
LETTERS

THE EDITOR:

Concerning Mr. Gerald Weales' letter [T37] about André Gregory's directorial achievements including his production of my play *Beclch*; as old Ez Pound would say: "Can you be interested in the writings of men whose general perceptions are below the average?"

Well, at least I beat up a little interest in Mr. Weales, the bore.

*Rochelle Owens
New York City*

THE EDITOR:

In T36, you introduced André Gregory's version of his expulsion from the Theatre of the Living Arts in Philadelphia with the prediction that it would lead to "a long and difficult public colloquy."

For openers, let's correct a few factual errors. André Gregory was not founder of the Theatre of the Living Arts. Louis Silverman and I purchased a derelict movie house in January, 1964, rehabilitated and equipped it with our own money and credit, organized a non-profit civic corporation as operating entity and leased the theatre to it at cost. Our wives personally supervised reconstruction, negotiated the Equity contract, called auditions in Philadelphia and New York, selected the five plays for our first season and cleared rights for production. Thirty-five community leaders formed the first Board of Directors, helped to fund the first season and elected me President.

We hired André Gregory originally to direct one play and assist in the fund-raising; he is an inspiring speaker. He is also a very ambitious young man. Very soon, the Board of Directors became factionalized, and the four founders of TLA withdrew from day-to-day supervision

of the front office and ceded to Mr. Gregory complete power (not just artistic freedom, which we had already given him contractually).

The pose of Beleaguered Artist Persecuted By The Hostile Establishment ill suits Mr. Gregory; he created his own Frankenstein's monster.

The Board of Directors which operated during my administration was broadly representative of all walks of life in our community. On it were knowledgeable theatre professionals *and* Social Register matrons *and* business executives *and* representatives of the professions *and* of various ethnic groups *and* the plumber *and* electrician who had contributed months of labor to create the theatre. After the *coup* in March, 1965, many of these people were ousted and replaced by Mr. Gregory's new Main Line friends. From that point on, the Board provided unswerving, unquestioning, absolute support for Mr. Gregory despite mounting evidence of what I and the other founders thought be erratic and irresponsible judgment.

Now this is the real issue, and the reason I believe serious theatre people should study what happened at TLA.

I argue that the cult of personality represented by the Artistic Director concept in regional theatres is dangerous at best, disastrous at worst. We have mourned the demise of theatres in Pittsburgh, Seattle, San Francisco (twice!) and Lincoln Center. Years ago, Ted Hoffman observed that "artistic directors of theatres do not develop sufficiently to meet the possibilities that the economic status of their theatre invites; they hesitate to make use of guest artists of greater ability than their own, they tend to lose actors who are critical of them for good reasons, and wind up associating the loyalty of mediocre actors with quality." (The most talented members of our original company