann, Mrs. Martin (Lillian)
Holland, Doris
Hruby, Frank
Jelliffe, Rowena Woodham
Johnson, William
Jones, Robert
King, Charles
Kuhl, Lawrence
Levin, Betty
Mack, Ethel
Marans, Gerald
Moore, George
Nystrom, Maurice
Rorimer, Joan
Shure, Leonard
Silver, Dorothy
Silver, Reuben
Smith, Hale
Starbird, William
Thomas, Donald
Ulmer, Peggy
Vincent, Laurence
Walsh, Frederick G.
White, Shirley
Wolfes, Helmut
**PRE-GILFIN PLAYERS (1920-21)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Director</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THREE PILLS IN A BOTTLE</td>
<td>Rachel Lyman Field</td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
<td>Griffiths</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS</td>
<td>Norman McKinnel</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE VERY NAKED BOY</td>
<td>Stuart Walker</td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLARENCE</td>
<td>Booth Tarkington</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE IMPERTINENCE OF THE CREATURE</td>
<td>Cosmo Borden Lennox</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHERE BUT IN AMERICA</td>
<td>Oscar M. Wolff</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE MAKER OF DREAMS</td>
<td>Frank G. Tompkins</td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE GOOD WOMAN</td>
<td>Oliphant Down</td>
<td>East Tech H.S.</td>
<td>Griffiths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE</td>
<td>George Middleton</td>
<td>Central H.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHAM</td>
<td>Frank G. Tompkins</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAKESHIFTS</td>
<td>Gertrude Robins</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>DREGS</td>
<td>Frances Pemberton</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPENCER</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPRESSED DESIRES</td>
<td>Cook &amp; Glaspell</td>
<td>Griffiths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEN MINUTES BY THE CLOCK</td>
<td>Alice C. D. Riley</td>
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<td>Bohemian Hall</td>
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<td>WOLVES</td>
<td>J. J. Bell</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TWO CROOKS AND A LADY</td>
<td>Eugene Pillo</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This list of one-act plays is undocumented. There is no hard evidence (programs or newspaper releases) of production. The information given is based on memory of participants. The plays above are also listed on an undocumented play listing from the Karamu Theatre files (mimeographed, 1955) entitled: "Plays Produced by the Karamu Theatre."

1. Full-length play.

2. Also toured to Oberlin, according to Mrs. Rose Griffiths Ruhlman.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Director</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/16</td>
<td>MEDICINE SHOW</td>
<td>Stuart Walker</td>
<td>East Tech H.S.</td>
<td>Jelliffe</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>ENTER THE HERO</td>
<td>Theresa Helburn</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Griffiths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>OBSTINACY¹</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/13</td>
<td>MODESTY</td>
<td>Paul Ernest Hervieu</td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
<td>Griffiths</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>THURSDAY EVENING</td>
<td>Christopher Morley</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Griffiths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>REHEARSAL</td>
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</table>

¹Adapted by Rose Griffiths from German ms.
### 3rd Season (1923-24)
(Directed by Mrs. Martin Heydemann)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/5</td>
<td>THE FAMILY EXIT MANSIONS</td>
<td>Lawrence Langner</td>
<td>East Tech H.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE GHOST STORY</td>
<td>Hildegarde Flanner</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Booth Tarkington</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>WAPPIN' WHARF¹</td>
<td>Charles Brooks</td>
<td>Temple Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/22</td>
<td>A LITTLE FOWL PLAY THE FLIGHT OF THE HERONS</td>
<td>Harold Owen</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marietta Kennard</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/19</td>
<td>(Three one-acts)²</td>
<td></td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>A LITTLE FOWL PLAY THE FLIGHT OF THE HERONS SUPPPRESSED DESIRES³</td>
<td>Harold Owen</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marietta Kennard</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cook &amp; Glaspell</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹Full-length play.

²Gaz., March 15, 1924, advance notice of production. No play titles given.

³Revival.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>NC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>GRANNY MAUMEE&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Ridgely Torrence</td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE SACRED PLACE</td>
<td>Louis Esson</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHI FU</td>
<td>William Gustema</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/10</td>
<td>THE MONKEY'S PAW</td>
<td>W. W. Jacobs</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THE POT BOILER</td>
<td>Alice Gerstenberg</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/26</td>
<td>SHAM&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Frank G. Tompkins</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DANGER</td>
<td>Richard Hughes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Norman McInnle</td>
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</table>

6/23  5/26 program repeated.

<sup>1</sup>This program lists Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe as "Dramatic Director"; Mrs. Martin Heydemann as "Official Coach."

<sup>2</sup>Revival.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>NC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>(Three one-act plays)¹</td>
<td></td>
<td>Central &quot;Y&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/18</td>
<td>CHI FU²</td>
<td>William Gustema</td>
<td>West H.S.</td>
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<td>SUPPRESSED DESIRES²</td>
<td>Cook &amp; Glaspell</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS²</td>
<td>Norman McKinnel</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/26</td>
<td>THE LULLABY³</td>
<td>Edward Knoblock</td>
<td>Longwood H.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/25</td>
<td>MOONSHINE</td>
<td>Arthur Hopkins</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COMPROMISE</td>
<td>Willis Richardson(N)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THE RIM OF THE WORLD</td>
<td>Floyd Dell</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/25</td>
<td>EGGS⁴</td>
<td>Alice Gerstenberg</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>OVERTONES</td>
<td>G. B. Shaw</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THE SHEWING UP OF BLANCO</td>
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<td>POSNET</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/30</td>
<td>HYACINTHS</td>
<td>Tacie May Hanna</td>
<td>Bohemian Hall</td>
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<td></td>
<td>WOLVES²</td>
<td>J. J. Bell</td>
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<td></td>
<td>THE NO 'COUNT BOY⁵</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/4</td>
<td>TWO CROOKS AND A LADY²</td>
<td>Eugene Pillet</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>OLD WASH LUCAS</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE DREAMY KID</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
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</table>

¹Gaz., Oct. 24, 1925. Play titles not given. Item indicates, however, that program was given "under auspices of Women's auxiliary of NAACP local branch."

²Revival. ³Full-length play. ⁴Monologue by Arthur Talbot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/19</td>
<td>BANK ACCOUNT</td>
<td>Howard Brock</td>
<td>Bohemian Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>FLATTERING WORD</td>
<td>George Kelly</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>THE DREAMY KID</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/26</td>
<td>CONFLICT</td>
<td>Clarice V. McCauley</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>THE FLORIST SHOP</td>
<td>Winifred Hawkbridge</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>SACRIFICE</td>
<td>Elizabeth H. Yates</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/24-26</td>
<td>OFF NAG'S HEAD</td>
<td>Dougald MacMillan</td>
<td>[Karamu Theatre,</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>SIMON THE CYRENIAN</td>
<td>Ridgely Torrence</td>
<td>until 1939]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>THE MEDICINE SHOW</td>
<td>Stuart Walker</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/30-31</td>
<td>THE RIDER OF DREAMS</td>
<td>Ridgely Torrence</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>4/1-2</td>
<td>BEDROOM SUITE</td>
<td>Christopher Morley</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;</td>
<td>MIRAGE</td>
<td>George M. P. Baird</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/4-7</td>
<td>WAPPIN' WHARF</td>
<td>Charles Brooks</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/8-11</td>
<td>OLD WASH LUCAS</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
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<td>NEIGHBORS</td>
<td>Zona Gale</td>
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<td>REHEARSAL</td>
<td>Christopher Morley</td>
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</table>

1 Repeated at Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Dec. 17, 1926.

2 This bill marks the opening of Karamu Theatre, 3807 Central.

3 Revival, full-length play. 4 Revival.
### 7th Season (1927-28)
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/7-12/10</td>
<td>BLACKBEARD FINGERBOWLS AND ARAMINTA WHITE DRESSES</td>
<td>Paul Green Harry Lacy Hamilton Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8-2/11</td>
<td>BANK ACCOUNT THURSDAY EVENING</td>
<td>Howard Brock Christopher Morley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/7-3/10</td>
<td>SUN-UP 2</td>
<td>Lula Vollmer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GOOD MEDICINE THE FLIGHT OF THE HERONS THE NO 'COUNT BOY 3</td>
<td>Arnold &amp; Burke Marietta Kennard Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/21-3/24</td>
<td>RIDER OF DREAMS 3, 4 SIMON THE CYRENIAN 3</td>
<td>Ridgely Torrence</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/18-4/21</td>
<td>ICEBOUND 2</td>
<td>Owen Davis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/27-6/2</td>
<td>IN ABRAHAM'S BOOM 5</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/10-6/23</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; 6</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

2 Full-length play. 3 Revival. 4 Benefit performance for Travis Art Fund.
5 1st production outside of N.Y.
6 Professional engagement at the Little Theatre; proceeds to Travis Art Fund.
### 8th Season (1928-29)
*(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/15-11/18</td>
<td>MARYA OF THE LOWLANDS</td>
<td>Angel Guimerá</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/19-12/22</td>
<td>EARTH¹</td>
<td>Emjo Basshe</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/14-2/17</td>
<td>THE FIELD GOD</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21-3/24</td>
<td>SUN-UP²</td>
<td>Lula Vollmer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/9-5/12</td>
<td>ANNA CHRISTIE</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/13-6/16</td>
<td>THE LEOPARD LADY</td>
<td>Edwin Childs Carpenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/2</td>
<td>THE NO 'COUNT BOY²,³</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

¹1st production outside of N.Y.  ²Revival.  ³Performance at Music Hall, Public Auditorium, Spingarn Medal Program, Annual N.A.A.C.P. Conference.
9th Season (1929-30)  
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/16-10/20</td>
<td>IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/4-12/8</td>
<td>THE DRUNKARD</td>
<td>W. H. Smith (adap.)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>ROSEANNE&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Nan Bagby Stephens</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>2/5-2/9</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/16-3/22</td>
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<td>&quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/5-3/9</td>
<td>THE ROMANTIC YOUNG LADY</td>
<td>G. Martinez Sierra</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/23-4/27</td>
<td>BIG LAKE</td>
<td>Lynn Riggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/4-6/8</td>
<td>THE SOUL OF NICHOLAS SNYDERS</td>
<td>Jerome K. Jerome</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>Revival.  <sup>2</sup>At Little Theatre (Public Hall) as Theatre of Nations entry.  
<sup>3</sup>Berea, O.; at invitation of Berea School Superintendent.  
<sup>4</sup>Professional engagement at Ohio Theatre, Cleveland, O.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/12-14, 11/16</td>
<td>EARTH&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Emjo Basshe</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/17-12/21</td>
<td>SAZUS MATAZUS</td>
<td>Laurence Eyre</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/25-28, 3/1</td>
<td>YOU MUS' BE BO'N AGAIN&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Andrew M. Burris (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29</td>
<td>SERMON IN THE VALLEY&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Zora Neale Hurston (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EMPEROR JONES&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/8-4/12</td>
<td>SERMON IN THE VALLEY</td>
<td>Zora Neale Hurston (N)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EMPEROR JONES</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/13-5/17</td>
<td>SELF</td>
<td>Mrs. Sidney F. Bateman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> Revival.

<sup>2</sup> Extra performance for Interracial Committee, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, March 14.

<sup>3</sup> At Little Theatre (Public Hall) as Theatre of Nations entry.
11th Season (1931-32)
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/4-11/8</td>
<td>THE UNDERGROUND SAVAGE¹</td>
<td>Leo B. Pride</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/9-12/13</td>
<td>DEEP DARK¹,²</td>
<td>Isadora Bennett</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COASTWISE¹,²</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3-2/7</td>
<td>WILD BIRDS</td>
<td>Dan Toheroh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9-3/13</td>
<td>IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM³,⁴</td>
<td>Paul Green</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/27-30, 5/1</td>
<td>SCARLET SISTER MARY</td>
<td>Daniel Reed</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1-6/5</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹World premiere.
²Repeated April 19, 1932, for touring company of THE GREEN PASTURES.
³Revival.
⁴Toured to Oberlin, Nov. 5, 1932, under auspices of Oberlin College Drama Association.
12th Season (1932-33)  
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/9-11/13</td>
<td>SCARLET SISTER MARY¹,²</td>
<td>Daniel Reed</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/14-12/18</td>
<td>THE OCTOROON</td>
<td>Dion Boucicault</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/1-2/5</td>
<td>BRAIN SWEAT³</td>
<td>John Charles Brownell</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>PORGY⁴</td>
<td>Dorothy &amp; Dubose Heyward</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15-3/19</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/26-4/30</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1-6/4</td>
<td>SAZUS MATAZUS¹</td>
<td>Laurence Eyre</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Revival.  
²Toured to Oberlin, Nov. 4, 1932 under auspices of Oberlin College Drama Association.  
³World premiere.  
⁴At Little Theatre (Public Hall) as Theatre of Nations entry.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/22-11/26</td>
<td>ST. LOUIS WOMAN&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Countee Cullen (N) &amp; Arna Bontemps (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/13-12/17</td>
<td>BRAIN SWEAT&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>John Charles Brownell</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7-2/11</td>
<td>HOME TO CANAAN&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Richard Chase</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21-3/25</td>
<td>GOD'S OWN</td>
<td>Isadora Bennett</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2-5/6</td>
<td>ROSEANNE&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Nan Bagby Stephens</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/6-6/10</td>
<td>CIRCLE OF CHALK</td>
<td>[Hoei-Lan-Kin]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> World premiere.  
<sup>2</sup> Revival.
14th Season (1934-35)  
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/21-11/25</td>
<td>HOBOKEN BLUES (or Rip van Winkle, Black)¹</td>
<td>Michael Gold</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12-12/16</td>
<td>SERMON IN THE VALLEY²</td>
<td>Zora Neale Hurston (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EMPEROR JONES²</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/27-3/4, 6-11, 14-16, 4/24-4/28</td>
<td>STEVEDORE MARSHLAND³</td>
<td>Paul Peters &amp; George Sklar</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/5-6/9</td>
<td>ST. LOUIS WOMAN²</td>
<td>Countee Cullen (N) &amp; Arna Bontemps (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹1st production outside of N.Y.  
²Revival.  
³World premiere.
15th Season (1935-36)
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/6-11/10</td>
<td>THE SOON BRIGHT DAY&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Isadora Bennett</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/11-12/15</td>
<td>PORGY&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Dorothy &amp; Dubose Heyward</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/25-1/29</td>
<td>BIG TOP&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(Federal Theatre Workshop)&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/18-2/23</td>
<td>PEACE ON EARTH&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Sklar &amp; Maltz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/29, 3/1,7-8, 14-15</td>
<td>NO LEFT TURN&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;  UNITED WE EAT&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt; A LITTLE FOV PLAY&lt;sup&gt;2,3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Will Hughes, Alice Ware, Harold Owen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24-3/29</td>
<td>LITTLE HAM&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/?&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>BRAIN SWEAT&lt;sup&gt;2,3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>John Charles Brownell</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/28-30, 5/1-4</td>
<td>WHEN THE JACK HOLLERS&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N) &amp; Arna Bentemps (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>CONJURE MAN DIES&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Rudolph Fisher (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/9-6/14</td>
<td>LITTLE HAM&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>World premiere.  
<sup>2</sup>Revival.  
<sup>3</sup>Federal Theatre, Project #8118; directed by William Johnson.  
<sup>4</sup>Little Theatre (Public Hall). Gaz., April 25, 1936 (post-performance item which does not indicate exact date).  
<sup>5</sup>Pullen, CPD, Feb. 3, 1938, refers to this production "at Karamu two seasons ago" as Federal Theatre production. No other evidence of production.  
<sup>6</sup>Interracial.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/5</td>
<td>NOAH</td>
<td>Andre Obey</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/18-11/23</td>
<td>TROUBLED ISLAND</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/13-1/18</td>
<td>TURPENTINE</td>
<td>Peter Morell, Augustus Smith</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17-2/22</td>
<td>FRESH OUT O' HEAVEN</td>
<td>Gerald Davidson</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/13-3/14</td>
<td>CHANTECLER</td>
<td>Edmond Rostand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/1-6, 9-11</td>
<td>JOY TO MY SOUL</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/27-5/3, 7-9</td>
<td>HAITI</td>
<td>William DuBois (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>BURY THE DEAD</td>
<td>Irwin Shaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5-5/9</td>
<td>THE SOON BRIGHT DAY</td>
<td>Isadora Benedit</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/10-6/13</td>
<td>MARTA OF THE LOWLANDS</td>
<td>Angel Guimerá</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Federal Theatre, Project #8118, directed by William Johnson.
2 World premiere. 3 1st production outside of N.Y.
4 Federal Theatre, Project #13009, directed by Gerald Davidson.
5 Little Theatre (Public Hall). 6 Revival.
17th Season (1937-38)  
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/8-12/13</td>
<td>STEVEDORE&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Peters &amp; Sklar</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2-2/7</td>
<td>CONJURE MAN DIES&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Rudolph Fisher (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/27-2/28</td>
<td>BRAIN SWEAT&lt;sup&gt;1,2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>John Charles Brownell</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/16-21, 25-27</td>
<td>DARKER BROTHER&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Conrad Seiler</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/27-30, 5/1-2, HAITI&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>William DuBois (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>LITTLE HAM&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

18th Season (1938-39)  
(Directed by Mrs. Rowena Jelliffe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/16-11/21</td>
<td>FRONT PORCH&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/1-6, 10-14</td>
<td>ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(Workshop group)&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/8-13, 17-19</td>
<td>MULATTO</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/26-30, 5/1-7</td>
<td>COAL DUST&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Shirley Graham (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/24-29, 6/1-4</td>
<td>JOY TO MY SOUL&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>Revival.  
<sup>2</sup>Feb. 27, 1938 performance at Lake Erie College, Painesville, O.; Feb. 28, 1938 performance at 3807 Central.  
<sup>3</sup>World premiere.  
<sup>4</sup>Interracial.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/12-13/10</td>
<td>IT'S BETTER F0'T' SING'1</td>
<td>Cleve Playhouse</td>
<td>Dorothy Paxton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/21-3/3</td>
<td>I GOTTA HOM3,4</td>
<td>W.R.U.</td>
<td>Shirley Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FINALE (&quot;Swing Version&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
<td>R. E. Hayes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/24</td>
<td>NO MAJOR PRODUCTIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>SERMON IN THE VALLEY</td>
<td>Garfield House</td>
<td>Gilbert &amp; Sullivan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/10-2/15</td>
<td>ONE HUNDRED IN THE SHADE</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Interim Period (1942-45)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>NO MAJOR PRODUCTIONS</td>
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</table>

Performances were held at Oberlin and Akron, and in Goodyear Theatre. Directed by Betty Levin & Ethel Henderson.
### 23rd Season (1946-47)
(Directed by Rowena Jelliffe, Assisted by Gerald Marans)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/6-10, 12-16</td>
<td>THE CORN IS GREEN</td>
<td>Emlyn Williams</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/14-3/1</td>
<td>GOLDEN BOY</td>
<td>Clifford Odets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/9-5/24</td>
<td>WINESBURG, OHIO</td>
<td>Sherwood Anderson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/13-6/15</td>
<td>FUMED OAK BOX AND COX</td>
<td>Noel Coward, J. M. Morton</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### 24th Season (1947-48)
(Directed by Gerald Marans)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/6-11/16</td>
<td>THE SHOW-OFF</td>
<td>George Kelly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12/7-12/21</td>
<td>FAMILY PORTRAIT</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Cowen</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/27-3/13</td>
<td>TAMING OF THE SHREW</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/14-5/29</td>
<td>MISTER JOB</td>
<td>H. Shirley Fowke</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. The first of three seasons in the Karamu Studio Theatre, 2364 E. 90th St.
2. First arena production in Cleveland. Adaptation of script to West Virginia coal town setting.
3. World premiere.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/29-11/13</td>
<td>MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS</td>
<td>William Saroyan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/3-12/18</td>
<td>ANTIGONE</td>
<td>Anouilh, Galantiere (adap.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/18-3/12</td>
<td>COMEDY OF ERRORS</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/22-5/14</td>
<td>THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH</td>
<td>Thornton Wilder</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
## 26th Season (1949-50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Aud.</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/6-</td>
<td>FAMILY PORTRAIT ², ³</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Cowen</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Marans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/7-</td>
<td>SERMON IN THE VALLEY ², ³</td>
<td>Zora N. Hurston(N)</td>
<td>D-NC</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Jelliffe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WISE MAIDEN ³, ⁴</td>
<td>Carl Orff, Engel &amp; Williamson (transl.)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Frank-Shure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/9-</td>
<td>THE MEDIUM ³</td>
<td>Menotti</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Frank-Shure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE AFRICAN CHIEF (Cantata)</td>
<td>J. Harold Brown(N)</td>
<td>-NC</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/11-</td>
<td>ANDROGLES AND THE LION ³</td>
<td>G. B. Shaw</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Marans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/24-3/30</td>
<td>SET MY PEOPLE FREE ⁵</td>
<td>Dorothy Heyward</td>
<td>D-NC</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Marans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/17-5/7</td>
<td>MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Marans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE PRODIGAL SON ⁴</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Balls (G) - Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/18-6/21</td>
<td>KISMET</td>
<td>Edward Knoblock</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Marans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/2-7/1</td>
<td>MAID AS MISTRESS</td>
<td>Giovanni Pargolesi</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Moore (G)- Shure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DOWN IN THE VALLEY</td>
<td>Kurt Weill</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Ulmer (G)- Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/3-8/5</td>
<td>KARAMU UNDER THE STARS ⁶</td>
<td>(Revue)</td>
<td>M, O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹This season marks the opening of Karamu's Arena and Proscenium Theatres, 2355 E. 89th St. All productions during this season ran in repertory—not continuously within opening and closing dates given.

²Revival.

³One of the offerings in Theatre's Festival Week; ran in repertory for over a month.

⁴American premiere. ⁵First production outside of N.Y.

⁶Karamu outdoor theatre; included DOWN IN THE VALLEY by Kurt Weill.
<table>
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<td>10/16-11/24</td>
<td>LET'S MAKE AN OPERA&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Benjamin Britten</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>YERMA</td>
<td>Lorce, O'Connell &amp;</td>
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<td>P</td>
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<td>Smith&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Gilbert &amp; Sullivan</td>
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<td>Gluck, Elmslie</td>
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<td>P</td>
<td>Frank-Blank</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(libr.)</td>
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<sup>1</sup>American premiere.  <sup>2</sup>Original score composed by Hale Smith.

<sup>3</sup>American premiere of this translation.  <sup>4</sup>World premiere.

<sup>5</sup>Leo Taubman of Metropolitan Opera completed staging when Benno Frank became ill.

<sup>6</sup>Karamu outdoor theatre.
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<td>9/14-10/18</td>
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<td>9/28-11/3</td>
<td>BALLET BALLADS:</td>
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<td>1) SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS</td>
<td>Brown, Elmslie</td>
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<td>2) SONG OF SOLOMON²</td>
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<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
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<td>STREET SCENE</td>
<td>Rice, Weill, Hughes (M)</td>
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¹American premiere.  ²World premiere.
³Ballet Russe of Cleveland and Karamu Dancers performed in this program.
⁴Revival.  ⁵Second stage production anywhere.
### 29th Season (1952-53)

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<td>Cerf</td>
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<sup>1</sup>Revival.  
<sup>2</sup>First community theatre production.  
<sup>3</sup>Original music by Hale Smith.  
<sup>4</sup>World premiere.
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<sup>1</sup>Revival.  
<sup>2</sup>World premiere.
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<sup>1</sup>American premiere.  <sup>2</sup>Second production anywhere.  <sup>3</sup>World premiere.
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₁First production outside of N.Y.  ²First English production in America.
³Revival.  ⁴Second production anywhere.
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<td>MR. JOHNSON</td>
<td>Norman Rosten</td>
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<td>12/18-1/5</td>
<td>AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS1</td>
<td>Menotti</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>1/8-3/16</td>
<td>GUYS AND DOLLS</td>
<td>Loesser, Burrows, Swerling</td>
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<td>1/15-2/16</td>
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<td>Sebree (N) &amp; Johnson</td>
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<td>2/26-3/9</td>
<td>THE EARLY YEARS:</td>
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<td>1) THE DREAMY KID1</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
<td>D-NC</td>
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<td>2) CRUSHED PETUNIAS</td>
<td>Tennessee Williams</td>
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<td>Mack (G)&amp; White (G)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) THE LONG VOYAGE HOME</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Jones (G)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/19-4/13</td>
<td>MACBETH2</td>
<td>Bloch, Fleg (libr.), Cohen (transl.)</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>4/9-5/11</td>
<td>BILLY BUDD</td>
<td>Coxe &amp; Chapman</td>
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<td>4/30-5/25</td>
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<td>Edmund Norris</td>
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<td>THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE</td>
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1Revival.  

2American premiere.
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<tr>
<td>9/17-11/2</td>
<td>PIPE DREAM</td>
<td>Rodgers &amp; Hammerstein</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>10/1-11/9</td>
<td>A HATFUL OF RAIN</td>
<td>Michael Gazzo</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/12-12/7</td>
<td>ME, CANDIDO</td>
<td>Walt Anderson</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/26-12/21</td>
<td>KATYA KABONOVA¹</td>
<td>Leos Janacek</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>12/17-2/8</td>
<td>THE KING AND I²</td>
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<td>12/31-2/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/11-3/15</td>
<td>THE CONSUL</td>
<td>Menotti</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/25-3/22</td>
<td>BULLFIGHT¹</td>
<td>Leslie Stevens</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/25-5/8</td>
<td>THE INNOCENTS</td>
<td>William Archibald</td>
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<td>4/1-5/3</td>
<td>FINIAN 'S RAINBOW</td>
<td>Harburg, Saldy,</td>
<td>M-NC</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Frank-Brown</td>
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<td>Lane</td>
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<td>5/13-6/7</td>
<td>DEATH OF A SALESMAN</td>
<td>Arthur Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/20-5/31</td>
<td>THE TURK IN ITALY³</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Frank-Wolfes</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/17-7/3</td>
<td>MUSICAL ALBUM '58</td>
<td>(Revue)</td>
<td>M, O</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Nystrom-Wolfes &amp; Brown</td>
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¹American premiere. ²Revival. ³Second performance in America.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>9/16-11/15</td>
<td>PAJAMA GAME</td>
<td>Abbott &amp; Bissell, Adler &amp; Ross</td>
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<td>9/23-10/4</td>
<td>THE TURK IN ITALY¹</td>
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<td>10/14-11/8</td>
<td>TOBIAS AND THE ANGEL¹</td>
<td>James Bridie</td>
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<td>11/18-12/13</td>
<td>SUSANNAH</td>
<td>Carlisle Floyd</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>11/25-1/3</td>
<td>MORNING'S AT SEVEN</td>
<td>Paul Osborn</td>
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<td>12/23-1/31</td>
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<td>1/13-2/28</td>
<td>ME AND JULIET²</td>
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<td>2/10-3/14</td>
<td>THE ABDUCTION FROM THE HAREM</td>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>3/17-4/18</td>
<td>TWELFTH NIGHT</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<td>3/24-4/25</td>
<td>BLUE DENIM</td>
<td>Harlily &amp; Noble</td>
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<td>D. Silver (G)</td>
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<td>4/28-6/27</td>
<td>CAROUSEL¹</td>
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<td>Frank-Brown &amp; Wolfes</td>
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<td>5/5-6/27</td>
<td>SIMPLY HEAVENLY</td>
<td>Langston Hughes (N), D-NC David Martin (N) (music)</td>
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<td>Silver-Brown</td>
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¹Revival.
²First community theatre rights.
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<tr>
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<th>Director</th>
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<td>9/15-10/17</td>
<td>SIMPLY HEAVENLY&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Hughes (N), Martin (N)</td>
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<td>9/22-11/7</td>
<td>JAMAICA</td>
<td>Harburg, Saidy, Arlen</td>
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<td>10/27-11/28</td>
<td>MARIA GOLOVIN</td>
<td>Menotti</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>11/17-12/12</td>
<td>DARK OF THE MOON&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Richardson &amp; Berney</td>
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<td>12/8-1/9</td>
<td>OUR TOWN&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Thornton Wilder</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Askew (G)</td>
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<td>JAMAICA&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Harburg, Saidy, Arlen</td>
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<td>1/19-2/13</td>
<td>TAKE A GIANT STEP&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Louis Peterson (N)</td>
<td>D-NC</td>
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<td>2/23-3/26</td>
<td>THE MAN IN THE MOON&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Haydn, Gutman (transl)</td>
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<td>3/8-4/9</td>
<td>A WREATH FOR UDOMO&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>William Branch (N)</td>
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<td>4/5-5/14</td>
<td>SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL</td>
<td>Ray Lawler</td>
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<td>5/24-6/18</td>
<td>A LOSS OF ROSES</td>
<td>William Inge</td>
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<td>MUSICAL ALBUM '60</td>
<td>(Revue)</td>
<td>M,O</td>
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<sup>1</sup>Revival.  <sup>2</sup>Second performance in America.  <sup>3</sup>World premiere.
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<td>Frank Loesser</td>
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<td>Anna C. Mowatt</td>
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<td>SWEET SINGER OF AVON</td>
<td>Shakespeare-derived musical &amp; opera revue)</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Frank &amp; Nystrom-Wolfes</td>
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<td>THE PENCIL OF GOD&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Ernest Pascal</td>
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<td>Guenter Rutenborn</td>
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<td>ALLEGRO&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>PEPITO&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Offenbach, Frank (adap.)</td>
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<td>A RAISIN IN THE SUN&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Lorraine Hansberry (N)</td>
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<td>SEE THE JAGUAR</td>
<td>Richard Nash</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Barclay (G)</td>
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<td>TERRIFIC IN HARLEM&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Hughes (N), Nystrom</td>
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<td>Nystrom</td>
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<td>Hughes (N), Glenn (adap.)</td>
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<td>STREET SCENE&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Rice, Weill, Hughes (N)</td>
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<td>5/30-7/1</td>
<td>HE WHO GETS SLAPPED</td>
<td>Robert Ward (Revue)</td>
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<td>6/13-7/1</td>
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<sup>1</sup> Revival.  <sup>2</sup> World premiere.  <sup>3</sup> American premiere.

<sup>4</sup> A choreographed curtain-raiser for SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM.

<sup>5</sup> First community theatre rights.
APPENDIX II

THE HUMAN VALUES OF THEATRE

There are many people who believe that Theatre is a business, and that a good play is one that makes money. There are some people who see Theatre as the last remaining hope of Capital "A" Art, and the home of the avant-garde ideas of a confused society. There are other people who believe that "putting on plays" is a nice hobby, and a good way to spend leisure time, to keep busy. Those of us at Karamu look at Theatre in still a different way, and, we think, a more meaningful way.

The existing body of Drama, without which our Theatre could not exist, is a repository for all that is great and true in Western civilization. Worthwhile plays have always revolved around a moral axis, constantly concerning themselves with issues of true and false, of right and wrong, of good and evil. No preparation for such a play can avoid the discussion of these issues, the taking of sides—the commitment of the individual to a responsible, mature point of view.

The characters in worthwhile plays represent human beings in conflict over those issues—human beings who think and feel and react and participate in events which form the story of the play. A responsible preparation of such a play must deal with the pros and cons of human actions, with the wellsprings of motivation. Such a preparation inevitably yields added insight into the minds and hearts of others, knowledge of "the other fellow," and greater understanding must inevitably accrue.

The content of the worthwhile play, that is, the artistic quality of its language, the information it communicates, the emotional stimulus of its story—in short, the training drama gives the mind and the personality—these are in themselves rewarding. It would be impossible to be brief in describing the fruits of the rehearsal period for a worthwhile drama: the discussions over issues; the debates over the behavior patterns of the characters; the significance for our times of the play's view of life, its
theme; the research into a new locale, strange customs, new traditions, foreign attitudes; the literary history of a play, and its place and its author's place in cultural history.

The play as Theatre offers additional opportunities for personal growth, for "putting on a play" is a complex process. Theatre has been called "the Art wherein all Arts meet," and certainly play production offers practical opportunities to work at many interests and crafts. Skills as remote from one another as choreography and carpentry, enunciation and electronics, acting and acrobatics—all may be developed by the play's participants, at Karamu or any community theatre.

But skills can be taught in schools, and "practical opportunities" are available almost everywhere in our "do-it-yourself" age. Many more significant things happen at Karamu during rehearsal and play production times. Things which relate to basic, humanistic values, not merely manual skills and accumulation of greater information. People of all social classes, of all races, and of a variety of cultural backgrounds come together, submerge their individual personality differences, and join hands in submitting to a stringent, common discipline in order to attain a common goal: the creation of an artistic product. They get to know each other—rich or poor, to depend on each other—white or Negro, to work with and respect each other—Jew or Gentile. They gain in personal security from these broad contacts (and perhaps in increased social mobility as well). They grow in alertness to Life, in their heightened response to all variety of stimuli around them. They gain personal satisfaction and pleasure—elements which are, unfortunately, lacking in the lives and bread-and-butter occupations of many of our citizens—from the success of their efforts, from the joy of the activity, from the praise of fellow-workers and the public.

Once, a little boy was given a jigsaw puzzle of the world by his father. The father had told his son that the puzzle had taken him two hours to work when he was a child, but the boy completed it in fifteen minutes. The father was puzzled, and the boy explained: "Daddy, there was a picture of a man on the back of the map, and when I made the man whole, the world came out all right."

In these times, Karamu House and Karamu Theatre are dedicated to making the man whole, and perhaps as a result, someday soon, the world may come out all right.

Reuben Silver
November 21, 1960.
APPENDIX III

THEATRE SPACES

Note: All dimensions given to the nearest half foot.

MAIN FLOOR

Arena

Theatre (overall dimensions): 45' x 28'6" x 12' high (to light grid)
Lobby: 44' x 23' 6"

Seating: 100 to 140 depending on staging.

Theatre is air-conditioned.

Proscenium

Stage: 53'6" wide x 35' deep x 36'6" to grid
Opening: 31' wide x 18' high

Theatre Front (Lobby and Box Office): 21'6" x 25'
Lobby and Gallery: 47'6" x 17'6"

Light Booth (with follow spot, loudspeaker from stage, openings for movie and slide projectors)

Dressing Rooms (2): 13' x 14' (with adjoining washrooms and showers; also loudspeaker from stage)

Auditorium size: 45' wide x 43'6" deep (223 seats)

Theatre will be air-conditioned as of September, 1961.
MAIN FLOOR - Continued.

Other

Shop: 22' x 45' x 15'6" high
Green Room: 27' x 16'
Outdoor Stage: 46' wide x 17' deep
Costume Room: 15'6" x 27'6"
   6' x 27'6" (mezzanine)
Costume Storage (1): 15'6" x 5'6"
   (2): 12' x 12'
   (3): 12' x 12'
Stage Manager's Office: 10' x 12'

BASEMENT

Property Storage (small props): 35' x 15'6" (half occupied by ventilator equipment)
Property Storage (large props): 43' x 11'
Children's Dressing Rooms (2): 18'6" x 8'6"
Children's Rehearsal Room: 31' x 19'
Children's Theatre Room: 22' x 18'
Trap Room and Scene Storage (downstairs workshop): 35' x 37' x 8' high
Arena Dressing Rooms (2): 13' x 14' (with adjoining washrooms and showers; also loudspeaker from stage)
Large rehearsal hall: 60'6" x 30'
Furniture Storage: 41'6" x 11'
Flat Storage Room: 19' x 24'
Band Room (used for rehearsals): 29'6" x 39'

SECOND FLOOR

Dance Studio: 22' x 45'
Dance Dressing Room: 10' x 13'6" (with adjoining washrooms and showers)
SECOND FLOOR - Continued.

Music Rehearsal Studio: 25' x 18'

* * * * *

LIGHTING EQUIPMENT

Arena: Ariel Davis Dimmer Board

Dimmers - 12  
Capacity - 12,000 watts  
Circuits - 16 (two for house lights)

Dimmers are on two separate, portable control boards. Each board has six dimmers and each dimmer has a capacity of 1,000 watts. There is a patch panel for connecting any circuit to any dimmer.

Proscenium: Leonard Control Board

Dimmers - 30 (three house dimmers)  
Capacity - 148,500 watts  
Circuits - 80

The Leonard board has facilities for thirty-three dimmers, and Karamu hopes to add the last three by fall, 1961. Twenty-one of the dimmers have a capacity of 4,000 watts. The three house dimmers also have a capacity of 4,000 watts each. The board has three banks of dimmers: A, B, and C, and the last three dimmers in two of the banks have a capacity of 5,500 watts each. The other three have a capacity of 6,500 watts each. There is a patch panel for connecting any circuit to any dimmer.
APPENDIX IV

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES OF KARAMU HOUSE AND KARAMU THEATRE

SEPTEMBER, 1960 - SEPTEMBER, 1961

CHILDREN’S ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arts and Crafts</th>
<th>DAY AND TIME</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Art: 7-11 yrs.</td>
<td>MWF 4:00-5:30 P.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crafts: 7-11 yrs.</td>
<td>Th 4:00-5:30 P.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art: 12-14 yrs.</td>
<td>Th 4:00-5:30 P.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crafts: 12-14 yrs.</td>
<td>MWF 4:00-5:30 P.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Adults: 15-17 yrs. (See Adult Schedule below.)</td>
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Children's Modern Dance

| Rhythmic Training: 3-4 yrs.     | MW, TTh 2:30-3:30 P.M.* |
| Dance Education: 5-7 yrs.       | MW 4:00-5:30 P.M.*      |
| Dance Composition: 8-10 yrs.    | TF 4:00-5:30 P.M.*      |
| Technique and Composition: 11-13 yrs. | Th 4:00-5:30 P.M.*       |
| Teenagers: 14-17 yrs.           | Sat. 10:00-11:30 A.M.* |

Children's Theatre - Student Theatre

| Creative Dramatics: 6-8 yrs.    | Th 4:00-5:30 P.M.     |
| "  "  " 9-13 yrs. (Beginners) | M 4:00-5:30 P.M.      |
| "  "  " 9-14 yrs. (Advanced)  | W 4:00-5:30 P.M.      |

Student Theatre: 15-18 yrs.      |

Special Sessions: TF Announced.

Special Activity Groups

Natural Science: Informal sessions designed to stimulate awareness of the role of Science in relation to the Creative Arts.

Juniors: 10-13 yrs.               |
Young Adults: 14-17 yrs.          |

Field Trips

Technical Radio: 9-14 yrs.        |
Photography Classes              |
Fencing                          |
Remedial Reading                 |
CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES - Continued.

Instrumental Band
Piano Classes
Children's Chorus: 6-12 yrs.
(Karamettes)
Children's Chorus: 13-16 yrs.
(Karateens)
Conversational French
Spanish

Karamu Day Nursery: 3-5 yrs.
(Fees arranged)
Education for Family Living
(Nursery parents)

ADULT ACTIVITIES

Arts and Crafts Studio (Open for work on individual projects in addition to scheduled classes.)
Ceramic Sculpture
Painting
Ceramics
Pottery Wheel
Print Workshop
Sculpture Workshop
Enameling
Life Drawing
Advanced Ceramics
Leathercraft
Arts and Crafts for Older Adults

Modern Dance
Beginning and Intermediate
Limbering
Ballet and Modern Jazz
"Karamu Dancers" (Concert Group)

Special Activity Groups
Percussion Studies
Fencing
Informal Science
Weaving
Negro in American Heritage
Conversational French

Political Education Groups
Story of Mankind

DAY AND TIME

F 4:00-5:30 P.M.
MW 4:30-6:00 P.M.
WF 4:30-5:30 P.M.
Sat. 1:00-2:00 P.M.
Sat. 11:30-12:30 P.M.,
1:00-2:00 P.M.
MW 4:30-5:30 P.M.
TTh 4:30-5:30 P.M.

M thru 7:00 A.M.
F 5:30 P.M.
Monthly - Announced.

T 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
M 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
MW 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
W 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
T 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
W 10:00-2:00 P.M.*
TTh 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
Th 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
F 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
T 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
TTh 10:30-noon

W 6:45-8:15 P.M. or
2:30-10:00 P.M.*
MW 10:30-11:30 A.M.*
TF 6:30-7:30 P.M.*
MTh 7:30-9:30 P.M.*

Sat. Noon-1:30 P.M.*
Sat. 7:30-9:30 P.M.*
F 8:00-11:00 P.M.
Announced.

TTh 11:00 A.M.-
12:30 P.M.

Weekly - Announced.
ADULT ACTIVITIES - Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Day and Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karamu Theatre</strong> (Theatre productions conducted on workshop basis.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dramatic Productions</td>
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<td>Formal Classes: Acting, Directing,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre Appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musicals and Operas</td>
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<td>Operatic Coaching in Ital., French,</td>
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<td>German</td>
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<td>Stagecraft for All Productions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre Workshop Classes</td>
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<td>Scenic Design Classes</td>
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<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
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<td>Vocal Repertoire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choral Ensemble (auditions by arrangement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karamu Quartet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sight Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choral Groups: Prestonians Southlanders</td>
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</table>

- Tryouts Announced.
- Summer Sessions.
- Tryouts Announced.
- Arranged.
- Daily.
- TTh 7:30-9:30 P.M. Announced.
- W 7:00-8:15 P.M.
- T 7:00-8:15 P.M. Arranged.
- TF 8:00 P.M.
- MW 8:00 P.M.

*There are incidental fees ranging from 25¢ to 75¢ per session for asterisked courses.

Note: House membership is the only prerequisite for enrollment in all activities listed above. Annual membership dues: Adults - $2.50; Young Adults - $1.50; Children - $.75.
APPENDIX V

CULTURAL ARTS SERIES

1959-60 Season

Nov. 8  Melitta (Cuban folk singer).
Dec. 2  Marguerite and Jan Meyerovitz (singer and composer).
Jan. 24 Chamber Music Concert: Donald White, Cellist, Cleveland Symphony Orchestra; Theodore Johnson, Clarinettist, Cleveland Symphony Orchestra; accompanied by Mrs. Dolores White, Pianist.
Feb. 21, 28 TARTUFFE (in French), presented by La Troupe Francaise of Oberlin College.
May 22  Karamu Quartet, directed by J. Harold Brown.

1960-61 Season

Oct. 23  Will Geer (lecture with readings): "Shakespeare and His World."
Nov. 27  Trio Recital: Theo Baer, Cello; Sidney Weisa, Violin; Jean Weisa, Piano.
Feb. 26, Mar. 5 TIGER AT THE GATES (in French), presented by La Troupe Francaise of Oberlin College.
April 30 Violin Recital: Jerome Rosen, Apprentice Conductor, Cleveland Symphony Orchestra; accompanied by George Silfies, Cleveland Symphony Orchestra.
APPENDIX VI

QUESTIONNAIRE (ACTORS, STAFF)

Five questions drawn from the Directors Questionnaire (Appendix VIII) were the basis of interviews (telephone and in person) with sixteen Karamu personnel: thirteen performers and three staff members in theatre or theatre-related areas. An attempt was made to select interviewees representing a cross section of amateur personnel at Karamu in terms of race, length of relationship, and activity in dramatic as well as lyric productions.

Of the sixteen interviewees, eleven are Negroes, five are white; six "veterans" have been associated actively for approximately twenty-five years each, while the remaining ten have been involved from five to ten years each; thirteen have had experience in dramas and musicals, while three have been active only in drama. (The reason for the predominance of Negro interviewees is that from 1920 to 1946, the acting personnel was almost completely Negro; hence, the six Negro "veterans." Of the remaining ten interviewees, five are Negro, five are white.)

The following is a summary of members' responses to the questions asked--questions which relate to philosophy. 533
and attitudes regarding Karamu Theatre operation.

* * * * *

1. Is there such a thing as a "Karamu" play? How would you describe it?

Eight felt there was no limit on what Karamu could do with proper preparation. One of this group cited as appropriate any play that was "imaginative, full of personal, vital relationships." This description, he said, would "definitely include Shakespeare." The assumption, in almost every case, was that Karamu could attract a sufficient portion of Cleveland's acting community to enable production of a wide variety of plays from a personnel point of view. One of the eight distinctly resented the "Karamu type of play" apellation as limiting, saying that the "Karamu clientele is now so diversified in every possible way that there is no longer a Karamu type of play." She urged broadening play selection in order to increase theatre knowledge and skill for the participant.

Although the questioner specifically excluded the "Negro content" play (since it is an obvious choice for Karamu Theatre), two comments (from the group of eight) on the race play are of interest and are noted:

1) "Negro content plays should have a universal approach, beyond just limited Negro problems. After all, Negroes have problems that all people have, in addition to their having a few specific problems."

2) After expressing his thought that Karamu could do "any type of play" and that "we are past the Paul Green stuff," a veteran Negro actor said, "We are better though doing our own type of play . . . plays like A RAISIN IN THE SUN and SIMPLY HEAVENLY. A play like SIMPLY is like downtown--right like we are--we had a ball."

Four responded in favor of the "message" play (FINIAN'S RAINBOW, STREET SCENE, SIGN OF JONAH were given as examples) as being more appropriate for, and effective at, Karamu than lighter fare, or more "stylized, classic" plays.

Four definitely excluded drawing room comedy and/or "classics" (i.e., Shakespeare and period plays) from the range of Karamu's effective repertoire, emphasizing the need for speech training and suggesting that speech laboratory courses be instituted at Karamu. One of the four, however, indicated his belief that Shakespearean comedy was an exception to the "no-classics" rule for he felt "Shakespearean comedy was intended to be played loosely and freely." Another stated: "Arty plays should be done"--as training for
personnel, but should be produced in a workshop or for a restricted run because of their limited box office appeal. He cited SLEEP OF PRISONERS as an example.

2. Do you believe interracial casting and good theatre are compatible? Was interracial casting satisfactory for you?

There was a unanimous "yes" to this question. Five, however, expressed their feeling that interracial casting was sometimes a block for the audience, and two of the five felt that "credibility" in interracial casting had to be carefully considered by the director, even within the framework of interracial theatre; i.e., "It is the responsibility of directors in [an interracial theatre] to make white audiences aware of the distinctions among Negroes—color differences, etc. If two Negroes of certain shades of color marry, their children will inevitably be a certain shade. Casting in realistic plays should take this into account. Negroes are very sensitive about this, and white audiences should be educated [both about this sensitivity and these distinctions]."

Two Negro actors believed that some of the Negro members resented white actors at Karamu "because it cuts down the chances of the Negro. They feel that the whites have so many other theatres to work in, and the Negroes have only Karamu." (In this connection, it is interesting to note that one white actor believed whites were discriminated against. He cited a personal experience of what he considered to be discrimination in the casting of a musical.)

Four mentioned that interracial casting "in itself has a certain excitement .... It is a positive asset." In speaking of the Negro performers, one white actor said: "I think they have a peculiar talent for the theatre. They seem to be more lively, less inhibited .... When the Negroes at Karamu are bad, they are bad; but when they are good, they are great .... a sort of emotional ascension. They can reach great peaks. You can't get this anywhere else in town."

One veteran Negro performer was emphatic about the need for Negroes to play all parts with a conscious sense of "dignity. It isn't the fact that a Negro is doing it—it is the way the Negro does it that counts." This member cited a recent Negro content play where "people in the race were offended by [the leading actress'] lack of dignity." Reference was made to the actress' shuffling posture and shabbiness of dress as "offensive. It wasn't necessary for her to do the part this way."
3. How would you describe the official philosophy of Karamu theatre?

This was a difficult question to answer for the majority of the interviewees. As one member put it: "I have never thought about this. I come to Karamu for fun." In thinking beyond the fulfillment of personal needs, however, seven members stressed "racial compatibility" and integration as "the core of the philosophy" and indicated that the program was extremely effective on this score. "If there were more Karamus," said one Negro actor, "there wouldn't be so many Alabamas. You get to know people as they are."

Five did not stress the interracial aspect of Karamu House in their answers, of which the following response is typical: "... to give all people, regardless of background, race, economic levels, an opportunity for self-expression through theatre and by such self-expression to come to a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them."

One felt that although Karamu must have "started as a creative outlet ... [he] no longer [thought] it was just a hobby at Karamu." That and later responses of this interviewee indicated he felt Karamu's greatest obligation was to the best possible production from a professional point of view, and that what he called the "settlement house, hobby or outlet" approach hampered this end.

Two members related their answers on the "philosophy" question to Karamu's range of play selection—one regretting Karamu's "slighting the Negro content and social content play"; the other anxious that Karamu do more experimental plays of the Ionesco, Albee genre,¹ and more original plays.

A veteran Negro actress, distressed by the displacement of older members by "irresponsible newcomers," related her answer regarding philosophy to the feeling of personal loss she felt for the "Gilpin tradition ... In the old days, you worked your way into the group. Now people get leads right away. [We do not get] the respect and consideration that we deserve ... Obviously the philosophy has changed."

¹After reciting an impressive list of experimental plays, the interviewee weakened his case somewhat by concluding with THE MOON IS BLUE!
4. Is there at Karamu Theatre a serious conflict between "social work" theory and "good theatre" practice?

Three members answered "no" to this question.

Six members felt there was a conflict, but it was not a serious one. Of the six, three, representing what might be loosely termed the "social work" point of view, felt the "therapy" suffered because of the emphasis on production. Three, whose theatre aspirations and interests are more "professional," felt the productions suffered because of the emphasis on "therapy." But none of the six felt the "damage" was serious.

Four answered that there was a conflict, and that it was serious. They stressed the damage done to productions by "therapy"--or "casting nuts"--as one actress described it. They urged more care in casting and more uniform disciplining of theatre behavior violations.

Two, responding in the affirmative, disclaimed that "therapy" "was necessarily involved," suggesting that "so-called therapy casting" was "simply bad judgment on the part of the director."

One, a staff member, answered as follows: "I don't know if there is a conflict, but there is a compromise. In giving the greatest number of people the opportunity to perform (regardless occasionally of the artistic demands of the show) and out of the necessity of letting someone act who needs to act as an outlet, one makes a compromise with artistic levels. Anybody who works in such a theatre must reconcile themselves to this--the value of allowing someone to play who may need it is probably greater than the business of satisfying those artistic people who insist on high standards. We must exist to allow an outlet."

5. An observer has spoken of the "paradox of Karamu." This refers to the professionalism of the theatre: two houses, a large number of annual productions on a pre-committed schedule, admission charges, reviews in the daily papers, etc.--and the amateur basis of it all: volunteer personnel, who may or may not be completely responsible and disciplined. Would you comment on this.

One person felt there was no problem in this area, although "the theatre has naturally had its ups and downs" depending on the personnel.
Three members believed the scheduling was not too heavy. "If anything, if you are going to do theatre from the settlement house point of view, then you have a greater mass of people to meet and to serve then you would ever have in a limited professional situation. Actually what Karamu may need more than anything else is a larger professional staff to provide the outlets and experiences for more people."
This was the statement of one staff member who urged more theatre workshops and classes both as "outlet" and theatre training. This member was joined by two others who were positive about the schedule and length of runs, and urged more professional staff at Karamu to handle the membership.

Eight members praised the scheduling--"the schedule is excellent for the serious actor in terms of training. The number of productions is also good because there are more opportunities for participation"--but were critical of the lack of discipline of amateur personnel. "Just because you don't pay people doesn't mean you don't have to discipline them."

Four interviewees complained about the long runs--one saying that the long run was personally debilitating; two saying that the amateur personnel were not responsible enough to maintain a long run, particularly in the musicals where the casts were larger; and one member (who consistently spoke from a "social work" viewpoint) rejecting the long run on this score: "It hurts the social work value of the place . . . . There [should] be more time for the individual to be tied to his home. Karamu should be only a facet of life, and if you make it a be-all, then Karamu has not achieved its purpose." He went on to present specific examples of people who "needed" the outlet that Karamu afforded as an escape from family and/or personal problems, but added his feeling that "escape" was not the best answer to the problems of such an individual.
# APPENDIX VII

## KARAMU THEATRE

### STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENSES

**FOR REPRESENTATIVE YEARS**

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<th>Income</th>
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<th>1955</th>
<th>1960</th>
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3. Converted to gas heating.
4. Deficit carry-over to 1961 - $142.96.
1961

TOTAL KARAMU BUDGET

Theatre $ 64,000.00
Nursery 31,000.00
House proper 125,000.00

TOTAL $ 220,000.00

INCOME

Earnings:
  House 19,780.00
  Nursery 17,793.00
  Theatre 46,386.00
  83,959.00

Special Gifts:
  House (for deficit) 13,000.00

Endowments:
  Theatre 17,500.00
  House 22,000.00
  39,500.00

Welfare Federation: 83,541.00

TOTAL $ 220,000.00
APPENDIX VIII

DIRECTORS QUESTIONNAIRE
(February, 1961)

Choice of Plays

1. Who chose the plays you directed? You; Mrs. Jelliffe; Together; Other (specify).

2. How did you choose plays?

3. In your opinion, is there such a thing as a "Karamu" play? How would you describe it?

Tryouts and Casting

1. How did you arrange tryouts? Notification by mailing list; Newspaper publicity; Local bulletin boards; Other means? (Specify.)

2. Open tryouts or precasting? How many audition sessions? Actors heard privately? In a group? Did you cast any roles without auditions? Under what circumstances?

3. Can you sum up your Karamu casting policy and philosophy, briefly?

4. Were you in complete charge of casting? If not, specify.

5. Were there any official pressures in casting?

6. Did you always cast freely interracially? If not, under what circumstances did you not?

7. Do you believe interracial casting and good theatre are compatible? Was interracial casting satisfactory for you?

8. The casting policy of Karamu has been described as follows: "Open, interracial casting, according to talent, in all plays except those of a specific racial nature or content, in which case casting is done on a racially appropriate basis." Please comment.

541
Rehearsals and Production

1. How many rehearsals over how long a period of time?

2. Rehearsal procedure and routine?

3. Times of rehearsals?

4. How often did you return to a show after its opening?

5. Please comment on the advantages and disadvantages of the length of the runs at Karamu.

6. Did you alternate actors in roles? What is your attitude toward "alternating"?

7. Did you use understudies? What is your attitude towards the use of understudies?

8. How often did an actor fail to appear for a performance? For what reasons?

9. What did you do?

10. Did you have specific, detailed knowledge of the Karamu Theatre budget? General knowledge? Were you hampered artistically by budget considerations? Specify.

Non-Directing Activities

1. Did anyone conduct classes in acting or other facets of theatre activity at any time during the year? Please specify.

2. Did anyone conduct a Lab Theatre production program, i.e., "student" plays, run either as major productions or for one-night stands? Specify.

3. What were your responsibilities to Karamu in addition to directing? Outline them, please.

4. Was publicity on the dramas your responsibility? To what extent?

5. Were you satisfied with the way publicity was handled? Was the amount of publicity you received satisfactory?

6. Would you recommend that Karamu alter its present policy and begin paid advertising, even in the face of its limited budget?
7. During your tenure at Karamu, were there guest directors? If so, why were they used?

8. Did you supervise their work? Closely? Loosely?

Attitudes and Philosophy

1. How would you describe the official philosophy of Karamu Theatre while you were a staff member?

2. Were there discrepancies between this philosophy and actual practice? Specify.

3. Did other staff members cooperate with you in your theatre work? Were there conflicts? Did you make use of the resources of other Karamu House areas in your adult theatre work: Children's Theatre, Music, Dance, Art Studio, etc.? Specify.

4. What were your greatest sources of satisfaction at Karamu?

5. What were your greatest sources of dissatisfaction?

6. In connection with questions 4 and 5 above, what would you like to see changed or abolished, and what would you insist on retaining in the Karamu Theatre set-up?

7. Is there, in the Karamu Theatre set-up, a conflict between "social work theory" and "good theatre practice"? Is it a serious conflict, or can one work well within it?

8. An observer has spoken of the "paradox of Karamu." This refers to the professionalism of the theatre: two houses, a large number of annual productions on a pre-committed schedule, admission charges, reviews in the daily papers, etc.--and the amateur basis of it all: volunteer personnel, who may or may not be completely responsible and disciplined. Would you comment on this.

9. During your tenure, did the volunteer system in the theatre give any evidence of breaking down? Was it unsatisfactory? In what respects?

10. Do you think Karamu can continue to operate an amateur community theatre or will it be necessary, in your opinion, to abandon the volunteer system in favor of some degree of professionalism? If so, please specify.
11. In order to be a good director at Karamu, what qualities and abilities would a candidate require? In what order of importance?

12. How did your Karamu experience affect your general attitudes and your work since you left?

13. Why did you leave Karamu Theatre? (Optional.)

***

Biography

(Theatre background, related experience, current work [some details on theatre work, if any; especially directing and teaching], educational background, honors, publications, etc. Please distinguish between pre-Karamu and post-Karamu experience.)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles


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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I, Reuben Silver, was born in New York, New York, on September 19, 1925. I received my secondary-school education in the public schools of Detroit, Michigan, and my undergraduate training at Williams College and Wayne (now Wayne State) University, in Detroit, where I received the Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1949. While at the University of Connecticut, where I taught as Graduate Assistant in the English Department, I attended the summer session of the Kenyon School of English at Kenyon College. In 1951, I received the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Connecticut, and entered the graduate program in Theatre at Florida State University, where I remained for a year, teaching as a Graduate Assistant. I transferred to the Theatre Arts graduate program of the Department of Speech of the Ohio State University in 1952, and taught a variety of subjects as Graduate Assistant. From 1955 to the present, while completing the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, I have been employed as Director of Drama Productions at the Karamu Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio.