

THROUGH THE STAGE DOOR, A SPOTLIGHT ON 'BACKSTAGE' WORK: WOMEN
DESIGNERS AND STAGEHANDS IN THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The narrative within theatre history has been predominantly male, especially regarding those who work in technical production. When historians speak to women's participation in theatre, the focus is often on performers, directors, and playwrights. Women designers are treated as anomalies, with a paucity of scholarship written about women stagehands. This thesis applies a social perspective to analyzing women's experiences in theatrical production, attempting to dismantle the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor. Rather than focusing on individual achievements, I grouped women as cohorts. The first cohort comprises pioneer women designers; I examine how women gained the skills necessary for United Scenic Artists Local 829 membership. The second cohort is made up of women stagehands who joined Locals One of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, after the passage of Title VII. Finally, I investigated the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on women stagehands in Local Four. I pay keen attention to the struggles and hardships women have faced once in theatrical unions and draw on oral testimony collected from members of the second and third cohorts. Through this methodology, my research shows that women created alternative pathways to membership in the aforementioned unions. These alternatives include education and training programs, networks of women workers, and mastery of new technologies. In sum, I establish that women are not only capable designers and stagehands but have also been equal contributors to the rise and success of modern theatre. The goal of this endeavor is to promote the creation of a more equitable workplace for all theatrical workers.

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Pre-Production

It is a bitter January night in lower Manhattan on Chambers Street. The wind tunnels which manifest along the narrow streets strike my face like bricks, and by the time I reach the intersection of Chambers and Broadway, I wish I had dressed more appropriately. The only black clothing I have are thin black fashion jeans, a t-shirt, and my Montclair State University sweatshirt under my winter coat. I walk up the industrial stairs at 280 Broadway, passing my fellow dancers warming up in the common areas, preparing for the performance to come. Upon entering the theatre space, I see people covering the windows with blackout shades, standing on ladders, dropping down the side lighting, and pulling heavy black curtains around the stage.

“We have a lot to do and not a lot of time before the run-through and show; let’s get you into the booth; you’re running sound for the show.” My heart palpitates; I have never done this before. I thought I would just be observing.

“This is the soundboard; we’ll show you the power-down procedure post-show. For now, here is the master volume fader; this is the gain, iPod plugin, this the mic fader, and this is where CD’s go. If you have any questions, Asami is running lights and is also your Stage Manager; listen to her and ask questions if you need anything. Don’t worry—you’ll be fine.” And then, as if time had skipped over the last hour or so of dress rehearsal, donning my chunky headset, I hear Asami’s gentle voice; “Stand by Lights 101 and Sound 1.” Standing by, I timidly replied. “Lights and Sound—GO”-Author

After finishing my Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance Performance at Montclair State University in New Jersey, I began my journey into backstage work as a choreography student at Dance New Amsterdam (DNA, now Gibney Dance Center). In one seminar, there was a lecture on stagecraft, and the school offered a production apprenticeship. Curious to learn more, I decided to apply. Not long after that first gig in January 2011, it became apparent to me that I enjoyed working backstage far more than dancing on stage. I thus made the transition into a new career.

During my first experience working backstage at DNA, women surrounded the work environment. As I began working on corporate events and in other theatres, I noticed how few women were part of the production crews. Sometimes, I was the only female on the job. In 2015, President Matthew D. Loeb of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)¹ established a Women’s Committee to show that the union “recognizes the voices of the many diverse women in IATSE.”² This is a positive step. However, the history section of IATSE’s website includes no mention of women’s entrance into the field of backstage work, a frequent reminder that backstage work has been primarily a male-dominated field.

Diep Tram, a former senior editor of *American Theatre*, refers to this male domination as common knowledge.³ Has there really been a dearth of women working behind the scenes? My attempts to answer this question have often been met with an unsupported contention: Yes—it has always been this way, since the dawn of modern theatre. When we look back at Elizabethan theatre, a renaissance era of the performing arts, there were no professional women actors. Women did not begin to perform on stage until the latter half of the seventeenth century; boys would commonly perform women’s roles. The first ever licensed theatre troupe of actors were the “Leicester’s Men,” named after Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester, in 1574 CE.⁴ Theatre historian Natasha Korda states the “all-male stage” in Elizabethan theatre grew from the guilds which professional theatre troupes were modeled upon.⁵ Tram seems to be correct; “the male

¹ The full title of IATSE is the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, Its Territories and Canada. This research focuses specifically to Theatrical Protective Union Local One and Stage Employees Local Four of New York City. For simplicity, I refer to the aforementioned as Local One and Local Four.

² History of IATSE, *IATSE Women’s Committee*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.iatse.net/history/iatse-womens-committee>.

³ Diep Tram, “Why So Few Female Designers? A New Study May Have the Answers,” *American Theatre*, September 13, 2019, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.americatheatre.org/2019/09/13/why-so-few-female-designers-a-new-study-may-have-the-answers/>.

⁴ Mark Cartwright, “Elizabethan Theatre,” *World History Encyclopedia*, June 12, 2021, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.ancient.eu/Elizabethan_Theatre/.

⁵ Natasha Korda “Women’s Theatrical Properties” in *Stage Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris, Natasha Korda (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 205.

domination of theatre” is common knowledge. However, when we draw back the curtains, women have always been in the wings, supporting one another through networks, and have been equal contributors to the success of Western theatre. To help dismantle the patriarchal narrative of theatrical labor, this thesis, by using a social perspective of research, assembles documentation to produce a more comprehensive analysis of women in theatrical production.

Theatre is a visual and aural spectacle; the work done behind the scenes is often invisible. Women’s contributions have been diminished, silenced and disremembered. How does that narrative change when we spotlight behind-the-scenes women in technical production and design? A challenge of creating a comprehensive analysis of highlighting women in theatrical production is that much of the work written on the subject prior to the 1980s has been biographical or autobiographical. Examples of this can be seen with lighting designer Jean Rosenthal and co-author Lael Wertenbaker’s *The Magic of Light* (1972)⁶ and costume designer Irene Sharaff’s *Broadway and Hollywood* (1976),⁷ both of which are part autobiographical and part technical. Furthermore, there is Carole Klein’s biography *Aline* (1979),⁸ about scenic designer Aline Bernstein—however, much of the focus is on her infamous love affair with American novelist Thomas Wolfe. There is some value to these sources, which are used in Chapter I.

Historians of theatre have remarked upon the spectacle of a show—its directors, playwrights, and performers. Initially published in 1981, *Women in American Theatre*⁹ is a collection of interviews and essays on women’s multifaceted participation in American theatre.

⁶ Jean Rosenthal and Lael Tucker Wertenbaker, *The Magic of Light: The Craft and Career of Jean Rosenthal, Pioneer in Lighting for the Modern Stage*. 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).

⁷ Irene Sharaff. *Broadway & Hollywood: Costumes by Irene Sharaff* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold/Litton Educational, 1976).

⁸ Carole Klein, *Aline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

⁹ Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins, eds., *Women in American Theatre* (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2007).

A project spanning over twenty-five years, edited by theatre historian Helen Krich Chinoy and theatre professor-turned-dramaturg Linda Walsh Jenkins, this anthology is now in its third edition. It consists almost entirely of writing by women, both scholars and theatrical practitioners, that attempts to uncover, analyze, and highlight women's roles in American theatre's history. *Women in American Theatre* encompasses all aspects of theatrical production, both on and off stage, including the struggles and hardships women face in theatre. This book is one of the most commonly cited sources in research on women's various roles in American theatre as actresses, theatre managers, directors, producers, and designers. Within each essay, this anthology's primary goal is to provide women an ability to "locate themselves in some female tradition that will help them understand their problems in the present as well as plan for the future."¹⁰ The anthology is broken down into eight sections highlighting women in previously mentioned areas, with two sections entirely devoted to feminist theatre and theories. The last section, titled "Voices at the Millennium," is a new chapter in the third edition, which includes ten additional pages devoted to women in design.

According to Chinoy, the difficulty of locating women in various roles in theatre is due to the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor. She means that, once skills in the dramatic trades formalize into legitimate professions, men ascend to this higher tier of theatrical labor, whereas women stay at the bottom. Therefore, their work and contributions to the field have been forgotten.¹¹ Chinoy and Jenkins offer a small glimpse into these forgotten women, but while this anthology is useful, its contents do not provide deep analytical conversation. One section is simply titled "Here are the Women Playwrights;" it only locates these women on an individual basis. Even more so, while Chinoy mentions an "old girls' network" of women, little is dedicated

¹⁰ Chinoy and Jenkins, eds., *Women in American Theatre*, xxvii.

¹¹ Chinoy and Jenkins, eds., *Women in American Theatre*, 180.

to designer women, as if their inclusion were an afterthought. The topic of women designers encompassed by just a few short pages with very few articles—one notably by light and scenic designer Peggy Clark and an article by historian Mary Callahan Boone on light designer Jean Rosenthal. Directors, playwrights, and feminist theatres receive much more attention.

It is also important to note that there is no mention of IATSE women stagehands entering the world of backstage theatrical production after the passage of Title VII. This federal law, part of the Civil Rights Act, prohibits discrimination against employees based on color, race, national origin, religion, and sex. In fact, there is no mention of female stagehands at all despite *Women in American Theatre* having been published after Title VII became law, when women had entered craft unions previously dominated by men. It is imperative within the type of revisionist theatre history that Chinoy and Jenkins compiled in *Women in American Theatre* to locate and create an overview of the individual achievements women have made in theatre; this book offers a breadth of stepping stones into further research. According to Gerda Lerner, their methodology is the base level of historicizing women by simply noting their individual achievements.¹²

While this anthology covers a wide range of roles women have played in American theatre, it ignores the achievements of female stagehands and thus a fully complete analysis of the importance women played in the rise and success of Western theatre. *Women in American Theatre* focuses on individual successes, and sidelines the connectedness of these women to one another. By examining *how* these individual achievements were accomplished—i.e., the alternate ways women obtained skills that helped them break out of lower-tier theatrical labor—my research shows that women in theatrical production collectively formalized their design fields

¹² Gerda Lerner, “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges,” *Feminist Studies*, Autumn, 1975, vol. 3, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1975): 5, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i368984>.

into full-fledged professions. These alternate routes to skills included higher education, women's networks, and most importantly, mastering new technologies in stagecraft.

There are also historians of theatre that speak to women's performances on stage while also providing a more social perspective. Faye E. Dudden, former professor of history at Colgate University, did this with her work *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences 1790-1870*, published in 1994.¹³ Dudden analyzes how the performative onstage activities allowed women a break from the private sphere but were also objectified and how "women's work" was defined on the early American stage. Dudden refers to this as the "body problem."¹⁴ According to Dudden, when American theatre became a capitalist venture in the late nineteenth century, women's rights were a growing social movement. This resulted in "looking" becoming a male privilege.¹⁵ *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences* does more than highlight women in the theatre, it also speaks to how antebellum theatre reflected society itself. This history moves beyond the base level into "contribution history: describing women's contribution to, their status in, and their oppression by male-defined society."¹⁶

Studying the experiences of women employed onstage can deepen our understanding of women's employment backstage. Dudden believes that the theatre has never been able to ignore gender: "Particular historical moments and human conditions provide special focus for the stage's revelatory powers. For example, in early modern England the stage reflected and modeled the social relations of the emerging market economy."¹⁷ While this work is geared toward onstage performance and its attendees, it nevertheless speaks to New York City theatre's social, economic, and political landscape, particularly in lower Manhattan. Dudden provides a

¹³ Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences 1790-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Dudden, 3.

¹⁵ Dudden, 6.

¹⁶ Lerner, 5.

¹⁷ Dudden, 1.

unique analysis of the onstage activities, women's representation and the cultural landscape surrounding early American modern theatre—but, as in the anthology edited by Chinoy and Jenkins, there is little spoken of “backstage” activities.

Actresses performing as *women workers* on stage were often underrepresented. Take “Lize,” the titular character's girlfriend in the “Bowery B'hoys” plays of the 1840s. Lize was a rare glimpse into working women's reality; however, later versions of the play ultimately dropped the character. Dudden makes note of actresses who were also theatre managers and family ties—the wives who worked for the early American theatrical companies. Laura Keane is specifically noted who “testified to the limitations of the power of the female manager and the female audience alike.”¹⁸ Keane was unique; she left her husband, successfully operated a theatre in New York City, and tailored it to the female middle-class audience. In other words, Keane attempted to move beyond the body problem.

The same “body problem” created difficulty for women to garner respect in theatre and backstage work activities. In one sense, it allowed Victorian women to break out of the private sphere of domesticity. On the other hand, because theatre has always been a space for visual and aural entertainment, women's bodies and voices were sexualized and objectified by the male audiences. The roles which women played onstage were intended to replicate what men defined as women's roles; objects of desire and docile housewives. Dudden concludes that the body problem was due in part to the theatre moving from primarily an aural to a more visual form of entertainment. I argue that there was little to no focus on the elements of design during this period. When theatre began to focus on the visual and audio *techniques* of the production as a whole, not solely on its performers, and new technologies began to appear in stagecraft, women began to have access to backstage careers.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

While the “all-male stage”—thus the gendered division of theatrical labor—has seemingly been accepted into the canon of theatre history without question, there has been recent exploration into *how* this mindset originated. Natasha Korda’s *Labors Lost: Women’s Work and the Early Modern English Stage*, published in 2011, provides vital evidence and analysis of how the all-male stage mindset perpetuated; and deems it a myth.¹⁹ Korda states, “Scholarship emphasizing female absence has tended to confine its definition to the onstage activities of the professional playing companies in London and to minimize the significance of women’s participation in the theatrical activity beyond this purview, branding such activity as exceptional or of lesser significance.”²⁰ Korda deconstructs the idea of the “all-male professional stage” by providing a wide-ranging account of women’s participation in Shakespearean theatre during the Elizabethan Era.

Drawing on newly uncovered archival sources, small glass beads, and other “tiny objects” created by women, Korda reconstructs how women provided various forms of labor cross-class. Upon discovering the “tiny objects,” Korda explains that “deciphering these scattered traces often requires laboriously collecting many shards or fragments of evidence that would remain, when viewed in isolation, indecipherable. Like beads, they take on significance or value only relationally, when strung or stitched together to form a pattern.”²¹ At the same time, *Labors Lost* expands the definition of “backstage work” by discussing the social, cultural, and economic conditions outside the playhouse, as well as how the private spaces of women influenced and shaped the playhouse itself.

¹⁹ Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women’s Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011)

²⁰ Korda, 16.

²¹ Korda, 3.

Korda's work is relatively new scholarship; at stake is the representation of working women within the playhouses of the early modern stage. Recognizing the informal networks of working women also raises the status and legitimacy of performance itself as a profession.²² The commercial theatres relied heavily on such informality, yet simultaneously emulated the standardization of formalized craftspeople in guilds. To better understand the gendered division of theatrical labor—as well as how male playwrights and actors developed the meaning of women's work—Korda cast her research net broadly to include a vast network of immigrant craftswomen from the Netherlands, moneylenders, seamstresses, and others. By taking the concept of “backstage work” and expanding it beyond the playhouse walls, we begin to see that while women's work in the formal economy was more often restricted, their work was predominant within informal networks.

While this created new opportunities, it excluded women from the visible workspace of the stage itself, with “playing” still defined as men's work. *Labors Lost* deconstructs the myth of Shakespeare's theatre as that of an “all-male stage,” and uncovers a broad network of women working with women. Korda comes to the idea of a gendered division of theatrical labor during Shakespeare's time from a more positive angle than Chinoy. She argues that the division was crucial to the rise and success of the modern stage. However, what worked then has had a long and lasting negative effect on women's contributions to the rise of American theatre—a fact still apparent. By deconstructing the “all-male stage” as a myth, Korda makes a call to action for further research on women's participation in theatrical production. She states that “these are only a few of the avenues of research that might be pursued to illuminate the varied contributions of working women to the rise of the professional stage.”²³ This thesis is a response to that call. I

²² Ibid., 1.

²³ Ibid., 218.

argue that the myth of the “all-male stage” directly carried over to the United States during the rise of commercial theatre.

To finally deconstruct this division, we must look back on these pioneering American women designers entering the field, and when women became union stagehand workers, much as Korda does by looking at women’s networks on the Shakespearean stage.²⁴ With my research, I take Korda’s framework and apply it to twentieth and twenty-first-century American theatre in New York City. I expand theatrical backstage work to include women networks and for these interfaces observed as cohorts to dismantle the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor. First cohort is with pioneer women entering United Scenic Artists Local 829 (USA829). The second cohort is of women entering IATSE as stagehands after the passing of Title VII. Third and final cohort is women entering stagehand work in the digital/social media age. Thus I steer the conversation from the biographical approach of noting individual achievements of women designers into a social history focusing on these cohorts of women and including women’s voices of IATSE. I argue that backstage women in American theatrical production created alternative spaces, organizations, and pathways towards union membership to elevate the legitimacy of women’s status as “players” in developing modern theatrical production. It is time to burn the all-male stage myth to the ground.

Artistry and technical knowledge are vital for providing a cohesive analysis of women’s contribution to modern theatre; and their *equal* contribution to technical theatre production. The advancement of women in backstage work intertwines with the advancement of new technologies such as the switchboard, computer-operated lighting boards, and the promotion of audio technologies for the theatre. New technologies are not specifically gendered, and women

²⁴ While I make references to it, I have chosen not to include an in-depth exploration of costume design and the wardrobe union. The reason being that textiles has been a female-dominated trade. My interest comes from researching women in stagecraft positions that have been primarily reserved for men.

thus have easier access to them. Raynette Smith's 1988 article in the United States Institute of Theatre Technology (USITT)'s Journal *Theatre Design and Technology*, "Where Are the American Women Scene Designers," details a theory brought forth by scenic designer Heidi Ettinger (née Landesman). Ettinger attributes scene design to be more associated with architecture, the very nature of architecture to be rigid, hard, a defined space, and therefore male. Lighting and costume design is soft, which equates to ephemeral and more in tune to private space and consequently feminine, that the "architect becomes the enforcer of the hierarchical structure of a society through his power to allocate space."²⁵ Ettinger claims that designer roles are gendered, that lighting and costuming are subordinate to the scenic designer, and therefore unequal. My rebuttal to this theory is that one cannot assign gender dynamics to design elements. By providing more analysis into design theory and the rapid technological advancements in stagecraft, specifically with lighting design, I am able to point out women's equal contributions to theatrical production.

When researching how women gained the skills needed to enter USA829, there is a challenge in explaining the unique profession of light design. Specifically, it is difficult to explain its nuts and bolts to readers without a background in theatre. Scenic designers create renderings and scale models. The costume designer has mockups and fabric swatches: both are tactile and visible. In the first half of the twenty-first century, light designers only had lighting plots, channel hookups, cue sheets, and color/focus charts, but these tools of the trade do not fully explain the lighting design. Light is visible only when reflecting upon a surface, and the intensity, direction, and color with which light reflects evoke an emotional response.

²⁵ Raynette H. Smith, "Where Are the American Women Scene Designers?," *Theatre Design and Technology/United States Institute for Theatre Technology* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 6, accessed April 14, 2021, https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/hickmanbrady/tdt_1988spring/.

The Lighting Archive/Theatrical Lighting Database, Stanley McCandless's *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, and Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives can help us with such a challenge. Pioneers Jean Rosenthal, Peggy Clark, and Tharon Musser all studied at the Yale School of Drama under Stanley McCandless, who is considered the father of modern light design in theatre. His book, *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, describes what is now known as the "McCandless Method."²⁶ The "McCandless Method" begins with an analysis of the lighting effect to be produced, goes on to a determination of the characteristics of the most straightforward standard lighting units necessary for the purpose, and then outlines a method of lighting procedure that is simple, adequate, and easily coordinated with the other elements of production.²⁷

A school report titled "New York Lighting," written by Tharon Musser while attending Yale in 1950, was discovered in 2018 by light designer Ken Billington.²⁸ In this report, Musser describes the light designer's role and requires a specialized skill set of artistic and technical knowledge. The Tamiment Archives contains the minutes from USA829's Lighting Designer's Committee during 1962-1963, in which Rosenthal and Musser were members.²⁹ These documents show USA829's dissent of IATSE organizing their own light design union when the position was in the designer union's jurisdiction. Most importantly, the committee created a specific light design exam separate from the general designer's unions entrance exam, which would test a person's artistic ability and technical skills needed for this specialized profession.

²⁶ Stanley McCandless, *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, 4th ed. (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1958).

²⁷ McCandless, *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, 9.

²⁸ Beverly Emmons, "The Lighting Archive," *The Lighting Archive*, Accessed October 30, 2020, <https://thelightingarchive.org/>. This was first posted in the Facebook group "Archiving Technical Theatre History" and is now archived in the Lighting Archives database. The Lighting Archive is a digital open-source database in partnership with the New York Performing Arts Library containing the original light plots, channel hookups and other production materials from notable lighting designers. This provides incredible access for researchers who are not able to travel to individual designer archives, or for those researching during a pandemic.

²⁹ Lighting Designer's Committee, Feb 1962-Jun 1963, United Scenic Artists Records [WAG.065, Box #6, Folder #38]. Tamiment Library & Wagner Labor Archives, NYU.

Whereas theatre historians tend to be biographic when researching women in theatre and note the individual achievements made by women in theatrical design, they lack the technological depth and understanding of the profession itself. These women helped develop the definition of light design and its documentation as it developed into a career and determined the crafts skills needed for union status. Historians such as Mary Callahan-Boone also deduce that women entered this career because the lighting was subordinate to the scenic design and a feminized profession.³⁰ However, by looking at these documents together, their potential shows that this design element was not subordinate to that of other more established design professions but equally integral to the production. These documents provide the context of both the artistic and technical skills needed, and these accomplishments move beyond the biographical narrative. They also allow me to expand this history into a social context where these women are active and equal contributors, networking with one another in New York City commercial theatre's rise and success.

For every theatrical performance, there is an accompanying playbill. Although small, its contents carry a breadth of information; advertisements, a breakdown of the show, identifying which actor is playing what character, and giving credit to the producers and production staff. Playbills are also a personal keepsake. From the first time I stepped onstage in a duck tutu at age four to the recent revival of *West Side Story*, I have been collecting playbills for the past twenty-nine years.³¹ For many others, including myself, they signify a small keepsake of history, a written legacy when the visuals of the production fade into the memories of its spectators.

³⁰ Mary Callahan Boone, "Jean Rosenthal's Light: Making Visible the Magician." *Theatre Topics* vol. 7, no.1 (1997): 77, accessed April 20, 2021, [doi:10.1353/tt.1997.0001](https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.1997.0001).

³¹ *West Side Story*, Revival Directed by Ivo Van Howe, choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, book by Arthur Laurents, music Leonard Bernstein; Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, Shubert Theatre, New York, February 20th, 2020.

These small keepsakes can show us even more. A playbill from Civic Repertory Theatre's 1930 season provides insight into the network women created in theatre production.

In addition, I utilize the *Theatre Design and Technologies*, the official journal of the United States Institute of Theatre Technologies (USITT) which has been the leading organization for the discourse and research of new technologies. This journal has been valuable in the discussion of women in stagecraft and why designers organized. The appendices of this research include a selection of lighting plots and cue sheets as well as mock-ups of productions that further detail the feminization of new technologies. These sources are crucial to understanding how women gained access to backstage work. Finally, I have conducted both long-form and shorter interviews of women in the field of backstage work, specifically as stagehands, in two New York City theatrical Locals.

This thesis is laid out in a similar way one would mount a production. Chapter I, "The Load-In," is where I incorporate my research on the pioneering women designers of United Scenic Artists Local 829. In this section, I ask; how were women able to acquire the skills needed to enter USA829? What were they able to accomplish once gaining membership, and how did Local 829 affect their careers? This chapter focuses on four women (Aline Bernstein, Peggy Clark, Jean Rosenthal, and Tharon Musser) during the timespan of the early 1900s to the mid-1960s, before Title VII went into effect. In this chapter, I explore the alternative ways in which women designers gained entrance into the production design union. Like the men, they acquired skills through a combination of family connections, training programs, and apprenticeships. But while these women certainly opened the doors for other women to seek entrance into the design union, hardships for women in Local 829 continue to this day. By uncovering how pioneers attained skills needed during the formalization of production design

and gained access to production, these women would legitimize theatre design as a career for women and provided mentorship for anyone entering Local 829.

Chapter II, “Tech Week,” picks up during the Civil Rights Era, when a new wave of women began working in theatrical production beyond the pioneering women who created careers in design. They would do so as IATSE stagehands, as union tradeswomen. I gathered an oral history of Barbara Schwartz, one of the first women to join IATSE Local One. I asked Schwartz how she became involved with backstage work, the process of obtaining membership into IATSE, and what it was like to enter a field that had previously been designated for men. Her testimony further establishes the feminization of new technology and the need to, “go along to get along” with their male counterparts. Finally, I examine the changes IATSE is making as an organization to become a more inclusive union.

Chapter III, “Standing By,” brings us to present times and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted short interviews with women of IATSE Local Four in Brooklyn and Queens, about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. What is also at stake is the very existence of theatre itself. This sector of the entertainment industry is based upon live, in-person events. While there is protection that comes with being in a performing arts union such as safe working conditions and fair wages, the members work on an “as-needed” basis, meaning that employment is available only when there is a production that needs employees. I examine the economic ramifications of the pandemic and developing hardships/struggles union theatrical production women are currently facing with respect to mental health and layoffs, in addition to the positives of what the pandemic has brought. Has the use of social media created an alternative route which women have used throughout theatre history to create new opportunities for working in the pandemic (such as creating virtual performances)? How much of this work

and alliances is forged in person, through the stress and exhilaration of live performance, and how much of it is shared virtually? These positives include Zoom as a new technology for women to learn new skills and the opportunity for self-care in an industry that asks a lot of our bodies. It has been time off members of this industry needed, but for a length of time no one wanted; however, the positives also produce new challenges as we move forward into post-pandemic theatre.

New technologies, education, and networks of women workers are the key factors to dismantling the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor. It is time now, to enter the stage door.

CHAPTER I: “The Load-In”-Women Designers in USA829

Walking down the hallway accompanied by her husband Theo and dressed to the nines in a glamorous art deco style pink and gilt sari, she approached the doorman and confidently said “I’ll show you my credentials,” as she opened her beaded purse, presented her union card, and letter of acceptance. The doorkeeper looked the card over carefully and then, after a long, long moment, swallowed hard, threw open the door and shouted hoarsely to the boisterous, shirt-sleeved men inside: “Let’s give a welcome to our new member—Brother Bernstein!”³² In November of 1926, Aline Bernstein (see Fig. 1), a theatrical scenic and costume designer in New York City, became the first female designer to be inducted into the United Scenic Artists of America Local 829; an autonomous local of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America.³³

Bernstein was not an anomaly; while men discouraged women from the field of production design, that did not completely dissuade women from entering and seeking union membership. Women had much greater access to the stage with performative onstage activities while other women gained access to backstage production through subversive pathways. Other pioneering women joined USA829 after Bernstein, such as light and scenic designer Peggy Clark (see Fig. 2), best known for her lighting designs on the musical *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960); light designer Jean Rosenthal (see Fig. 3), who lit almost 100 productions but is most famous for *West Side Story* (1957); and light designer Tharon Musser (see Fig. 4), who designed for *A Chorus*

³² Klein, 173. There are several sources which cite Bernstein entering her first union meeting being called “Brother Bernstein” from union correspondence, letters to her lover Thomas Wolfe, and newspapers. The night of Bernstein’s first union meeting was also the night of her anniversary dinner with husband Theodore Bernstein, both thought the idea of her wearing an evening gown to a union meeting would be hilarious and make a bold statement after being rejected from membership previously.

³³ Although the union was first called United Scenic Artists of America until 1918 after its separation from the International Alliance of Theatrical Stagehand Employees (IATSE) this paper will refer to it as either USA829 or Local 829. *History: In The Beginning*, USA829, accessed January 17th, 2021, <https://www.usa829.org/About-USA-829/History>.



Fig. 1 Aline Bernstein. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aline_Bernstein.



Fig. 2 Peggy Clark, <https://peggyclark17.wordpress.com/biography/>.



Fig. 3 Jean Rosenthal from her book, *The Magic of Light*



Fig. 4 Tharon Musser, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/21/theater/21musser.html>.

Line (1975). Looking at the pioneers' careers we see recurring patterns in the ways they gained their skills in theatrical design, patterns strikingly similar to those that characterized their male colleagues. Like the men, they acquired skills through a combination of family connections, training programs and apprenticeship. But while these pioneers certainly opened doors for other women, special hardships and struggles for women in Local 829 continue to this day. The current statistics on Broadway productions serve as an indicator of the glacial pace of change over the past ninety-plus years for women in design. For the 2019 Broadway season, women designed just thirty percent of the sets, fifty-two percent of the costumes, and twenty-two percent of the lighting.³⁴

The alternative routes which were taken by these pioneering women helped create a standard route into unionship that is still present today. The ways in which these pioneers attained the skills needed during the formalization of production design—how they gained access to production—we discover this cohort legitimized theatre design as a career for women. Furthermore, this pioneering cohort provided mentorship for anyone entering Local 829. Finally, these early pioneering women highlight that there has been no aspect of technical theatre that has been untouched by women.³⁵

Before the designer became a formalized position, the elements of scenic design often came from art houses (workshops) that employed craft workers who mostly produced painted flats and decorative scenic backdrops. Scenic design also encompassed elements of costume design, and lighting would often be handed over to the head electricians of the International

³⁴ Broadway by the numbers is an excellent infographic that has started over the past few years. While this paper largely focuses on female scenic, costume, and light designers; sound and video design are now important design elements within a production. *Broadway by the Numbers*. ProductionPro, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://production.pro/broadway-by-the-numbers>.

³⁵ It should also be noted that the women studied here in chapter one are all caucasian. While there was certainly theatre production happening with women of color, the purpose of this research is not to focus on the euro-centric identities of these women, but rather how women were able to enter theatre production trades. The segregation of unions, specifically with IATSE and the all-black union Local 1-A, is discussed in Chapter II.

Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees union (IATSE) who operated the switchboards. The overall purpose of stage lighting was to provide illumination and a general wash of light across the stage before theatrical lighting became an integral design aspect of the performance. In other words, scenic, lighting and costume elements were not crucial to the production; the focus was more on the talent of the performers, the playwright's dialogue and the director's success in melding these two elements onstage. More often than not, the settings were based in realism. This, however, changed with the New Stagecraft movement of the early twentieth century.

New Stagecraft was a major shift from the status quo at the beginning of the twentieth century, applying minimalist aesthetics and techniques which were developed by theatre theorists such as Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966). These techniques created by Appia and Craig opened a new curtain in the theatre that created more abstraction, symbolism, and mood. The New Stagecraft was an important shift that moved scenic elements beyond just decorations on the stage, and legitimized scenic design into a more formalized position within theatre production. Aline Bernstein expressed this idea perfectly; "The purpose of stage scenery is to enclose the space of the stage in which the action of the play is to take place; to establish the locale; to create the mood; to provide a suitable background...stage scenery is not interior design."³⁶ The New Stagecraft movement marked the beginning of the delineation between craft workers and designers, and the need for protection of artistic integrity. New Stagecraft created the designer as a formalized position and from there, designers organized.

The establishment of Local 829 was unique. Although the local was originally part of IATSE, the American Federation of Labor determined that Local 829 needed to separate from IATSE and affiliate with the painters' union. Many of the designers, considering themselves

³⁶ Aline Bernstein, "Behind American Footlights," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, New Series*, 7, no. 7 (March 1949): 202, accessed April 18, 2021, doi:10.2307/3257330.

artists, felt forced into joining the painters, resenting association with the building trades.

Norman Bel Geddes expressed the sentiments of his fellow designers;

I have no objection whatever to joining the American Federation of Labor, in fact I am very much in sympathy with its aims; however, I do not feel the same way about the Local which we have been asked to join. Our positions are totally distinct from those of the men who paint scenery as are the carpenters who build it, the electricians who light it, and the truckmen who haul it.... Our position in the theatre is akin to that of the architects in building design....I should say that the distinction lies between those men who are put in charge by the managers of the pictorial side of production to design its settings, costume, and lighting; and those who carry out these ideas in a subordinate way, whether it be on the pain bridge, in the carpenter, costume, or electrical shop.³⁷

Bel Geddes shows that, while he did not object to joining the American Federation of Labor in order to obtain fair wages, hours, and safe working conditions—in addition to protecting artistic integrity—he believed the position of designer was distinctly different from that of the ground-level craft workers.

There's no people like show people, they smile when they are low—Ties and Connections to Theatre³⁸

In many craft unions, family ties certainly helped open doors for incoming members. This was and remains commonplace in IATSE stagecraft locals, whose membership has been dominated by patriarchal familial dynasties that continue to the present day. There is also evidence of family ties in Local 829, but not in the same multigenerational way as in IATSE.³⁹

³⁷ Carbon copy of the typewritten letter from Bel Geddes to [Lee] Simonson, August 9, 1923. Design Course, SC-7, USAA file, Bel Geddes Collection. Courtesy of Edith Bel Geddes, quoted in Don Stowell, “Unionization of the Stage Designer-Male and Female,” *Theatre Design & Technology/United States Institute for Theatre Technology*, no. 38 (Oct 1974): 9, 36-37.

³⁸ Chapter I section titles are from the song “There’s No Business, like Show Business,” 1946 Broadway production *Annie Get Your Gun* lyrics by Irving Berlin.

³⁹ Throughout chapter one, I treat IATSE and USA829 as separate locals. The designer union did not re-affiliate with IATSE until April 27, 1999, accessed April 21, 2021, <https://www.usa829.org/About-USA-829/History>.

Nepotism in Local 829 had operated mainly through spousal connections and on the rare occasion, scenic artist daughters' and sons' working for their fathers.⁴⁰

Joseph Frankau was a respected actor of his time. Aline Bernstein's relationship with her father Frankau—although he was not in the union—nevertheless opened the backstage doors into the realm of theatrical design. Frankau was performing in a production of *Hazel Kirke* when she was born on December 22, 1880. One could in fact make the argument that Bernstein's love for theatre began at birth. As a child, Bernstein clearly adored her father and his chosen profession, exclaiming to family members that she was going to be one of Shakespeare's heroines.⁴¹ In addition, the family would go on tour with Frankau, and Bernstein would watch the shows from the wings and sometimes even on the rare occasion go on stage, as she knew all the blocking and lines. "I loved the life," she recalled. "I even liked the discomforts. I enjoyed being part of a group."⁴²

Theatre is very much a community, a group providing entertainment to its audience. This community is further emphasized by Bernstein's Aunt Mamie opening up a boarding house which housed other actors on 44th Street, right in the heart of the theatre district. According to Bernstein's memoir of her early days, Frankau was deeply opposed to the idea of his daughter pursuing a career on the performative stage. Even at an early age, Bernstein was well aware of the small income of an actor while supporting not just for oneself but to provide for a family. It seems Frankau was always hesitant of his daughter's devotion to the theatre because of its financial uncertainties.

⁴⁰ Mabel Buell was a scenic artist who followed in her father's footsteps and was admitted into Local 829 in 1918. Stowell, 8.

⁴¹ Aline Bernstein, *An Actor's Daughter* (New York: Knopf, 1941), 54.

⁴² Bernstein, 77.

Peggy Clark, born in 1915 in Baltimore, had similar experiences to those of Bernstein with her family connections to theatre. Peggy Clark's father, Dr. Eliot R. Clark, was a professor of anatomy at several universities and her mother a researcher on blood circulation. Although their professions were in the medical sciences, the two shared a deep passion for the theatre. "Wherever they lived they started little theatres so that I grew up with this love of theatre as well as exposure to the sciences and to the liberal arts," Clarke later told an interviewer.⁴³ Clark and Bernstein both wanted access to the performative stage; while Bernstein was discouraged by Frankau, it was often lamented by Clark she did not have the looks (claiming that it was her towering height that got in the way). Nevertheless, her passion for theatre went beyond performance. According to the Library of Congress website, at the early age of five Clark saw a puppet show that inspired her to make a marionette theatre out of a cardboard box and Christmas lights.⁴⁴ It is clear that, with her parents' active engagement in the performing arts, Clark had family ties that evoked her interest in theatrical production.

Jean Rosenthal and Tharon Musser did not have immediate family connections to the theatre, but were exposed to performances in their formative years by their parents. Jean Rosenthal, born in Jamaica, Queens, in 1912, grew up in New York City like Bernstein and Clark. Similar to Clark's, Rosenthal's parents were both physicians who exposed her to New York City culture and regularly attended the theatre. However, Rosenthal's family, although giving her exposure to theatre, had no direct family ties to that world. There is no evidence that Tharon Musser had family connections to the performing arts. Born in Roanoke, Virginia, in 1925 originally as Kathleen Welland, Musser lost both of her birth parents while she was a child.

⁴³ Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins, *Women in American Theatre*, 211.

⁴⁴ Walter Zvonchenko, "LC Receives Papers of Noted Theatrical Designer: Peggy Clark, Lighting Up the Stage," *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* (April 1998), accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9804/clark.html>.

At the age of four, Musser was adopted by the Reverend George Musser with his wife Hazel, and grew up in Roanoke during the Great Depression.⁴⁵ Musser could have perhaps been exposed to the element of theatrics through her father's preaching sermons as a minister's daughter. Nevertheless, unlike Bernstein, Rosenthal, and Clark, Musser had zero exposure to the performing arts until she attended high school.⁴⁶

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that by either exposure or encouragement, family connections inspired a deep passion for all aspects of the performing arts for at least three out of our four pioneering women. Just as important, none of these women had spousal connections to Local 829.⁴⁷ While family connections help to explain why the four women were drawn to stagecraft and design, this does not necessarily explain how these women obtained the necessary skills. These skills were acquired through different ways of entry: training programs in higher education and the Little Theatre movement, specifically the Department of Drama at Yale University's School of Fine Arts in New Haven, Connecticut, and the Neighborhood Playhouse and School in New York City.

The costumes, the scenery, the makeup, the props...The audience that lifts you when you're down—Education and Training Programs

The leading male designers of the New Stagecraft movement (as well as the first designers in Local 829), such as Jo Mielziner, Robert Edmund Jones, Norman Bel Geddes and Lee Simonson, were able to obtain the skills needed through fine art schools or through an elite

⁴⁵ The population of Roanoke in 1930, about the time Musser was growing up, was 69,206. This information can be found through a simple Google search.

⁴⁶ Delbert Unruh, Marilyn Rennagel, Jeff Davis, and United States Institute for Theatre Technology, *Tharon Musser* (Syracuse: United States Institute for Theatre Technology, 2007), 11.

⁴⁷ Such as Carolyn Hancock, whose name is listed along with Bernsteins on the membership list of 1926. In a letter to Thomas Wolfe, Bernstein describes sitting in her first union meeting with her as well. "My Other Loneliness" which consists of the letters Wolfe and Bernstein wrote to one another, cites Hancock as being a fellow designer but also the wife of one of the locals first union members, scenic designer Lee Simonson. Aline Bernstein and Thomas Wolfe, *My Other Loneliness: Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein* (United Kingdom: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

college, most notably Harvard, and the trailblazing women were no different. Mielziner studied at the National Academy of Design and Normal Bel Geddes at the Cleveland Institute of Art as well as the Art Institute of Chicago. Bernstein began her artistic education at the School of Applied Design, where she studied with famed portraitist Robert Henri. Attending a fine arts school follows the same pattern of education of her fellow male designers of Local 829. Prior to moving on to larger productions on Broadway, these men used on-the-job training in the Little Theatres. The Little Theatre movement of 1912-1925 has often been described as amateur theatre but, in reality, it was anything but. Little Theater in fact was against the commercialism seen on Broadway; and people within the movement believed that theatre could be used for the betterment of American society and for self-expression.⁴⁸

When looking at the history of education for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they were more often than not caught between the world of Victorian domesticity, and the commercial world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Genteel women were stuck in the restrictive home, but were beginning to hear the call of opportunity that lay beyond the private sphere.⁴⁹ With the help of the women's movement, higher education for women had been unlocked. Our pioneer designers were among the first waves of women to enter the world of technical theatrical production. Obtaining the expertise through educational institutions and organizations were important elements that designers in Local 829 needed for the field; for women, these sites of education were primarily The Neighborhood Playhouse (see Fig. 5) and Yale's School of Drama.

⁴⁸ Dorothy Chansky, "Little Theater Movement." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*. September 5, 2016, accessed Jan 27, 2020, <https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/little-theater-movement>.

⁴⁹ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres : Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xiv.



Fig. 5. The Neighborhood Playhouse, 1917, *the collection of the Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014703308/>.

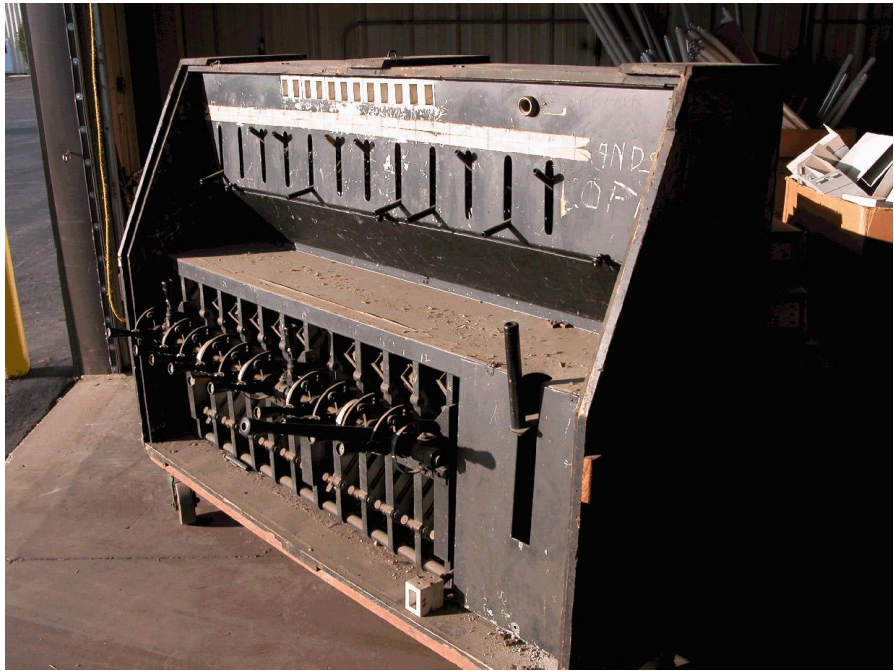


Fig. 6. Switchboard, *The Lighting Archive*

Aline Bernstein had been encouraged to study the fine arts rather than to perform onstage. Bernstein had a sincere distaste for school and would have rather been drawing, learning how to sew and being with her father while he rehearsed.⁵⁰ The young and enthusiastic Bernstein expressed openly that she did not wish to continue regular schooling because she very much did not want to become a teacher like the rest of her cohort. It was family friend Tom Watson who piqued Bernstein's interest in the fine arts. Watson—recently appointed the School of Applied Design's president, gave Bernstein a scholarship to attend.⁵¹ While these male designers were working and developing their design skills in such places as The Provincetown Players, The Neighborhood Playhouse was the only Little Theatre which was established entirely by women with the intention to support other women, as well as the Lower East Side community. This playhouse served as a pivotal educational and training ground in the technical and design aspects of theatre production for Bernstein and other women.

The Neighborhood was founded by the sister philanthropists Irene and Alice Lewisohn in 1915 and was part of the Henry Street Settlement, a nonprofit social service agency servicing the Lower East Side of Manhattan created by Lillian Wald. One of the main missions of the Henry Street Settlement was to help assimilate immigrants of the Lower East Side tenements in Manhattan to American culture through many social programs such as home nursing classes, educational opportunities for children and adults alike, and support for trade unions, all of which helped prepare immigrants for employment by teaching them practical skills.⁵² Wald referred to these social programs and educational programs—particularly geared to the young—as “clubs.” These clubs were developed out of the social concerns of the Lower East Side residents such as

⁵⁰ Bernstein, 129.

⁵¹ Ibid., 194. It is difficult to find the exact year that Bernstein attended the Applied Design School for Women, but given her marriage in 1902 we can conclude it may have been sometime during the 1890's.

⁵² Christin Essin, *Stage Designers in Early Twentieth-Century America: Artists, Activists, Cultural Critics*. (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan. 2012), 107.

“housing conditions, immigration, unemployment, minimum wage, political control, labor unions....”⁵³ These clubs, such as the dramatic club which grew into The Neighborhood Playhouse, would provide skills that had the potential for its members to seek better employment opportunities.

Perhaps it was her early upbringing in a boarding house which compelled Bernstein to start volunteering with her sister Ethel at the Henry Street Settlement in 1911, in addition to a feeling of connection with the predominantly Jewish immigrants which dominated the area, given her own Jewish ancestry. Whichever the reasons, once Bernstein connected with the Lewisohn sisters, work with the Neighborhood Playhouse marked the start of her on-site training in production design. The Playhouse differed from other Little Theatres in two major ways: It was the only one whose founders were all women, and it was the first to construct all the design elements “in-house.”

Through the success of festivals such as the “Grand Street Follies” and growing popularity of its many other productions, particularly with *The Little Clay Cart* and *The Dybbuk*,⁵⁴ the Playhouse was able to expand with added workshop spaces on Pitt Street. In a *New York Times* article on the final performance at the Playhouse before it turned into a school (May 29, 1927), theatre critic J Brooks Atkinson remarked that the establishment became, “a model plant where all the crafts of the theatre were practiced-scene designing, construction and painting, costume design and manufacture, the art and science of lighting.”⁵⁵ Lillian Wald described the Neighborhood Playhouse as:

⁵³ Lillian D. Wald, *The House on Henry Street* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1915), 181.

⁵⁴ The successes of both productions were largely in part due to Bernstein's costume and scenic designs. Jean Rosenthal notes being an audience member for both productions as well. Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, *The Magic of Light: The Craft and Career of Jean Rosenthal, Pioneer in Lighting for the Modern Stage*, 13.

⁵⁵ J Brooks Atkinson, “End of an Era: Tonight Concludes the Neighborhood Playhouse Experiment-‘Grand Street Follies’ Moves Uptown,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1927, 150, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/05/29/106926580.html?pageNumber=150>.

The outcome of the work of the festival and dramatic groups of the Henry Street Settlement. For nine years gifted leaders have devoted themselves to this interest, and the building of the well-appointed little theatre was necessary for the further development of the work. In addition to classes in music, plays, and dance..the performative, the playhouse offers training in the various arts and trades connected with stage production. Practically all the costumes, settings, and properties used in the settlement performances have been made in the classes and workshops. ⁵⁶

Other more established theatres such as The Provincetown and Washington Square Players in the Little Theatre Movement failed to provide access and the education for women, as well as minorities, to move past just the performative elements of the stage while the Neighborhood Playhouse specifically created opportunities for all its members as both apprentices and practitioners.⁵⁷ Therefore, the Neighborhood Playhouse provided the skills and training for women, and by women, that were crucial in order to join the theatrical production unions at a time when women were initially shut out from such unions as Local 829 and IATSE. As Irene Lewisohn conveyed; “The Neighborhood Playhouse offers a new field for experimentation in all the technical as well as the artistic branches of theatre arts, and, indeed, may have a small share in welding those two into one.”⁵⁸ The Neighborhood Playhouse also challenged the gendered hierarchical power structure within theatre. Because the playhouse and school were experimental as well as community based, and by providing the tools necessary for developing skills in performative and production, they were able to exist outside the established hierarchical system of male leadership. Women could thus rise from the lower-tier status. The Playhouse was a unique and alternative pathway, a pathway where women could see themselves as both craftworkers and artists.

⁵⁶ Wald, *The House on Henry Street*, 185-186.

⁵⁷ Pamela Cobrin, *From Winning the Vote to Directing on Broadway : The Emergence of Women on the New York Stage, 1880-1927* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 137. Corbin is a Professor of dramatic literature.

⁵⁸ Irene Lewisohn, “The Playhouse as a Laboratory,” *Settlement Journal* (March-April 1915), quoted in Essin, *Stage Designers in Early Twentieth-Century America*, 112.

Jean Rosenthal, like Bernstein, was not very “academic,” often referring to her education as progressive and unconventional. The Neighborhood Playhouse School was founded once the playhouse itself closed in 1926. Rosenthal initially studied acting and dance there, later confiding that it was one of the only schools that would accept her after she barely graduated from high school.⁵⁹ When starting classes at the Playhouse School, Rosenthal became even more enamored with theatre and the arts, but ultimately found that she hated having to perform on stage. Not knowing exactly what she wanted to do with her passion for the arts, Rosenthal subsequently became a technical assistant to Martha Graham, a Playhouse School faculty member widely considered the godmother of Modern Dance. After Rosenthal completed her time at the school in 1929, she craved more advanced training and was well prepared to make a success of it.

Rosenthal interviewed with George Baker, who had developed the Drama Department at Yale. After five minutes, she was accepted into the university despite having almost no formal education beyond high school.⁶⁰ In 1931, Rosenthal became a part of the first Master of Fine Arts program offered through Yale.⁶¹ Rosenthal had the opportunity to study under Stanley McCandless, who had been developing the idea of modern lighting implementing the theatrical theories set forth by the theorist Adolphe Appia, whose theories helped develop the New Stagecraft Movement. McCandless’s book, *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, describes what is now known as the “McCandless Method.” McCandless breaks down both the theoretical and artistic methodology of lighting design as well as specific techniques such as blending/toning, background lighting, and creating special effects. According to McCandless, the most critical

⁵⁹ Nancy J Alder, “A Woman's Touch Is Lighting Broadway Stages; Jean Rosenthal Has Served the Theater Since the 1930's.” *New York Times*, July 8, 1964, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/07/08/archives/a-womans-touch-is-lighting-broadway-stages-jean-roenthal-has.html>.

⁶⁰ Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, *The Magic of Light*, 15.

⁶¹ Although Yale did not become fully coeducational until 1969, the Drama Dept immediately admitted women since its inception.

elements to consider artistically with lighting are color, the intensity of light, distribution (or as McCandless refers to as “dramatic visibility”), and the ability to alter lighting over the course of a performance; invoking a greater depth of emotional response from the audience. McCandless states:

The pictorial aspect of the stage depends upon the form and color of the setting, the arrangement of the properties, and the grouping and costumes of it's actors. These are basic elements that present definite conditions to be blended together, by the distribution of light, into an appropriate dramatic picture or series of pictures.⁶²

The invention of the switchboard (see Fig. 6) allowed lighting to do more than promote visibility; it became a vital element in the composition of the stage picture as it allowed for controlled light, a powerful tool for dramatic visibility which gave the ability for lighting to be a vital element in stage composition and design.⁶³ Jean Rosenthal's education in light design gave her two important insights: that lighting must not distract or take away from the overall theatrical experience and that it is an integral, equal, and vital aspect of the production as a whole. There are a few takeaways here. One is that McCandless was a crucial mentor for many women breaking into the budding field of lighting design. He certainly was for Rosenthal in addition to Clark. In her book, *The Magic of Light*, Rosenthal fondly reminisces about her mentor:

McCandless was indeed the granddaddy to us all. Not because there were no others before him, but because he did have such a specific and orderly attitude towards lighting and he set up that most important thing: an attitude which demands that there *must* be a technique and a method for organizing your ideas.⁶⁴

Second is the newness of the switchboard. Because the telephonic switchboard had already been established as a female technology, the lighting switchboard more than likely opened the doors even more for women designers.

⁶² McCandless, 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁴ Rosenthal and Wertebaker, *The Magic of Light*, 16.

Unlike Bernstein and Rosenthal, Peggy Clark was very academically inclined. Given Clark's exposure to the liberal arts through her parents, she studied the dramatic arts at Smith College, an all-women's college in Northampton, Massachusetts. "At Smith," she later recalled, "we had no feeling that if we were in design or production we were being women in a man's field."⁶⁵ Whereas Bernstein and Rosenthal were able to gain the vital skills needed through the Neighborhood Playhouse organization, this particular college environment was able to provide training for Clark because of its commitment towards women's education. Clark, feeling there was no other way to pursue a career in the field of theatrical design as a woman other than academically, moved on to also study with McCandless at Yale four years after Rosenthal. She expressed: "We didn't have family connections with theatre or anyone to turn to say: Here's somebody, can she be an apprentice or something?"⁶⁶ It was during her time at Yale that Clark took the exam for Local 829 and passed, allowing her to immediately have the ability to work on the large productions.

Berea College had a profound impact on Musser.⁶⁷ Musser did not have the financial stability that Clark, Rosenthal and Bernstein had to further their education. For example, her family was so poor that they could not even afford electricity in their home and relied upon candles and gaslights.⁶⁸ Berea College, with its focus on students from Appalachia, did not charge tuition and students performed work in exchange for study and were assigned to on-campus jobs. Given Musser's financial problems, Berea gave her a unique access to education. Musser's first job happened to be at the Tabernacle, which was the school's theatre.

⁶⁵ Chinoy, *Women in American Theatre*, 212.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶⁷ Founded in 1855, Berea College, located in Berea, Kentucky, was the first coeducational and racially integrated college in the South. Berea College Early History, "*The Berea Story*," accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.berea.edu/about/history/>.

⁶⁸ Douglas Martin, "Tharon Musser, Stage Lighting Designer, Dies at 84," *New York Times*, April 21, 2009, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/21/theater/21musser.html>.

The college was able to offer Musser on-site training through the Tabernacle, much like the Neighborhood Playhouse and its school did for Bernstein and Rosenthal. When Musser decided to go on to study at Yale in 1947; however, vastly different from Rosenthal's experience, wasn't initially accepted as the school thought she did not have enough skills. As the story goes, Musser ignored the administration's sentiments, attended anyway and was ultimately accepted because of her determination.

Obtaining the expertise through these institutions and organizations was an important element that women designers in Local 829 needed for the field. With the help of the women's movement, higher education for women had been unlocked. Our pioneer designers were some of the first waves of women to enter the world of theatrical technical production in New York City. But, it is not only what one knows—but who.

Apprenticeship, mentorship, and women working with women networks

Equally important was—and still is—apprenticeship. Unions have long since used the system of apprenticeship to pass down the knowledge needed to become a skilled worker. Pioneer women in USA829 experienced a myriad of apprenticeships, receiving instruction from leading male designers, educators, and even from one another.

While working at the Neighborhood Playhouse, Bernstein would go to workshops led by the leading male Scenic Designers such as Robert Edmund Jones and Jo Mielziner. She would often bring their expertise to the playhouse as guest lecturers. Furthermore, Simonson and Bel Geddes provided opportunities for Bernstein to design costumes for some of their productions.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Essin, *Stage Designers in Early Twentieth-Century America*, 112.

When The Neighborhood Playhouse became a school, its leaders also became its faculty members. Bernstein would become one of Rosenthal's teachers while she was a student there.⁷⁰

In the six years between Yale and admission into Local 829, Rosenthal went to work with the Federal Theatre Project where she would meet Orson Welles and continue working with him with The Mercury Theatre. It was there she met leading lighting designer Abe Feder, who would become not only a colleague, but a mentor as well.

While Clark was still attending Yale—already admitted into Local 829—she was well aware that her gender would pose difficulty in obtaining design jobs. She expressed to fellow design student John Koenig that she wished to be his apprentice after Yale.⁷¹ In addition to apprenticing with Koenig, Peggy Clark would also develop a long-term working relationship with Oliver Smith that would last twenty years.⁷²

Financial instability continually proved to be a challenge for Musser. When she was attending Berea and working at the Tabernacle, Ed Cole who was the Technical Director there very much mentored her and would even continue to provide support. When Musser needed to drop out of Yale in her second year due to lack of funds, Cole was able to secure a job for her as a technical director in Alaska which provided even more hands-on training and gave her the ability to finish her studies. Musser's accounts of her difficulty in taking the exam needed for entry into Local 829 provide a glimpse into what skillset was needed in addition to how various forms of apprenticeship were needed to gain access into the union. At the time, lighting design

⁷⁰ Rosenthal would also go on to briefly teach at the Neighborhood Playhouse School as well.

⁷¹ Chinoy, 213.

⁷² Jane Ann Crum, "Three Generations of Lighting Design: an interview with Peggy Clark Kelly, Jennifer Tipton, and Dianne Mizzy," *Theater*, 17, no. 1 (February 1985): 45–50, accessed April 21, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01610775-17-1-45>. As stated in the article, this interview was conducted in New York City on June 10th, 1985 at the Yale Club. While this paper has continually referred to Peggy Clark, it should be noted that although not a designer, Clark would marry Lloyd R. Kelley, a lighting technician who would serve as her primary light board operator. This serves as a spousal connection that draws similarities to that of Lee Simonson and Carolyn Hancock.

was not its own separate track yet so a designer needed to take an “All Categories” exam, which tested on the elements of scenic and costume design by creating sketches in addition to lighting design and scene painting (out of the one hundred points, lighting only accounted for 10 of them).⁷³ It would take several attempts before Musser was finally able to pass the exam. Her acceptance into Local 829 was largely due to help from scenic and costume designer Bill Eckart. I argue that Musser’s friendship with Eckert friendship can be considered an apprenticeship.

In addition to the mentorship and training these pioneering women received at Yale and/or the Neighborhood Playhouse, networking with theatre professionals was a crucial part of building a career. Nowhere was networking’s importance more obvious than in the playbills that named the many individuals working onstage or backstage. What can this playbill from Civic Repertory Theatre (see Fig. 7) show us when we give it further context beyond the printed pages?

This playbill can provide even more insight into the working relationships women in theatrical trades fostered with one another in early twentieth century western theatre in New York City. Bernstein, an active collaborator for Civic Repertory Theatre productions, served as both the scenic and costume designer for many of its productions. Despite acceptance into the designers union, Bernstein still had difficulty in being hired for lucrative Broadway productions as a scenic designer; however, her skills were greatly valued in lower budget venues in the downtown theatre scene. Not only were Bernstein's skills appreciated, but her connections as well. In 1914 while summer vacationing in Woodmere, Long Island, Bernstein introduced her sister, Ethel Frankau to Edwin Goodman who owned the famed department store Bergdorf Goodman. This meeting resulted in Ethel Frankau working at Bergdorf's for over sixty years.⁷⁴

⁷³ Unruh, Delbert, Rennagel, Davis, and United States Institute for Theatre Technology, *Tharon Musser*, 19.

⁷⁴ Carole Klein, *Aline*, 63.

The Apprentice Group

FRANCE has two State theatres and a conservatoire where actors, singers and musicians are trained by the State. The people of France believe that the money which is devoted by the government to the subsidy of these institutions is well spent.

The United States has no State theatres nor a conservatoire. In America the theatre is indebted to Eva Le Gallienne as the first director to wage successful war against the high cost of theatre going; as the first actress who refused to be starred, and as the first producer who felt an obligation towards the people who comprised her audiences.

"The theatre should be an instrument for giving, not a machinery for getting—" Miss Le Gallienne has always contended and for the last four seasons, has tried to carry out that principle.

The Civic Repertory Theatre not only produces plays but trains a group of apprentices for the stage. This group consists of thirty students between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. Their tuition is free.

Of all the arts, the theatre is probably the most difficult for the beginner. Painters, writers, musicians can all go to art schools; but so sensitive is the actor's equipment, so dangerous is his imitative gift, that most great actors feel that the beginner should begin in the theatre. And therein lies the great difficulty—because the theatre demands experience.

It was to bridge over this difficulty for the actor that Miss Le Gallienne founded this student group. The apprentices are allowed to watch all rehearsals of plays presented during the season, instructed in make-up and if there happens to be a play in which people can be used, other than the regular company, they receive their chance of appearing on the stage.

With the assistance of the members of the company, they are rehearsed in plays, and appear in them before Miss Le Gallienne and her company. They are required to attend a series of talks, and, in fact, they follow the exact schedule of the acting company.

They live in the atmosphere of the theatre. Those who are gifted unconsciously absorb the rhythm of acting and those not gifted soon tire of the rigid regime, of constant rehearsals, strict attention to detail and the discipline required for this work.



The First Home

If, as psychologists say, we are influenced by our earliest impressions—let baby's first glimpse of the world be of the foamy, silken beauty of a Carlin bassinet!

Carlin
Comforts

528 Madison Avenue at 54th St.
NEW YORK

CHICAGO SAN FRANCISCO
PASADENA HOLLYWOOD SEATTLE

Fig. 7, Civic Repertory Theatre playbill, 1930. Photo provided by the Author

but high quality is to blame



There are many people who feel that a Steinway must be far beyond their means. In reality, any Steinway may be purchased with a cash deposit of only 20%, and the balance may be extended over a three-year period. Used pianos are always accepted in partial payment. A Steinway Upright can be bought for \$475, and Grand for \$1000. Steinway & Sons, Steinway Hall, 109 West 57th Street, New York City.

STEINWAY
The Instrument of the Immortals

Thirty
years of building have taught us how to manage...and thirty years of managing...have taught us how to build.

Write for our Brochure

FISHMAN REALTY & CONSTRUCTION CO. INC.
285 MADISON AVENUE

Owners and Builders Since 1898

FIRE NOTICE—Look around NOW and about the Hall around its year end. In case of fire, walk (not run) to THAT exit. Do not try to beat your neighbor to the street.
JOHN J. DORMAN, Fire Commissioner.

CIVIC REPERTORY THEATRE, INC.

1405 Street Theatre—1st Floor 1405 Street
EVA LE GALLENONE, Director

SIEGFRIED

By JEAN CRAVDOUX

Translated by Philip Carr

Costumes and Scenery Designed by Alton Bernstein

CAST (in order of appearance)

Mach	Harold Moulton
Eva	Margaret Mower
Servant	Arnold Moss
Baron Von Zellen	Egon Brocher
Concubine	Eva Le Gallienne
Robinson	Donald Cameron
Siegfried	Jacob Ben-Ami
Jacques de Pongeloy	Robert H. Gordon
General von Waldorf	Walter Beck
General Ledinger	Paul Laysac
Sergeant	Herbert Shapiro
Cherly	Burgess Meredith
Tutti	J. Edward Bromberg
Schumann	Howard da Silva

Period—1921. Place—Germany on the frontier of France.

ACT I A waiting room of an official building.

ACT II Siegfried's study. The next day.

ACT III The same as Act I. A day later.

ACT IV The waiting room of a frontier railway. Several days later.

Issue Shared, Assistance by Alton Bernstein

Scenery executed by Cass Throckmorton, Inc.

Properties designed by Alton Bernstein and executed by Cass Throckmorton, Inc.

Painting by Horace Ansonwood

Miss Le Gallienne's and Miss Mower's gowns from Joseph-Guilmot

Wigs by E. Lucas

Uniforms by Earl Gerson Company

"Tickets for this theatre may be purchased from the Postal Telegraph Company Theatre Ticket Service"

(Program continued on page 11)

Wear Kayser—
you owe it
to your audience



KAYSER

HOSIERY
GLOVES
UNDERWEAR

At all the better shops and at the Kayser Store, 475
Fifth Avenue, near 41st St., opposite the Library
© 1931 C. C. Kayser

BEFORE OR
AFTER THE
THEATRE

RUMPELMAYER'S ST. MORITZ GRILL

for Tea

for Dancing

This world-famous shop has come to America at last

Tyonne and Roberts dance nightly. Music by Howard Lanin.

HOTEL ST. MORITZ
ON THE PARK
50 CENTRAL PARK SOUTH

America's First Truly
Continental Hotel
Director
S. GREGORY TAYLOR

Fig. 8 Civic Repertory Theatre Playbill, page 10. Photo provided by the Author

This connection to high-end retail was invaluable for venues such as Civic Repertory, as seen on page 10 (see Fig. 8) in the production credits for *Siegfried*: Miss Le Gallienne and Miss Mower's gowns from Bergdorf-Goodman. This is a prime example of the network of women in theatrical labor extending beyond the walls of the playhouses fostering relationships with other working women.

More examples of this network of women working with women focus on apprenticeship and mentorship. Sister USA829 costume designer Irene Sharaff was credited frequently as Bernstein's costume assistant. This mentorship would eventually lead Sharaff to become a leading costume designer in both film and on Broadway and receiving both Academy Awards and a Tony Award for her designs.⁷⁵ Page five of this playbill writes about the apprenticeship group for Civic Rep, "The theatre should be an instrument for giving, not a machinery for getting" Gallienne states. This apprenticeship program consisted of thirty students ages fifteen to twenty-five and not only provided free training for both male and female performers but also allowed them to gain onstage experience as well. It would not be out of the realm of possibility that this program would also train students for not only onstage activities but also theatrical production. Lastly, looking at the final page of the playbill we see the officers, staff, founders and benefactors of Civic Repertory Theatre. One can immediately see the founders and staff were almost entirely women. One male founder who merits a mention is Mr. Adolph Lewisohn. Adolph Lewisohn was the uncle of Irene and Alice Lewisohn, founders of the Neighborhood Playhouse. This indicates a connection between these two women-operated theatres and is another example of the networks women created for one another.

⁷⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica. (August 12, 2020). Irene Sharaff. Accessed November 15, 2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Irene-Sharaff>

Irene would design the costumes and win the Tony Award for best costume design for the 1957 original production of *West Side Story*. This production also connected Schraff to fellow USA829 and pioneering lighting designer Jean Rosenthal.

Irene Sharaff recalls her entrance into costume design and apprenticeship with Bernstein at the Civic Rep theatre in her book, *Broadway and Hollywood*:

In spite of my fear that she would consider me too young and inexperienced for the job, she finally said that my sketches showed a great deal of talent and that she would take me on as her assistant -though it is perhaps more accurate to say ‘apprentice,’ because for the first six months I received no salary. It was nevertheless the start of three years of intensive training in the theatre, invaluable, and perhaps possible in repertory theatre.⁷⁶

This was recollected from 1928 and so, this playbill proved to be one of the first credits to Sharaff's career. Sharaff also mentions that she was still a student in art school, which follows along similar lines of education that Bernstein had. In addition to the Little Theatre Movement providing access for women to enter the field of theatrical production, her apprenticeship to Bernstein at Civic Rep gave her on-the-job training for the skills needed to eventually become a member of USA829. “From the first day that I worked with her, Aline treated me as a colleague, showed no annoyance at my lack of expertise, and was understanding when I made mistakes.”⁷⁷ This is a perfect example of women working with women and evidence that these pioneers made a point of fostering relationships with those who were new to the field of production.

Training and networking did not by any means eliminate the obstacles women encountered once they became union theatrical designers. What were these women able to accomplish once gaining membership and what were the struggles and hardships they faced as females within the union which differed from their male counterparts?

The headaches, the heartaches, the backaches—Hardships and Struggles

It is not that the USA829 specifically banned women's membership. As expressed earlier there were some female scenic artists who had studied under many of the male designers. The

⁷⁶ Irene Sharaff, *Broadway & Hollywood: Costumes by Irene Sharaff* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold/Litton Educational, 1976), 8.

⁷⁷ Sharaff, 9.

union members further established the gendered hierarchy system of theatrical labor with labeling scenic artists as a lower tier than of designing. In other words, the union did not actively seek out or even encourage female designers to join. This section discusses some of the difficulties these pioneer women had once they joined USA829; from lack of union support over artistic integrity, to obtaining high paying designer gigs.

Bernstein knew how important unionization was and the protections it was able to provide specifically for women's labor. During her tenure with the Neighborhood Playhouse, she would often participate in sewing circles with immigrant women of the Lower East Side. This connected her with the Ladies Garment Workers Union and would often attend its meetings at Cooper Union during the shirtwaist strike of winter 1909-1910.⁷⁸ Bernstein's biographer Carol Klein states that working at the Playhouse "convinced her that the welfare of professionals needed the protection of organized labor."⁷⁹ Even before finally being admitted into USA829 in 1926, her membership request was denied for almost two years. Bernstein would also face difficulty in garnering projects as a scenic designer and more often than not, solely work as a costume designer on Broadway.

USA829 was also selective in how they protected the creative integrity of its male designers over females. In 1958 both Feder and Rosenthal were in London mounting their productions of *My Fair Lady* and *West Side Story*. In both cases, the dispute was over the use of their lighting designs without consulting the execution of the lighting plot; and that neither designer would receive program recognition or compensation for their designs. This lack of support is clearly seen through the communications between Rosenthal and *West Side Story* producers Harold Prince and Robert E. Griffith:

⁷⁸ Essin, 113. This is also expressed through letters to Thomas Wolfe.

⁷⁹ Klein, 173.

We love you here in New York but they don't love you in London on account of they don't want to pay you any money. Beaumont [the London producer] has just produced *My Fair Lady* over there without the benefit of Abe Feder and sees no reason to pay additional money when he has his own expert. Those are his words, Jean. I hope this doesn't put you in some sort of trauma, but I have to tell you what the man says. . . . When you get back to town, come over and buy me a cup of coffee.

In a letter replying to Prince and Griffith that Rosenthal also sent to her union representative:

If you plan to re-light entirely and not use either the light plots or the designs of the New York Production, I wish you the best and ask you please not to use my name on the program. If you plan to use the layout as set up in New York, then I am entitled to the conditions set forth in my contract with you as Lighting Designer. These conditions are the same as apply to the Scenic Designer under the United Scenic Artists contract.⁸⁰

While Feder would ultimately win his case and receive fair compensation for his design, Rosenthal would not receive the same support on her case from Local 829 despite expressing that she was protected under the same rights as her male counterpart.

Musser's school paper "New York Lighting," written in 1950 provides more illumination on the struggles of lighting designers. Musser breaks down the financial aspects of this career, emphasizing how specialists in light design should strive for higher wages, and the relationship between electrician and designer positions. In this relationship, Musser also describes the contention between the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and USA829 when IATSE electricians also claimed to be lighting designers, which Musser disagreed with. "The number of problems in lighting a New York show depends a great deal upon the electrician and his relationship to the lighting designer. There has always existed and still does exist a bone of contention between [USA] members and IA members concerning stage lighting"⁸¹ Musser was an early proponent of wage equality between different areas of design,

⁸⁰ Rosenthal correspondence, 19 September 1958, Jean Rosenthal Collection, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, quoted in Mary Callahan Boone, "Jean Rosenthal's Light: Making Visible the Magician," *Theatre Topics* 7, no. 1 (March 1997): 80, accessed April 20, 2021, doi:10.1353/tt.1997.0001.

⁸¹ "The Lighting Archive." School Report | The Lighting Archive, Accessed January 25, 2020, http://thelightingarchive.org/show.php?show_id=55. \$450 in 1950 would equal to roughly \$4,500 in 2020.

the special nuances to the technicality of the Light Design profession, and was incredibly vocal about the subject matter. “We were still living in an era of the ‘designer’ head electrician, who used basically the same plot for every show,” she later recalled.⁸²

In the early 1960s the lighting designers of USA829 formed the Lighting Committee, to ensure equality as a light designer in the production team and a proper exam specific for lighting. The minutes from the 1962 meeting of the committee show both Rosenthal and Musser were present along with three male colleagues. It is important to note that this committee was formed well before the emergence of the women’s liberation movement and two years before the Civil Rights Act. The minutes show USA829’s dissent of IATSE organizing a light design union when the position was in the designer unions jurisdiction. Most importantly, the committee created a specific light design exam separate from the general designers unions entrance exam, which would test a person’s artistic ability and technical skills needed for this specialized profession. What can be drawn from this committee is these early women were vocal activists in ensuring equal footing for all aspects of design, that no element was more important than the other. This continues to follow the theories Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig set forth at the beginning of the new stagecraft movement. The committee can be seen as another effort made by backstage women to gain parity with their male counterparts.

Even though these women experienced struggles and hardships after joining USA829, this pioneering cohort of women were able to make incredible accomplishments within the field of theatrical design. But did the accomplishments of Bernstein, Rosenthal, Clark and Musser truly open doors for women who later sought to enter the union? This final question remains difficult to answer. Despite these early women challenging the all-male stage hierarchy through

⁸² Richard Pilbrow, *Stage Lighting Design: The Art, the Craft, the Life* (New York: Design Press, 1997). Pilbrow had a close relationship with Musser, the book is not clear if this came from an interview or if Musser made a contribution.

alternative routes to gain access, the numbers of female membership has not changed drastically nor has recognition for their crafts.

**Yesterday they told you you would not go far, that night you open and there you are—
Achievements and Legacies of the Pioneering Women of USA829**

The contributions of Rosenthal and Musser to lighting design have stood the test of time. The computer has changed our entire world and theatre is no different; it is Tharon Musser who became the first designer to use a computerized control system for lighting in *A Chorus Line*. This again proves that new technology helps open doors for women.⁸³ Musser would also become a mentor to many leading light designers both men and women, designer Ken Billington referring to her vast mentorship as attending “Musser University.”⁸⁴ Musser and Rosenthal have continually been referred to as being called *the* pioneers of modern light design,⁸⁵ inspiring many other women to seek careers in the field. In addition, Musser was able to garner respect from IATSE stagehand men, which testimony in chapter two proves that this respect also helped women stagehands who were beginning to join IATSE. Both Musser and Rosenthal's concepts and methods are considered standard practice today. Jean Rosenthal created a grouping system that revolutionized the field which allowed the light designed to be maintained more easily—crucial to the integrity of any production. Rosenthal took the techniques of the McCandless method and moved beyond them, adding artistry that he was never fully able to

⁸³ For more on Musser and the use of computer technology refer to: Christin Essin, “Unseen Labor and Backstage Choreographies: A Materialist Production History of *A Chorus Line*,” *Theatre Journal* vol. 67, no. 2 (May 2015): 197-212, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/583124>.

⁸⁴ Delbert Unruh, “In Memoriam: Lighting Designer Tharon Musser,” *Sightlines* 49, no. 6 (2009), accessed January 17, 2020, <http://sightlines.usitt.org/archive/v49/n06/stories/TharonMusser.html>.

⁸⁵ Shoshana Greenberg, “Female Lighting Designers: Past, Present, and Future,” *The Interval*, January 16, 2018, accessed January 17, 2021, <https://www.theintervalny.com/features/2018/01/female-lighting-designers-past-present-and-future/>.

apply dramatically.⁸⁶ The McCandless method is now outdated; the techniques of Rosenthal and Musser continue to live on.

Peggy Clark would become the first woman to be the president of USA829 in 1968 and the first woman to receive a Tony award for light design. Clark opened the doors for other women in leadership positions in the local. Scenic artist Beverly Miller became president of Local USA829 in 1996 and remained in that position for almost twenty-five years. Currently, a fair amount of the positions on the Executive Board of Local 829, are held by women.

Bernstein would never fully find success on Broadway until the end of her life despite a 1927 *New York Times* article stating that “Broadway producers could with profit sit at the feet of Aline Bernstein.”⁸⁷ Even though she solidified her legacy as the first female designer admitted into the union, Bernstein also provided another notable achievement with the founding of The Costume Collection with Irene Lewisohn. The Costume Collection served to preserve and archive the history of costume design. This collection would merge with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and renamed the Costume Institute, and its exhibits continue to attract a massive audience. Her contribution as a curator and archivist of costume history can be seen through not just The Costume Collection—but through some of her writings as well. Another legacy of Bernstein is her written and illustrated testament of the technical skills for both the craft of costume design as well as costume history with her work; *Masterpieces of Women’s Costume of the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Bernstein receives recognition in the forward by her union colleague Lee Simonson when he expresses she was “not only a costume designer but an expert

⁸⁶ Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, 16.

⁸⁷ “Aline Bernstein, Designer” *New York Times*. January 2, 1927, 144, accessed April 6, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/01/02/96628724.html?pageNumber=144>.

dressmaker who not only saw the external effect of a dress but understood it literally from the inside out and was able, if necessary, to cut it out of a whole cloth and sew it together herself.”⁸⁸

Lighting designer Porsche McGovern currently sits on the executive board as a trustee for Local USA829. In addition to this leadership role, she has been an advocate for social justice for backstage workers. For the past six years, McGovern has been conducting research of who designs and directs in the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) by pronoun.⁸⁹ McGovern has recognized several trends from the research conducted for the 2018-2019 theatrical season for female-identifying designers. One, when there was an increase in the number of design teams with more than one “she” designer—there was a decrease in the number of all-“he” teams. Second, over the past six years there has been an increase in “she” designers.⁹⁰ This increase in female-identifying designers is certainly a positive take away from McGovern’s research. Unfortunately, most design fields are still dominated by men.

Financial compensation between the different fields of design are showing more equal footing. This can be seen when looking at the current Standard Design Agreements, or SDA rates for commercial theatre. Although designer rates are still entirely dependent on not only the tier and type of contract as members of USA829 have the ability to work on and off Broadway, in addition to negotiating for a higher fee. This wage equality is due to the efforts women such as Rosenthal and Musser made when on the Lighting Committee.

⁸⁸ Aline Bernstein, *Masterpieces of Women's Costume of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (New York: under the auspices of the American National Theatre and Academy by Crown, 1959).

⁸⁹ LORT is the largest professional theatre association in the United States. “LORT administers the primary national not-for-profit collective bargaining agreements with Actors' Equity Association (AEA), the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), and United Scenic Artists (USA). We also deal directly with personnel and management issues involving Theatre staff, artists, and craftspeople,” accessed April 7, 2021, <http://lort.org/who-we-are>.

⁹⁰ Porsche McGovern, “Who Designs and Directs in LORT Theatres by Pronoun: 2020,” *HowlRound*, December 22, 2020, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://howlround.com/who-designs-and-directs-lort-theatres-pronoun-2020>.

Award recognition is another example of accomplishment and legacy. The Tony awards, known as the highest honor in United States theatre, recognizes excellence on the Broadway stage. The Tonys, however, is not a valid measure of women's presence in the local. Nevertheless, this recognition can provide further work opportunities. For many designers, although protected in a union, work is still freelance based. For a female costume designer, this win would not occur until 1968 with Bernstein's protege Irene Sharaff. Tharon Musser was the first woman to win a Tony for her lighting design of *Follies* in 1972. It would not be till 1985 for a female scenic designer Tony win—by Yale Drama alumna, Heidi Ettinger.

Bernstein, Rosenthal, Clark, Musser: these women helped create a new backstage door to enter onto the mainstage of theatrical production, and while they were primarily concerned with creating a career in design and not necessarily paving the way for women, they did not shut these backstage doors behind them. These women's alternative pathways did and continue to enable women. The history of the early women in USA829 is only the load-in of the show.

CHAPTER II: “Tech Week”—The women craft workers of IATSE.

Richard Walsh: No, [Local] Four was...

John Coleman: All male stagehands at the time. That didn't change until...

Walsh: Until the country changed.

Coleman: Right. When I became Business Agent, it changed radically.

Debra Bernhardt: In the sixties?

Coleman: Yes, in the sixties.⁹¹

Title VII, a law part of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibits discrimination against employees based on color, race, national origin, religion, and sex. It was a legally-backed push to compel labor unions, employers in the private sector, and employment agencies to become more inclusive.⁹² Title VII, specifically with regard to sex, has been difficult to enforce, largely because it has proved difficult to define sexual discrimination. The National Women's Party lobbied for its inclusion in the list of prohibitions under Title VII and persuaded Congressman Howard Smith, a Virginia Democrat, to offer an amendment that added the word “sex” to Title VII.⁹³ Whatever his sentiments regarding sexual equality, Smith opposed passage of the Civil Rights Act and doubtless hoped that his amendment would make it too controversial to carry the day. The House and Senate approved the act nonetheless, and President Lyndon Johnson signed it into law on July 4, 1964. In those early years; however, no one was sure how Title VII would be enforced—not even the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the newborn federal agency charged with its enforcement. Historian Katherine Turk

⁹¹ The New Yorkers at Work Oral History Collection was created by Debra Bernhardt. On November 4, 1987, Bernhardt, along with IATSE Local Four IATSE members Peter Fitzpatrick and John Coleman, interviewed Richard Walsh; a member of Local Four since 1917. During his tenure Walsh served as Local Four President several times, in addition; serving as President of the International, as well as a Vice President of the AFL-CIO. Oral History Transcript Richard Walsh, Nov. 4 1987, [New Yorkers at Work Oral History Collection; OH.001; Box #5]; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁹² U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Timeline of Important EEOC events,” accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.eeoc.gov/youth/timeline-important-eeoc-events>.

⁹³ Jo Freeman, “How Sex Got into Title VII: Persistent Opportunism as a Maker of Public Policy,” *Journal of Law & Inequality (University of Minnesota Law School)* 9, no. 2, (1991): 16-184, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1377&context=lawineq>.

states this was due to lack of process and trained employees in the EEOC.⁹⁴ As the *New York Times* reported in 1967, Title VII was the “unwanted child of the Civil Rights Act.”⁹⁵ By the late 1970s, however, a series of successful lawsuits over workplace discrimination had persuaded both employers and labor unions that it would be wise to implement their own plans for desegregation rather than wait for a jury’s verdict or a judicial decree to do the job.⁹⁶ Against this backdrop, a new wave of women began working in theatrical production. These women did not seek backstage careers in design, but that rather in skilled manual labor. They became hangers of lights, constructors of sets, mixers of sound—and members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE).

Nancy Maclean utilizes Cynthia Cockburn’s argument about the distinctions between men and women in the workforce in her 1999 piece, “The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class.” Cockburn, a scholar of technology states, “While people are working, they are not just producing goods and services, they are also producing culture.”⁹⁷ Even when IATSE Local One began admitting women in the late 1970s and early 1980s, “stagehand culture” remained intact. Once women gained entry into the union, many had to fight an ongoing battle against sexual harassment and gender/race discrimination. This gendered system has created a hierarchy in which women are defined as appropriate for certain types of work more than others.⁹⁸ For some women, stagehand culture is one of the main reasons to not seek union membership.

⁹⁴ Katerine Turk, *Equality on Trial: Gender and Rights in the Modern American Workplace* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 13.

⁹⁵ Robert B. Semple Jr., “Bigger U.S. Fight on Job Bias Seen,” *New York Times*, March 5th, 1967, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1967/03/05/93861215.html?pageNumber=35>.

⁹⁶ Turk, *Equality on Trial*, 2.

⁹⁷ Nancy Maclean “The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class,” *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 1 (Spring, 1999): 45, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i361447>.

⁹⁸ Maclean, 45.

From the very beginning, IATSE has had the reputation of being a father-son organization, and predominantly white.⁹⁹ Stagehand culture in New York City, much like the culture of USA829 for theatrical designers, has upheld gender stratification ever since a small group of male theatrical laborers began to meet regularly in 1863 as a fraternal labor organization known as the Theatrical Workman's Council. Two years later, the group incorporated as the Theatrical Mechanical Association under New York State law.¹⁰⁰ The Theatrical Mechanical Association organized in 1887 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), one of the oldest performing arts centers in America (see Fig. 9). The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that "an organization of stagehands, property men, carpenters and machinists has been effected as the Theatrical Progressive Union."¹⁰¹

This culture grew even more; when the Theatrical Protective Union (Local One) and the Theatrical Progressive Union (Local Four) of New York, met with other stagehand unions in surrounding cities, to form the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (see Fig. 10 & Fig. 11). Peter J. Fitzpatrick, a member of Local Four who served as the business agent from 1995 to 2008, wrote a brief history of Local Four in 2009. Fitzpatrick states that on July 17, 1893:

Brothers Henry H Harvey and James E. Walker[,] as representatives of the Theatrical Progressive Union, Brooklyn, [met] with the representatives of stagehands from N.Y.C., Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Denver, Buffalo, Syracuse and St. Louis at Elk's Hall NYC. At this meeting, they form[ed] the National Association of Theatre Stage Employees, later to be known as the International Alliance. The purpose of this

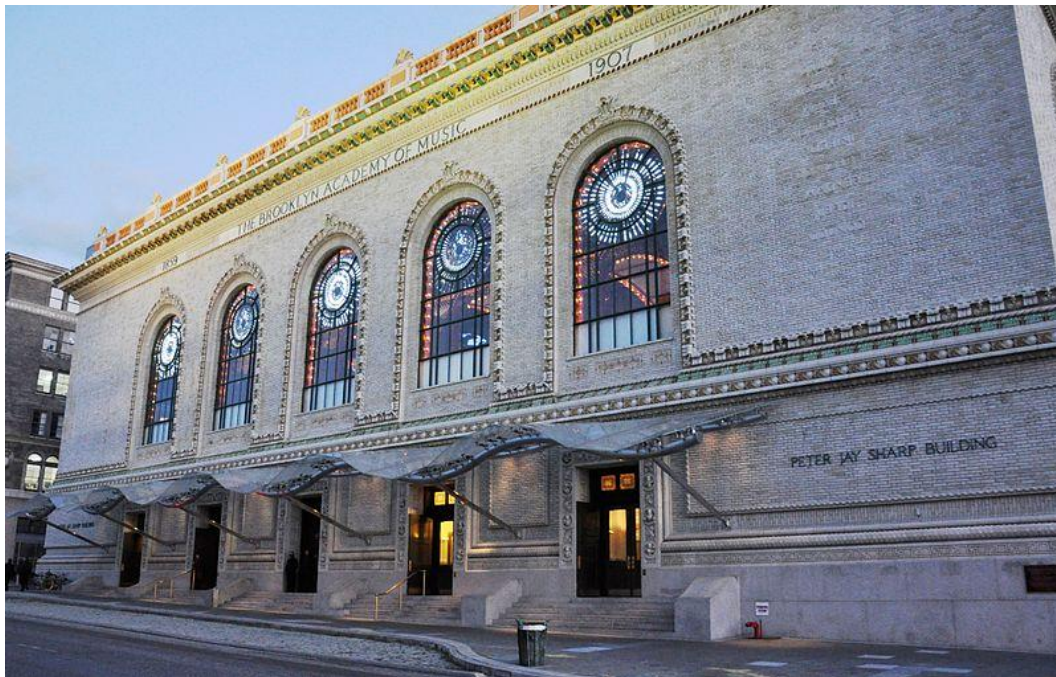
⁹⁹ Kathy A. Perkins, "Black Backstage Workers, 1900-1969," *African American Review (St. Louis University)* 16, no. 4, Black Theatre Issue (Winter 1982): 160, accessed April 21, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2904226>. In an interview with Perkins, Doll Thomas, one of the first black members in segregated Washington DC Local, stated that even the constitution and by-laws of the IA was "for whites only." In New York City, the segregated local 1-A dominated uptown Manhattan venues such as the Apollo Theatre.

¹⁰⁰ A challenge in researching during a pandemic is the inability to collect sources from archives. However, I have been able to utilize a budding network of IATSE labor historians. Isaac Silver, "Stage and Sweat: A History of America's Early Theatrical Unions" U.S Labor History, UMASS Amherst, Summer 2018. 2-4.

¹⁰¹ "An Unpromising 'Combine'" *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 1st, 1887, accessed April 18, 2021, Newspapers.com.



Fig. 9, The Original Brooklyn Academy of Music, Montague Street, circa 1895.
<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/blog/2018/01/17/brooklyn-academy-music>.



BAM Opera House (Peter Jay Sharp Building) on 30 Lafayette Ave, which was built in 1908 after a fire destroyed the original building. <https://www.bkmag.com/2015/04/10/bam-appoints-new-president>.



Fig. 10, Elks Hall in New York City, the meeting hall of where IATSE was born. “Elks Hall occupied the first floor of this building, located at 27th Street and Broadway, New York City, and it was here that the first Alliance Convention was held on July 17, 1893.” *History of IATSE-Timeline*
<https://www.iatse.net/timeline>

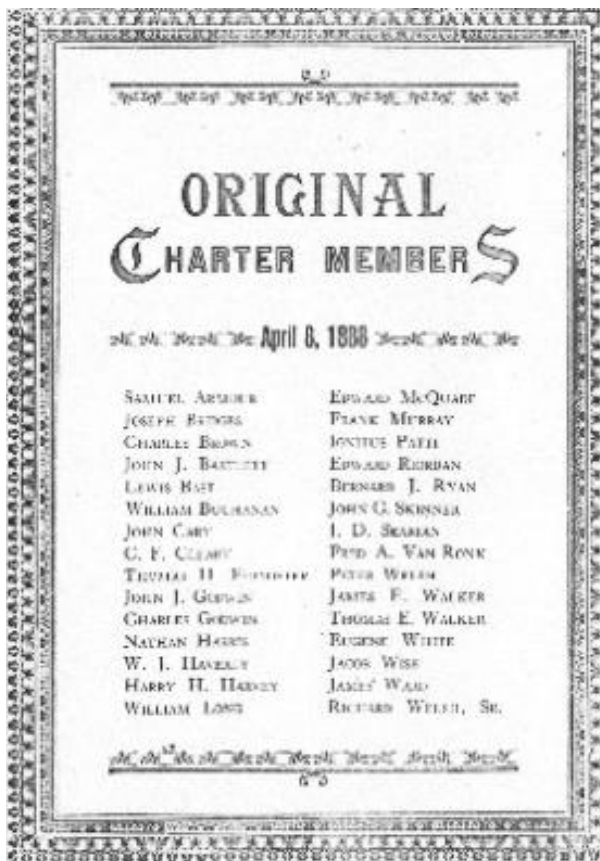


Fig. 11, The original Charter Members of IATSE Local Four, April 8, 1888.
https://www.iatselocal4.org/?zone=unionactive/view_page.cfm&page=History

alliance was to coordinate and protect on a national level, the jurisdiction and shared interests of these theatrical unions.¹⁰²

Seventeen white men gathered together to form IATSE. There is no evidence of any women or minority members present at the Elk's Hall meeting in 1893, even though women were active union members in USA829, thirty years after the formation of the stagehand union.¹⁰³ Minorities did become union members—but were segregated. Scholar and lighting designer Kathy A. Perkins explains in her 1982 piece “Black Backstage Workers, 1900-1969,” that the auxiliary or “A” locals were established to prevent black workers from working alongside white union members and receiving equal benefits.¹⁰⁴ In New York City, the segregated local 1-A obtained a union charter in 1937.

By the late 1960s, the New York State Division of Human Rights began to review the hiring practices, employment patterns, and policies of Local One after black union stagehands in Local 1-A filed complaints about racially discriminatory hiring.¹⁰⁵ In 1968, the State Commissioner of Human Rights concluded that IATSE's Local One—with jurisdiction over Manhattan—needed to amalgamate with 1-A and increase minority membership. The State Commissioner ordered Local One to “to publicly announce the date, time, and place for the union exam; to add more minorities to the waiting list; and for the union office to inform the State Division of all new openings in the apprenticeship workshop.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Peter J Fitzpatrick, “A Short History of Theatrical Stage Employees Local No.4, IATSE” *IATSELocal4 History*, Feb 17, 2009, accessed April 20, 2021, https://www.iatselocal4.org/index.cfm?zone=/unionactive/view_page.cfm&page=History.

¹⁰³ Recalling one of my early gigs; when I was quietly putting equipment back into a road case, a man approached me and asked: *Who's your father?* I did not understand the question, unaware of the nepotism that flourishes within IATSE. Looking back on the incident, it is apparent to me now that this individual believed that as a woman, the only way I would have attained this gig would have been because my father was a union member; that I must have been what is referred to in the industry as a “legacy”. Stephen Nidweski was a professional chef and has never been a stagehand or a member of IATSE; nevertheless, he fully supported my decision to change from aspiring dancer to backstage work.

¹⁰⁴ Perkins, 162.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

Another decade would pass before the first five women took the apprenticeship exam and became IATSE Local One stagehands. In 1987, Leslie Bennetts of the *New York Times* wrote about women's emergence into male-dominated Local One:

Only a decade ago, the New York stagehands' union—officially known as Local One of the Theatrical Protective Union, a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Operators of the United States and Canada—was still an all-male domain.¹⁰⁷

A decade after women joined Local One, they were admitted to IATSE's Local Four (based in Brooklyn and Queens). Fitzpatrick gives a vast overview of Local Four's history, but only one sentence pertaining to women: "New membership rules are instituted which are fair and equitable. Local No. 4's first female members are initiated in January, 1998."¹⁰⁸ In a history in which notable men are named numerous times—unnamed women are mentioned as an afterthought. Karen Caton, the first woman elected to Local One's executive board, stated in Bennetts 1987 *New York Times* article:

Nothing changed for 90 years, but now women are 1 percent of the membership—approximately 17 out of 1,750. I only got my card in 1980, and six years later I was elected to the executive board. What I think is wonderful is Local One's acceptance of change. They've adapted to it.

Although women's presence has grown somewhat in both locals', they have made up a small slice of the membership overall. In 2016, in a *New York Times* article on Local One member Jennifer Diaz's becoming the local's first woman head carpenter, Caitlin Kelly reported that out of 3,351 members of Local One, 189 were women.¹⁰⁹ As of early 2021, women make up only 5.7 percent of Local One's active members in good standing, and in Local Four only 8.9 percent.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Leslie Bennetts, "Women Behind the Scenery," *New York Times*, September 23, 1987, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1987/09/23/843387.html?pageNumber=83>.

¹⁰⁸ Fitzpatrick, "A Short History of Theatrical Stage Employees Local No.4, IATSE."

¹⁰⁹ Caitlin Kelly, "Backstage and Now the Boss: 'The Only Girl in the Building'," *New York Times*, October 6, 2016, accessed April 11, 2021,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/theater/backstage-with-a-hammer-the-only-girl-in-the-building.html>.

¹¹⁰ These numbers were calculated after contacting both Locals. Local One's membership is roughly 3,600 active members in good standing with 206 female identifying, Local Four has 356 members, with 32 female identifying

These statistics show that, over the past thirty-four years, Local One's female membership has grown by under five percentage points. Although national statistics are not available, there is evidence that women make up a very small portion of IATSE stagehands in other cities too.¹¹¹

To explore women's experiences as they entered Local One, this chapter draws on in-depth oral history collected from pioneer Barbara Schwartz (see Fig. 12). Schwartz was one of the very first women to enter Local One in the late 1970s and remained an active member until 2000, when she honorably withdrew. Although never formally retired, because she worked for twenty years, she receives a union pension and now volunteers at women's health clinics.¹¹²

Small Wires for the Girls

When Miss Saigon opened, it was a sound crew of three, the pink contract guy, Scott Anderson, mixing. Basically, I had to mix the show once a week to stay fresh on it so that if Scott ever didn't show up or want[ed] to take a little vacation, I was the built-in go to. So one night I was sitting there doing my mix by myself, sitting at literally a million and a half dollars' worth of equipment. It was intermission. People came back to their seats and this woman stopped by and she said, "Are you just going to do that until you can become an actress?" I mean, my mouth literally was agape. I said, "Do I want to trade this for 80 percent unemployment? I don't think so." -Barbara Schwartz¹¹³

What got you interested in theatre and ultimately stagehand work and how did you come to join IATSE?

members. This does not include retired members nor does it include the number of applicants awaiting confirmation into Local One that has been on pause due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

¹¹¹ In 2017, Shena van Spronsen uploaded to Vimeo a short video documentary about the women in San Francisco's IATSE Local 16. Local 16's membership topped 2,500 that year, but just 10 percent of its members were women. Shena van Spronsen, *Stagehands*. Vimeo, 2017. MP4 video, 9 mins 16sec. <https://vimeo.com/217587920>

¹¹² In a previous version of this thesis, there were originally two interviews conducted. Unfortunately, the second individual ultimately decided to withdraw their testimony out of fear of retaliation, July 21, 2021.

¹¹³ Barbara Schwartz, Zoom interview by author, January 15th, 2021.



Fig. 12, Barbara Schwartz working the orchestra and chorus submix on the Broadway musical “*Beauty and the Beast*” around 1997. *Photo provided by Schwartz.*

Schwartz: Well, I came to the whole thing in a very roundabout but logical way. When I was a youngster, a family moved across the backyard from our family, and they happened to have recently returned from Alaska and were going back to work in the theater industry. [The father] was Douglas Milne, really a fabulous and legendary stagehand who was the house electrician at the Brooks Atkinson [Theatre]. Even though I wasn't interested in the theater as a career, Doug knew that I was kind of interested in life in general, and he started to take me into shows when I was fifteen. I saw the original production of *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* [about] the parents of a child with severe cerebral palsy.¹¹⁴ I think he felt it would resonate because I had lost a brother to muscular dystrophy a couple of years before that. Because I liked the shows and I was just eager and curious, Doug, whenever there were comps or a place to put me up in the booth, would take me in. So that was subliminally there in my brain. Then in college [Swarthmore], even though I went to school intending to major in American studies and [become] an activist lawyer, I fell in love with a little production arts course that was being offered. From then on, my love [for] the theater totally spiraled, in the technical end of it especially.

Well, Doug kept in touch and I had done a couple of summers—of the *classic summers*—of summer stock¹¹⁵, and then, ...literally three days before I was supposed to

¹¹⁴ *A Day In the Death of Joe Egg*, Playwright Peter Nichols, Directed by Michael Blakemore, Starring Albert Finney, Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York, February 1st 1968.

¹¹⁵ Summer theatre, commonly referred to as Summer Stock, dates back to the late 19th century as a way to give professional experience to unknown actors. It is not only a training ground for actors to learn their craft onstage however, but for new (in the industry referred to as “green”) stagehands as well. There are a few ways to gain entry into Local One. First, having legacy status. Second, to make “X” amount in income from Local One employment for three consecutive years, followed by an education class. The membership then votes on acceptance into the Local. Third, apprenticeship with Local One. Entry is through an exam, followed by placement of apprenticeship to a venue or shop, and then gaining full membership upon completion of one’s apprenticeship. I took the Local One apprenticeship exam in 2016. A timed vocational aptitude test lasting several hours; the exam consists of quick math, shop math, reading comprehension, spatial awareness, and tool comprehension. The exam I took was similar to what Barbara took back in 1975. To gain an apprenticeship spot, one must score in the top tier; the number determines your placement in line, and how long it will take before your apprenticeship begins. For example, if

graduate, Doug [shared]...knowledge that...Local One was offering their first open apprentice test and told my mother, *maybe Barbara wants to take a stab at this*. So this was on a Friday. I got a phone call from my mom and she said, "If you want to do this, you have to be at this hotel tomorrow and you need twenty-five dollars and a picture." And so, literally two days before I graduated, I showed up and took the 1975 apprentice test, along with almost 1200 people.

Did Nancy Offenhauser¹¹⁶ take the test with you?

Absolutely. That was her generation: she, myself, Jean Hays, and, unfortunately, I don't remember the last two women on the list. But when the list finally came out of the hundred of us [who got into Local One], five of us were female.

Where were you assigned for your apprenticeship?

I was assigned to...it's a funny little title, the CBS fabrication electric shop. [The title] was to distinguish it from electricians that handled the physical wiring of the building and also studio electricians. The shop where things came out of was the fabrication electric shop. And it was interesting. I got a little insight. Of course, I wanted an apprenticeship with a theatrical shop, but they were sort of smart at the time. They wanted to place the women primarily in television because...first of all, there were bathrooms, which was a huge consideration back then. And [then] there were other women in [other] technical areas, you know, with video and painting and stage management and stuff like that. So we wouldn't have been quite the three-eyes gargoyles

Local One accepted the top one hundred scores from the apprenticeship exam and an applicant scored the highest, they would be placed in an apprenticeship first. The location as well as which department your apprenticeship is in is determined by Local One. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Summer theatre." Encyclopedia Britannica, October 15, 2014, accessed February 3rd, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/summer-theatre>.

¹¹⁶ "The first woman to become a member, Nancy Offenhauser, started her apprenticeship in 1977 and earned her full card in 1980." Bennetts, "Women Behind the Scenery," *New York Times*, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1987/09/23/843387.html?pageNumber=83>.

that we would be [in] some of the really old school shops. We [Schwartz and Nancy Offenhauser] overlap briefly because she did the first apprenticeship and, again, with their thinking about letting women go to safe spaces where there are women's bathrooms and other women around. She apprenticed at the CBS special effects shop before the days of Digital Fix and CGI...they were the people that would make fires and floods and things like that, kind of old based on shooting miniatures and using little Mad Chemist techniques. And there were a couple of funky...there were some genuine eccentrics in that shop, too. So she had some good learning experiences as well.

Bathroom access in the workplace is an old and recurring issue. Back in the Victorian Era, women dominated the private sphere. However, the Progressive era resulted in a surge of economic growth, which resulted in more women entering the public workplace, and new laws were created to create sex-separated bathrooms. Even so, these laws were meant to protect (white) women's "fragile" bodies.¹¹⁷ According to scenic artist Millia Davenport of USA829, women were not actively encouraged to join the designers' union as "the rank and file, who come to meetings, all had prostate trouble. If they had a female member they'd have to move headquarters to a place with two toilets."¹¹⁸ For women entering blue-collar trades in the 1970s and 1980s, the struggle continued, as there was no on-site preparation for women's changing facilities or bathrooms designated for women.¹¹⁹ Most likely due to simple convenience, it was

¹¹⁷ "For a white woman to cross spheres into the workplace threatened her natural purity and virtue," Emilyn Kowaleski, "Land of the Clean and the Home of the Segregated: Sex-Separated Bathrooms in the Northeastern United States, 1870-1920" (matser's thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2020), 4, accessed April 14, 2021, https://digitalcommons.slc.edu/womenshistory_etd/46.

¹¹⁸ Don Stowell, "Unionization of the Stage Designer-Male and Female," 8.

¹¹⁹ Jane LaTour, *Sisters in the Brotherhoods: Working Women Organizing for Equality in New York City* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 60.

somewhat progressive of IATSE Local One to place female apprentices at CBS, as this allowed for women-working networks to blossom within the stagehand union.

Access to bathrooms and changing facilities gave women the ability to work. In addition, higher education in American studies, and a passion for live entertainment were also reasons why Schwartz sought out membership in IATSE. However, each local within the union operates differently; whereas Local One provides apprenticeship as a means of access, Local Four does not.¹²⁰ For Schwartz, access to an apprenticeship provided the opportunity to join the union. I then asked:

Once you did get your card, can you tell me a little bit about your first union gig?

Schwartz: You're allowed to work as an apprentice if it doesn't interfere with your apprenticeship¹²¹ and because I'd been at the Shakespeare Festival; the Public Theater downtown at the time, part of their contract was they had two union positions. Within six months of my starting my apprenticeship, I was actually the house electrician at the Anspacher Theater, which is one of the two theaters that was a 299¹²², so they had union electricians. So I was actually working and it was...I thought it was a really nice

¹²⁰ In the interview with Richard Walsh, he explains that Local Four did have an apprenticeship in its early days and draws similarities to Local One: "You had to take...every year...you become an apprentice. That was one. Then the next year you had to take an examination. If you passed the examination, you went to the second year, and the next year you took another examination, and if you passed that, you went to your third year. At the end of your third year, you went to a vote of the membership." Currently, unless through an organizing drive, there is a required education class and examination for people seeking Local Four membership. Oral History Transcript Richard Walsh, Nov. 4 1987, [New Yorkers at Work Oral History Collection; OH.001; Box #5]; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

¹²¹ In Local One, you may take union work outside of your apprenticeship placement as long as it is within IATSE jurisdiction.

¹²² 299 refers to the number of seats. According to Schwartz through personal correspondence, within the Public contract the large seating number was deemed appropriate for the presence of a union stagehand.

synthesis for the most part of union rules and Off-Broadway creativity and flexibility. So I was really lucky to get introduced into it *gently* without being harshly dumped out.¹²³

Who was it...I think it was Otts Munderloh, the most esteemed sound designer in the world who was visiting when I was running lights on on a show at the Shakespeare Festival and was friends with the stage manager. I think the word was that I was very accurate and very careful and very consistent. So he lured me up to take a peek at how they were doing *A Chorus Line* at the time and it all kind of went from there. So, I mean, the whole thing about once the computer boards got really consistent in electrics—I didn't really feel the call to be a follow spot operator, I'm too nervy for that. I think I would just have been jerky in general. But once the electrics got so consistent, sound was the only place where the really terrifying adrenaline of doing things live still existed and still does to this day. So that's where I ended up. It was like daring myself every night, no matter what job I did. I mean, I did a lot of deck sound, I did a lot of wireless maintenance and swaps and stuff like that. But I did mix to some extent and it was...it was an adrenaline rush every night.

No, it's funny, the first woman of color that I met in the technical side of theater, well, first of all, the most beautiful soul in the world, Shirley Prendergast was a lighting designer.¹²⁴ I met her at the Public Theater. She had some Broadway credits, too, and a

¹²³ One can compare the Public Theatre to The Neighborhood Playhouse and Civic Repertory Theatre, all three were venues in which women could gain the skills necessary for membership in a backstage union. The Public was created in 1954 as the Shakespeare Festival. Its founder, Joseph Papp, born in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in 1921, wanted a theatre that was both accessible and essential, and produced many groundbreaking plays and musicals, including hits such as *A Chorus Line* and, more recently, *Hamilton*. This draws similarity to the initiatives of the Little Theatre movement. Kenneth Turban, Joseph Papp, *Free for All: Joe Papp, The Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told* (NY: Anchor Books, 2010), 8.

¹²⁴ Prendergast became the first black female designer in USA829 in 1969, as well as the first black woman to light design on Broadway in 1973. For more see Kathy A. Perkins "Spotlight on Shirley Prendergast" *Black Masks* vol. 17, no. 4, (Jan/Feb. 2006): 5-6, 14, accessed April 17, 2021, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3548609.

couple of stage managers that started too.... And this is interesting because it's the one thing that probably made being a woman in the local feasible is that I already started to see, primarily female lighting designers and some female stage managers that they [men] respected. [For example] like Tharon Musser on *Chorus Line* was just groundbreaking in every sense of the word and she was a tough old broad too. I think it helped that she wasn't pulling the girly card at any point either. But having people like that made the guys a little more amenable to having women in the same physical space as they were. You have to know...lumber and specs and rigging to be a set designer. I mean, it's what, every time a job gets more women, it gets kind of downplayed a little. Except sound went the opposite, it's really funny because back in the day, it was just mic cable. They called it small wire; oh, small wires for the girls. And that's how so many women snuck in through sound. And then all of a sudden, the big budgets and the rock-and-roll technology came in and all of a sudden the guys wanted it back. They're pulling these little skinny signal cables for lighting now. Sound has these massive things that are going to the big distro, going to the amps and all that, so in our own power setups that we had to balance and things like that. But [nevertheless] we saw a lot of us snuck in under the small wires for girls.

With regards to employment in the arts and entertainment, technology has been one of the most important factors.¹²⁵ Schwartz expressed that when a position in technical labor (such as lighting or sound) starts to have more women, it is downplayed. This sentiment exemplifies the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor theory. But much like the rapid advancement of lighting in

¹²⁵ Lois S. Gray and Ronald L. Seeber, *Under The Stars: Essays on Labor Relations in Arts and Entertainment* (NY: Cornell University, 1996), 9.

the entertainment industry, “small wires for the girls” is an example of women entering craftwork via new technology—audio—and a site of women networks.

Schwartz: You know, I worked on some things with Jean Hays, who actually had done a sound shop apprenticeship, and Judy Olson, who I think had done a sound shop apprenticeship after Jean Hays. That was probably [in] the era of “small wires are for girls.” Other ways to get [women] in, I know that there are a bunch of people who got a Local One card because they created the sound designers local [Local 922], then they [IA] finally absorbed them all into Local One, so that's how a bunch of very funky people, including a fair number of women, got in.

In addition to new technology, IATSE’s absorption of other entertainment craft locals has brought female-identifying members into Local One. In 1984, IATSE approached sound designers Abe Jacobs and Jack Shearing, asking if sound designers and engineers wished to have union representation. An advocate of sound design in live theatre, Richard K. Thomas, wrote in 1987, “The lack of acceptance of sound design as a fourth department along with scenery, costumes, and lights has made working conditions difficult and often compromised the esthetics of sound design.”¹²⁶ Thomas stated that sound designers and technicians felt that United Scenic Artists were more a union for visual designers. More importantly, Thomas notes that sound designers and technicians felt the need for union representation in order to stay better informed about new technologies. “New products were being introduced every day.... Computer technology offered incredible new potential for sound in the theatre. An organization was clearly

¹²⁶ Richard K. Thomas, “The Need for Union Representation for Sound Designers,” *Theatre Design & Technology/United States Institute for Theatre Technology*, 23, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 5-7, accessed March 28, 2021 https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/hickmanbrady/tdt_1987fall/.

needed to maximize the flow of information and use of these new abilities.” Local 922 was created and then in 1992, Local 922 merged with Local One (so that Local One would have sole jurisdiction of sound designers on Broadway). This follows a similar pattern when Local One attempted to create its own lighting designers union to have more of a stronghold on Broadway. IATSE ultimately failed at completing this when USA829 claimed that they had rightful jurisdiction. In the end, however, after a long history of separation, USA829 merged with IATSE in 1999.¹²⁷

While apprenticeship, absorption of other unions, the feminization of new technologies, and simply bathroom access were points of entry for women to gain membership into the union; this is not always the case. Some women worked at particular venues as a non-card carry stagehand, and eventually were asked to join the rank and file of their Local. Membership for Local Four was—and still is—heavily relying upon contract negotiation and organizing efforts. And while membership as a woman in the theatrical trades is not inherently barred- men certainly have not made it easy.

Go Along to Get Along

While Title VII barred employment discrimination on the basis of sex, it did not initially outlaw sexual harassment on the job. That would not happen until 1986, when the Supreme Court deemed sexual harassment a violation of Title VII.¹²⁸ While women pioneers in design such as Tharon Musser made it easier for men to accept women on the job, backstage work is still, very much, a man’s world. Today, any woman working in the arts and entertainment will

¹²⁷ Abe Jacob, “A Sound Union: Then and Now” LiveDesignOnline, Sep 27th, 2011, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.livedesignonline.com/theatre/a-sound-union-then-and-now>.

¹²⁸ LaTour, 20.

have at least one story of some form of sexual harassment on the job. While Schwartz felt she did not receive continuous or overt sexual harassment on the job, this does not mean it was not present, nor has it gone away. Schwartz practiced a form of coping called “going along to get along,” a practice that backstage women have almost made standard on the job. When I began to branch out beyond the comfort of working at Dance New Amsterdam into the larger realm of corporate events, I too needed to hide myself when I walked onto a job site. When I first started working in the industry, I even went as far as chopping off my long hair with the hope that men would stop hitting on me. This did not fully stop sexual harassment, however. It continues to this day. I thus asked:

What was it like to enter a line of work that has been primarily reserved for men?

Schwartz: Well, you know, I would love to go back and do it a little differently now. Back then I was a bit of a tomboy growing up and I acquired a certain amount of skills and was physically fairly fit. I think that I dealt with it [harassment] by trying to be one of the boys. There weren't enough women around...that we were so scattered if we were there at all. So there was very little overt sexism. I remember some crude remark from somebody in the Local after my apprentice interview about, *well, this is better looking than blah, blah, blah*, which was said within my hearing. I thought there was going to be more harassment and stuff, but there really wasn't. But I always felt that I was just on stage all the time. I think my coping mechanism was to be one of the boys and kind of keep my head down and laugh at the same dirty jokes and stuff like that. There was one person who was a little bit ladylike. She'd come in clothes like she was going for an interview for this job and she would not change into working clothes till after eight

o'clock started and she was universally scorned by the boys. So yeah, I know, I mean, again, looking back, I kind of wish I'd done a little less of that and just been a little more of myself.

Schwarz refers to her mentors as “rabbis.” In fact, this is quite a common expression for union stagehands. In Hebrew, rabbi means “my teacher” or “my master.” In terms of craft unions, a rabbi is one’s mentor.

Schwartz: Well, it's getting on a crew, even for what they call a work call, or a clean-up call, or a load-in, even when you're not going to be on the running of a long juicy show, in Local One, it was still very political. There was Gary Shevett, the *infamous* Gershen Shavitt who took *Chorus Line* uptown, who was the first electrician to get behind the automated boards, who had a lot of charm. He interacted really well with management and producers and talent and all that...I got several things through Gary.”

This political nature is true to all backstage work, not just Local One. There is a saying in the theatre industry: It’s not always *what* you know, but *who* you know. Rabbis not only provided work opportunities for women, but protection against sexual harassment.

In the *New York Times* article “Women Behind the Scenery,” Nancy Offenhauser goes on the record explaining that:

There are some heavy jobs I wouldn't take, but a small man probably wouldn't take them either, your size dictates certain things, and people do tend to gravitate toward what they'd be good at. Generally people who are small and quick climb; there's a lot of work involving ladders. People who are larger and heavier don't climb as much.¹²⁹

The article notes that new technologies such as the computer and automation have cut down the need for more stagehands. However, I assert that the feminization of new technologies in fact

¹²⁹ Bennetts, “Women Behind the Scenery.”

opened up more access for women to join the union. As Offenhauser's comment suggests, physical size also affected women's access to certain positions within stagecraft. Physicality brings forth a key insight into the masculinity of IATSE and how this shaped the stagehand culture.

In 2006, professor of sociology and legal studies Ava Baron analyzed the white male working body and how this continues to restrict women workers. Baron breaks this down into three themes. First, is the masculinity crisis—anxieties arise when men are confronted with challenges or losses to their manhood and must deal with the problem.¹³⁰ Second, there is the embodiment of masculinity, which has “emphasized toughness, physical strength, aggressiveness, and risk taking.”¹³¹ Finally, Baron analyzes masculine solidarity, in particular, noting that the term “brotherhood”—widely used in labor unions to express solidarity—encompasses “notions of kinship and the patriarchal family, not surprisingly incorporat[ing] hierarchical as well as egalitarian assumptions.”¹³² Schwartz's testimony further highlights Baron's themes of the white male working body within IATSE. The very nature of stagehand labor involves physical strength; IATSE masculinity has deemed what positions are more suitable and accessible for women. When white men are challenged with losing their manhood—women becoming union stagehands—results in men needing to deal with this as some sort of “problem.” The handling of the problem comes in the form of harassment to those not “macho” enough for the demands of the job.

According to the radical feminist legal scholar Catherine A. MacKinnon, women's “going along to get along” in a male-dominated environment is both a male conception and a

¹³⁰ Ava Baron, “Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Cambridge University Press, Aug. 30, 2006, no. 69, 144, accessed April 18, 2021, doi:10.1017/S0147547906000081.

¹³¹ Baron, 146.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 150.

reality enforced by men. The sexual harassment and discrimination women face as backstage workers can be along the lines of a male co-worker's taking a lighting instrument out of one's hands or calling a female "sweetie," "honey," "baby," rather than by her name. Other times the harassment is far more egregious, ranging from sexually charged comments on one's appearance to outright sexual advances on or off the job. Women have thus adopted a form of tolerance, regardless of their inner repulsion, endeavoring to maintain an appearance of compliance, in the hopes male co-workers will be satisfied and cease the persecution.¹³³ This appearance of compliance, to "go along to get along," can be compared to a form of performance. It is an acting role thrust onto working women that they never agreed to play.¹³⁴

Furthermore, when a woman does speak up against misogyny, and refuses to "go along to get along," she might suddenly be terminated. Her role in this unwanted performance has been changed by men to become an antagonist, ultimately she is viewed in a negative light. Her mere presence on the job becomes unbearable and therefore must be eliminated.¹³⁵ Unfortunately, for those who have spoken up have experienced such retaliation, from rumors to flat out not being hired at a venue. It bears repeating: it is not *what* you know always, but *who* you know...reputation is everything in this business.

From demanding work hours that is mentally and physically taxing, union representation offers protections such as fair pay and safe working conditions. Furthermore, there needs to be more inclusion of underrepresented minorities and genders in a union that has been predominantly white cis-gendered male.

Women who entered traditionally male-dominated fields such as IATSE after the passage of Title VII did not have much backing in terms of a mass women's movement such as

¹³³ Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979,) 45.

¹³⁴ MacKinnon, 45.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

reproductive rights or sexual violence against women. There were organizations for women craftworkers to offer support to one another such as United Tradeswomen (UT), created in 1979. Their mission was to see to it “that every woman will have the guaranteed right to work in any area of employment that she chooses.”¹³⁶ Because the world of theatre is incredibly time demanding, women like Schwartz would not have had the ability to attend such organizations nor would UT be considered a “mass movement.” It is no wonder that Schwartz had to go along to get along, during that time feminist legal scholars like Mackinnon state “unions’ response to women’s complaints of sexual harassment has been mixed. Some union officials refuse to process grievances based upon claims of sexual harassment.”¹³⁷ In other words, feminist attorneys were not able to navigate union politics. The burning question now is, what is IATSE doing to combat sexual harassment of its women members and how can it become a more inclusive union for members of all races and genders?

Strong Women, Strong Unions

The “Me Too” movement has made a massive impact on the entertainment industry. Coined by assault survivor and activist Tarana Burke in 2007, the hashtag #metoo went viral in 2017, growing from a local grassroots effort into a global movement.¹³⁸ While sexual harassment on the job is still alive for female backstage workers, there has been meaningful change in a positive direction. Local Four recently created a Women’s Committee and Local One has had a women’s committee (officially titled the Sisters’ Committee) since 2011.¹³⁹ Both locals’

¹³⁶ United Tradeswomen Records, Box 1, Folder 1, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, quoted in Latour, 15.

¹³⁷ MacKinnon, 49.

¹³⁸ MeToo Movement, “History and Inception.”, accessed February 13th, 2021, <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/>.

¹³⁹ Lorne Manly and Michael Cooper, “Hey, Stars, Be Nice to the Stagehands. You Might Need a Loan,” *New York Times*, December 27, 2013, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/28/arts/hey-stars-be-nice-to-the-stagehands-you-might-need-a-loan.html>.

executive boards presently include women, and Local Four's constitution and bylaws are being amended to feature more inclusive language.¹⁴⁰ There has also been extensive and mandatory sexual harassment training brought forth not just by New York State Department of Labor, but also through individual venues. The training comes in various forms, either through a presentation made by Human Resources as well as an online course, inability to complete this training results in termination of employment for that venue.

While family ties in theatrical unions have always been present, nepotism in IATSE has been changing since women began to enter stagecraft. The father-son lineage has been the dominant narrative in the organization, but now we are seeing cases of father-daughter lineage as well. Judy Olsen, an electrician interviewed in Bennetts *New York Times* piece remarked in 1987: "You get work if you know somebody who gives you work. But I'm finding it really isn't as closed as it was made out to be. Families are very important in this union, but the man who originally hired me didn't have sons, he had daughters, so his daughter ended up in the union."¹⁴¹ More than thirty years later, we are also beginning to see mother-daughter lineage in Local One. Schwartz cites Jean Hays as being part of the women entering IATSE in the era of "small wires for the girls" and her daughter, Kailey Hays-Lenihan, was accepted into Local One's apprenticeship program in 2019.¹⁴²

IATSE as a whole is making significant efforts to create a more inclusive and welcoming union to all of its members. On Tuesday, November 10, 2020, IATSE's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee held elections to choose officers to sit on its new executive body. In creating this committee, Co-Chairperson: Local 764¹⁴³ Trustee,

¹⁴⁰ Constitutional change was voted on in a General Meeting of Local Four to make the gendered language become gender neutral.

¹⁴¹ Bennetts, "Women Behind the Scenery."

¹⁴² This information was provided through personal correspondence with Kailey Hays-Lenihan.

¹⁴³ The Theatrical Wardrobe Union first organized in 1919 under the American Federation of Labor in New York City and was then granted a charter with IATSE in 1942. Currently President Patricia White serves as one of the

Kimberly Butler-Gilkeson and Local 480¹⁴⁴ President, Liz Pecosit were elected. These two BIPOC women will work towards establishing and prioritizing actionable goals for the committee through open forums and outline the committee's next steps for action. Pecos stated that "With support of members from the executive committee, both Co-Chairpersons are prepared to lead the committee's mission-driven goals to enhance and ensure full and equal opportunity for diversity and inclusion in the workplace and in our union."¹⁴⁵

Both the Title VII cohort and incoming women such as myself, entering in the era of social media, are increasingly less willing to "go along to get along." There is still more work to be done, though. The fear of retaliation such as not being considered for work for standing up against harassment is still present.

Furthermore, unlike in USA829 and Local 764, there has still never been a woman president of IATSE's Local One or Four. There has never been a woman president overseeing the entire International Alliance; be that as it may, currently there are three women out of thirteen international vice presidents. There are also more women than ever before currently sitting on the International's executive board and running the education and training departments. In 2015, IATSE created an equality statement (updated in 2018) that articulated a commitment to equality in the workplace and eradication of all forms of discrimination.¹⁴⁶ IATSE as a whole, is making

Internationals Trustees and is the Department Chair for Education and Training. "Theatrical Wardrobe Union Local 764, *History*," accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.ia764.org/about-us/history>. "About IA, *Leadership*," accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.iatse.net/about-ia/leadership>.

¹⁴⁴ "IATSE Local 480 represents professional film technicians working 'below-the-line' on TV and movie productions in the state of New Mexico. Since 1988, Local 480 has covered experienced film workers in ninety-nine crafts within twenty departments", accessed April 14, 2021, <https://local480.com/>.

¹⁴⁵ The CARES Act stands for: Coronavirus Active Response and Engagement Services. "IATSE's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Hold Elections for New Executive Committee," *IATSE C.A.R.E.S.*, November 18, 2020, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://iatsecares.org/2020/11/18/iatses-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-committee-hold-elections-for-new-executive-committee/?fbclid=IwAR3oKwRtDJ6FINATbnfrjiGjnVuaieOf8blbXXNr5RphI53nOKYypY6eYFw>.

¹⁴⁶ "Equal rights are the cornerstone of the labor movement. Unions were founded on the principle that all people are equal and all people are deserving of respect and fair treatment. Equality issues run through all areas of trade union activities - from health and safety to wage negotiations. The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) is committed to equality of opportunity and to eliminating all forms of discrimination. We are opposed to

sincere efforts to change the stagehand culture.

Women stagehands further prove, as the women designers did during load-in, that new technologies allowed greater access for employment in this craft union. Schwartz's testimony pulls back the curtain to show the pride and hardships of being a woman in a male-dominated industry, and the recent efforts made by the International demonstrate a commitment to equality. As the great composer and lyricist Irving Berlin penned for the 1946 production of *Annie Get Your Gun*, "let's go on with the show."

unlawful and unfair discrimination and oppression on the grounds of sex, gender identity and expression, relationship or marital status, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, language, background, political or religious beliefs, physical appearance, pregnancy or responsibility for dependents. We believe that equality for all is a basic human right and we actively oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. IATSE leaders and members must be vigilant in working, both with each other and with our employers, to promote an equal and welcoming environment for all people, through our actions, attitudes, and language. The IATSE celebrates the diversity of society and is striving to promote and reflect that diversity within this organization."

"IATSE Equality Statement," accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.iatse.net/equality>.

CHAPTER III:
“Standing By”—IATSE Local Four Women and the Coronavirus Pandemic

The date is March 12th, 2020. I am shutting down one of the theatres I work at—Artist In Residence Theatre (A.R.T/NY), close to Midtown Manhattan. The work shift is just like any other. I pass out the radios to front-of-house staff, check the HVAC temperatures, then collect the radios and wait for patrons and crew to leave, so that I can power down the lights and lock up. Except this is no ordinary night. It has recently been announced that Broadway is powering down indefinitely; every theatre in New York City is closing its doors, unsure of what will happen next. -Author

The show cannot go on. In the spring of 2020, typically the start of “the busy season” in theatre and live events, producers began cancelling theatrical workers’ gigs.¹⁴⁷ The entertainment industry is one where the workers are freelancers. Employment opportunities come when there is a new show to load in, an event to run, or a show to load out upon its completion. To put it another way, working in the entertainment industry as a backstage worker is a hustle and, if you do not work, you are not making any money.

Generating a global pandemic, the coronavirus (COVID-19) halted the world, putting an indefinite pause on large gatherings. In this moment of uncertainty, I reflect upon my research, hoping to find answers to questions about how theatre has survived in moments of bleakness. *How can the history of women’s “backstage” work help us now?* More than a year into this pause—this “stand-by” as we call it in the industry—it is more important than ever before to reflect on women’s contributions to the rise and success of the modern western theatre and on how the current pandemic is affecting women backstage workers. What is at stake now is the very existence of the entertainment industry, as well as women’s place within it.

This is not the first time the theatre industry has suffered a global pandemic. The

¹⁴⁷ Michael Paulson, “Broadway, Symbol of New York Resilience, Shuts Down Amid Virus Threat,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2020, accessed October 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/theater/coronavirus-broadway-shutdown.html>.

“Spanish Flu,” or the influenza pandemic of 1918-1920, infected roughly one third of the world's population. Deaths rose to at least fifty million across the globe and 675,000 in the United States alone.¹⁴⁸ A headline in the *Baltimore Sun* on October 6th, 1918, at the beginning of the pandemic, read “Gotham Refuses to get Scared”; despite reports that 2,070 new cases of the influenza in New York City in just a twenty-four-hour period—the city’s health department announced that theatres would remain open, albeit with restrictions such as keeping the windows open and “forbidding unguarded coughing or sneezing.”¹⁴⁹ As many theatre venues across the country shuttered their doors, New York City was in defiance. Journalist Charlotte M. Canning noted in *American Theatre* that the city’s health commissioner, Royal Copeland, had proudly exclaimed to reporters: “I’m keeping my theatres in as good condition as my wife keeps our home.”¹⁵⁰ Copeland’s decision to keep theatre venues open was an effort to maintain order and prevent widespread panic. Also, the pandemic began in the final months of the Great War, during which theatre provided patriotic entertainment, and this was perhaps another reason Copeland wanted to keep theatres open.

The “Spanish Flu” pandemic raged on for over a year and yet Broadway somehow managed to push through it—but this was not an easy undertaking. While there was no mask mandate, there were other restrictions. Theatres banned smoking and standing rooms in addition to staggering curtain times.¹⁵¹ Theatre also became spaces for health education about the influenza, providing pre-show announcements on the risks. In addition, theatres kicked out audience members who refused to adhere to the new restrictions. Despite these measures, the

¹⁴⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Pandemic Resources: 1918 Pandemic (H1N1 Virus),” <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>.

¹⁴⁹ “Gotham Refuses to Get Scared” *Baltimore Sun*, October 6, 1918, accessed March 12, 2021, Newspapers.com.

¹⁵⁰ Charlotte M. Canning, “Theatre and the Last Pandemic,” *American Theatre*, March 24, 2020, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/03/24/theatre-and-the-last-pandemic/>.

¹⁵¹ Laura Collins-Hughes, “ ‘Gotham Refuses to Get Scared’: In 1918, Theaters Stayed Open” *New York Times*, July 14, 2020, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/theater/spanish-flu-1918-new-york-theater.html>.

pandemic, in addition to the war, had negative effects on the theatrical economy. Audiences dwindled over the course of the year. The *New York Times* reported in the fall of 1918 that “hardened theatrical men insist there has never been a time when the fortunes of the playhouse were at so low an ebb as the present moment.”¹⁵² While there is no indication who these “theatrical men” were, most likely they were producers. Their sentiments would have been shared by members of IATSE.

COVID-19, on the other hand, did close theatre doors; Broadway has suffered the longest shutdown in its history. How have women stagehands stepped up to the new challenges the entertainment industry is facing? To explore this question, beginning in January 2021, I conducted short interviews with five women in Local Four: Catarina Uceta, Jessica Gill, Heather Gallagher, Mary Leach, and Jobiana Gabrielli (see Fig. 13). I investigated through these interviews the gendered impact of the shutdown. Has the crisis slowed women’s entry into backstage work and/or IATSE? Has it accelerated that entry? Like me, Uceta and Gill are new members of Local Four, both having joined the rank and file in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gallagher, Leach and Gabrielli are more established members, either in full-time house positions (such as Gallagher) or leading work calls. Leach and Gabrielli together run several committees, including Local Four’s education committee and the newly formed women’s committee. Finally, Gabrielli is the only female sitting on the executive board of Local Four.

I asked these women various questions: where they were when Broadway closed, did social media facilitate solidarity among female backstage workers, and what have they accomplished during the past year? I was surprised by the responses to my query about social media. Even online, the majority of the women I spoke to stayed within their “COVID bubbles.”

¹⁵² “What News on the Rialto?” *New York Times*, October 13, 1918, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1918/10/13/archives/what-news-on-the-rialto.html>.



Fig. 13 From left to right; Jessica Gill, Karen Sunderlin, Jobiana Gabrielli, Mary Leach, and Author working together during the pandemic on International Women's Day. March 8, 2021. *Photo provided with permission from Mary Leach.*

However, I found that new technologies such as the communication platform Zoom created opportunities for women stagehands to converse with one another beyond the bubbles.

Furthermore, hiring practices came into question, as did their effects on the mental health and financial security of Local Four's women members. Being a part of a union has provided safe work opportunities; yet, if a woman worker has not yet established a network (as is the case with Uceta), she has in all likelihood not received any work since the pandemic started.

Nice work...if you can get it.

Uceta: It was Thursday, March 12th.... I was over at Minetta Lane working on a load-in. I remember the TD [Technical Director] or the ATD [Assistant Technical Director] walking out of the venue and coming towards me. I was cutting lumber outside, and initially I thought she was going to tell me to stop cutting but instead she walked up to me and goes: "Oh, stop everything...Broadway is shut down." I was like, "What do you mean? Is it because of the coronavirus and everything going on?" She says yes, and that they're shutting Broadway down for the next couple of weeks. So she told me to just clean up and then put everything in the lobby and we'll, you know, continue where we left off when we come back in two weeks. And here we are almost a year later.

I haven't gotten any work yet. I know that there was some work available, for instance, the VMAs [MTV Video Music Awards]; but by the time I responded back to it, [the call was filled]. My phone for some reason was very delayed with a text alert and all that other stuff. I'm very [much] anticipating my first union gig because...I feel like, once I do that first work gig, that it [will] feel more real to me. Not saying that it isn't, but [I] feel that once I do get on a call, it'll finally kick in like, *Oh my gosh, I'm actually in the*

union now.¹⁵³

In the spring of 2019, The stagehands at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Fisher Building decided to unionize this venue, and in September 2020 Uceta, myself, and several others joined the rank and file of IATSE Local Four. For me, it was a bittersweet moment. While I had been unable to join Local One through the apprenticeship exam, I was able to join Local Four through the organizing drive; however, Uceta and I were sworn in virtually, unable to truly experience the solidarity of being physically surrounded by union sisters and brothers. The organizing efforts of the Fisher Building brought an influx of female-identifying members into Local Four. While workers at the Fisher Building organized well before the pandemic began, parallels can be drawn between their experience and that of women who became union members during the pandemic. The pandemic of 1918-20 saw the scenic artist Mabel Buell admitted to USA829. While her father's connection to the union surely paved her way, so did the pandemic, during which a significant portion of the men working backstage succumbed to the flu. As Buell's experience suggests, epidemics can advantage women trying to break into occupations from which they've been excluded.

Whereas Uceta has not been able to work during the pandemic, some women in Local Four have chosen to not seek work opportunities at all. One such woman is Heather Gallagher, who received her Local Four card in 2019 and is currently the Assistant Head Electrician at the BAM Opera House.

Gallagher: So funny story: I got COVID the first week of March.... I was sick before they started shutting everything down. So they started shutting everything down as

¹⁵³ Catarina Uceta, Zoom interview by author, January 22, 2021.

I was getting better. But I was still sick for like a week and I'm...recovering for the next two or three. So I remember that it happened, but at the time I was kind of, like, everything sucks. I have not tried [to get work]. My feeling on it is that I don't have kids or an ex-wife to pay for. So I didn't want to take the work away from the people who actually need it. You know, during that period where the six hundred dollars¹⁵⁴ was coming in, it was really comfortable. I wasn't hurting at all. I was meeting all my needs and I still had money in my pocket at the end of the month.¹⁵⁵

Whether by choice by lost opportunity to begin creating a network to facilitate steady employment, or simply on account of the dearth of jobs, entertainment workers have been mostly unemployed for the past year. Some opportunities have materialized; as Uceta mentioned, some members of Local Four worked on the Video Music Awards. This local's members have also created COVID-safe working environments in large Brooklyn-Queens warehouses, whose size facilitates social distancing. (Such environments are fewer and farther between in Manhattan, Local One's jurisdiction.) There are also some theatrical workers, such as stage managers, who have found opportunities to work on virtual events on platforms such as Zoom. Unfortunately for theatrical stagehands, the gigs have been few and primarily for TV and film. Jessica Gill, who joined Local Four in the spring of 2020, remarks:

¹⁵⁴ This was weekly Pandemic Unemployment Insurance (PUA) federal government assistance, part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Enacted on March 27, 2020, CARES has been providing numerous economic assistance programs for American workers, families, small businesses, and industries. U.S. Department of the Treasury, "About the CARES Act and the Consolidated Appropriations Act," accessed April 21, 2021, <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/about-the-cares-act>.

¹⁵⁵ Heather Gallagher, in-person interview with author, Brooklyn, February 8, 2021. Uceta stated in her interview that she too, contracted COVID at the beginning of the pandemic.

Gill: We're definitely never guaranteed anything, which is sort of scary when you think about it that way. But I think [this] is why being a part of a union is good because your network just gets larger and therefore increases your chances of getting more work. You know, we work when there's work—and we don't work when there's no work.¹⁵⁶

Having a permanent position at a venue can give stagehands a guaranteed amount of hours.¹⁵⁷ Heather Gallagher enjoys such a position. As Gill stressed, however, most stagehands are employed on a strictly as-needed basis:

Gill: I was currently working at Lincoln Center Theater for their production management office, [and] we were all sitting in our office doing our work when we got called in for a meeting. This was in the very beginning [of the pandemic], so we heard only the vague bits and pieces about this virus. But we were basically told [to] wrap everything up: we are going to take a break for a week and then start coming back. At that time, I also had a couple of gigs lined up at Barclays and BAM, so everyone was pretty calm at that point. Everyone was definitely...you could tell everyone was weirded out just because this never happens. You know, even [though] I feel like [in] weather events, we are even still working. So, for us to get to our general manager [to tell us to] pack everything and for the week, we were definitely concerned. I think we were all still in that mindset of this will just be a month. You know, let's just get through this month. We're all going to be OK....

¹⁵⁶ Jessica Gill, Zoom interview with author, February 20, 2021.

¹⁵⁷ In the industry there are various names for this such as “leads” or “heads.”

In addition, there are union members who were holding full-time theatrical positions prior to the pandemic, but left these positions during the pandemic to take higher-paying positions and better work opportunities in the union. Such is the case with Mary Leach, a member of Local Four since 2018, who, prior to the pandemic, was both a production manager (PM) for a Local One house in Manhattan and a stagehand in Local Four. When the pandemic arrived, Leach was already moving up within Local Four's ranks. In addition to her responsibilities as part of the local's education committee, she was also becoming a crew chief on various gigs, and concluded that it was time to abandon her PM position. This happened right before the pandemic started. Now, amidst the pandemic, Leach worries that the COVID-19 will diminish the traction she was gaining within Local Four.

Leach: It is really hard now that we're starting back up [with work]. It's like, *Hey, guys, remember me? Remember me?*, and knowing that, while I'm a solid stagehand,...it's just hard to make sure I'm still on everyone's radar. Especially when this industry is such a boys' club.... Every Local [within IATSE] has a lot of issues. I now work with enough of the crew chiefs, and [in] the Local that they know my work ethic, they know how hard I work. So I have an easier time than some other people. But, still, it's really hard. And when there's so few women, it really sucks to sometimes feel like you're the token woman on the job because they [men] want to say: "I do hire a woman; here she is." And I don't feel like that way all the time, I know they're hiring me. But there are times I'm like, "*Why am I the only one [woman] here when there could be more?*"¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Mary Leach, Zoom interview with author, March 13, 2021.

In an industry where there is no guarantee for work, how does IATSE distribute work? From research and personal experience, theatrical unions (like many unions) are immensely engrossed in nepotism. In addition to skillset and work ethic, favoritism plays a large factor when it comes to hiring workers. Local One for example has a hiring hall. A stagehand can go there to see what work is available—but there is no guarantee that they will be hired. Local Four does not have a hiring hall; therefore, work is distributed through fostering networks and connections with crew chiefs, who have the power to pick and choose who they want on their crew. Additionally, each local within IATSE operates differently. This severely affects women stagehands in hiring practices. Leach expresses it best—this industry is a boys club. Not much has changed since 1888 when Local Four began, it is still dominated and controlled by cis gendered men.

Positives in a Pandemic?

*You know, we all probably need to catch up on some sleep anyway. We're all super tired.-
Jessica Gill*

Initially, I theorized that social media would facilitate solidarity among women workers in theatrical production. There are Facebook groups such as Women+/Femme Stagehands, a group with over 3.6 thousand members that has provided a safe-space for discussion, advice, and empowerment.¹⁵⁹ There is also the private Facebook group Theatre Professionals of Underrepresented Genders (Formerly known as Women+ In Theatre,) with over 28.8 thousand members. I have used these groups in the past to connect with women and other underrepresented genders working in technical production, finding solidarity in such online

¹⁵⁹ Women+/Femme Stagehands is also undergoing a name change.

platforms. But when I posed the question: **Has social media provided an outlet to connect with other women workers during this pandemic?**, many of the women I spoke to said no. Jobiana Gabrielli, a member of Local Four since 2007, said it best: “Social media has been so polarizing that I distance myself from Facebook and Instagram.”¹⁶⁰ The pandemic has provided at least one positive for women in a moment of such bleakness—a much needed break from the physical and mental demands of the job.

Gill: I've also tried to take a bunch of courses online. Local Four reimburses us within certain amounts for classes. So [I'm] just trying to take as many certifications as I can, and [take] a lot of the COVID compliance classes [as well]. American Red Cross also has a mental health one, which I took because I think we're all struggling at the moment so I can realize certain things about myself. I would say [that] I really took those first few months just to sort of get myself back together. I think we all are guilty of running ourselves into the ground a little bit. You don't really realize that until you finally have a minute to be like... .Let's take care of myself first, because this might be the only time in our lives where we get this sort of reset opportunity, which is cool.

Leach: It's amazing that I rediscovered this thing called “taking some time to not work all the time”...Really, [I] enjoy reading again, [and] enjoy spending time in my apartment, which I haven't spent more time down time in than just sleeping for years.

Gabrielli: A few of my coworkers and I were like, “Oh, what's the worst that can happen? We get two months off.” We desperately needed these two months off anyway because we've been working nonstop for six years. So we all kind of agreed that a little bit of a break was going to be a good thing. But we did not expect it to last this long.

¹⁶⁰ Jobiana Gabrielli, Zoom interview with author, March 13, 2021.

Gallagher: Just relaxing has been great.... It's been a horrible year for depression. It hasn't been a productive amount of downtime, but....it's just been very relaxing. It was just great to get to spend time with people because, given our schedules, we don't always get a lot of time to hang out with people.... It's like an annoying, paradoxical amount of downtime because you have all this free time. It's like, oh, I should travel; *I can't travel*. Oh, I should go, go hang out with my friend; *I can't really go*. Oh, I should go check out this; *it's closed*.

Uceta: For me personally, I haven't reached out on social media as much as I would've liked to because there are so many other things going on in my household and out in the world in general. I found myself going into this dark hole of feeling like I'm becoming smaller and smaller. Mentally, the pandemic really hit me, and caused me to shelter myself from everyone, not only physically but now virtually.

The federal government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been closely monitoring the effects of the pandemic in regards to mental health. Based on a survey conducted in late June 2020, the CDC said that 40 percent of adults in the United States reported struggling with mental health and substance abuse.¹⁶¹ Mental health and physical well-being was already an issue for women stagehands when one factors in the temporary nature of work in the entertainment industry. Taking into the consideration that 2020 was also a polarizing election year, it makes sense that going to social media was simply, just too much to handle.

As Gill expressed, more often than not, stagehands run themselves into the ground. This pandemic has made clear that we need to take better care of ourselves. But what will happen

¹⁶¹ Czeisler MÉ, Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al., "Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020" *MMWR Morb Mortal Weekly Report* 2020; 69:1049–1057, accessed April 22, 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a>.

once the pandemic is over and we can fully return to theatre? Gabrielli is not so sure: “I would like for us to all realize that we have a limit and that we shouldn't work past our breaking point. Something tells me once it gets busy and all that money is available to us, we're all going to say yes to every call.” I believe that this will happen as well; that because of our passion and dedication, we will revert back to working ourselves to the point of sleep deprivation, as it is inherent in the entertainment industry.

While the pandemic provided a positive break from work, it has also been financially difficult. This is another factor exacerbating mental health issues. WeMakeEvents, a coalition of workers in the entertainment industry in the United Kingdom and North America, has been raising awareness of the severe financial crisis the industry has been faced with, as well as advocating for government assistance. Red Alert is a campaign through WeMakeEvents urging congress members for an expansion of pandemic unemployment benefits, claiming statistics such as “77 percent of people in the live events industry have lost 100 percent of their income.”¹⁶² What WeMakeEvents has not factored into its statistics about the pandemic's impact on the industry are the financial effects among women workers in particular. Financial hardships have been a cause for the rise in mental health issues during the pandemic; additionally, the prolonged break is raising issues of self-doubt among some women stagehands.

Uceta: I believe in my instance the reason why I haven't been able to snag a union gig as of yet is because of this irrational fear of not being good enough. Since I haven't worked for a year within the industry, it causes me to hesitate to reach out. Especially because I feel whenever I am on call [a reference to non-union work] I have to give 150 percent to prove I belong there and am worthy to work as a stagehand/carpenter.

¹⁶² WeMakeEvents.org, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://wemakeevents.org/>.

This is widely due to the fact that I am a woman, and more often than not have been seen [by cis-gendered male co-workers] as weak or incapable of pulling my weight. All of this is to say this fear is causing me to struggle financially. My bills are piling up, and the one thing that can help alleviate it is a simple phone call. But sometimes a phone call can have a lot of weight to it.

The Kaiser Family Foundation reported in March 2020 that women were developing more mental health challenges during this pandemic than were men. About half of the women surveyed, versus 42 percent of the men, reported that they experienced “worry about losing income due to a workplace closure or reduced hours because of COVID-19.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, the study showed that 16 percent of women but just 11 percent of men felt that the pandemic had already taken a major toll on their mental health. Because jobs in the entertainment industry are temporary, as well as difficult for women even to obtain, the pandemic has the potential to have especially long-lasting and negative effects for women stagehands like Uceta.

However, the pandemic has also given these women a new tool for building solidarity with one another. Zoom has become the dominating platform for communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is yet another new technology that women have been able to master. I have learned how to use this technology in order to conduct the majority of the interviews for this thesis. While theatre has been on a drawn-out stand-by, women have been mastering this communication tool, using it to organize festivals and to gain access to craft training that would normally be available only on the job.

¹⁶³ Brittni Frederiksen, Ivette Gomez, Alina Salganicoff, and Usha Ranji, “Coronavirus: A Look at Gender Differences in Awareness and Actions” *Kaiser Family Foundation*, March 20, 2020, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/coronavirus-a-look-at-gender-differences-in-awareness-and-actions/>.

Gill: I actually [have] worked a Zoom [theatre] festival.... What I actually noticed was that people were way more compassionate and understanding just because where we were all sort of at that same level. You know, everyone was trying to figure out the best ways to work as everyone was trying to figure out the best ways to communicate. I would say the only difference is that the producing teams are definitely predominantly women, and the general management has definitely been more women-centric.... I think in a lot of theaters [we've been] used to seeing general management and like higher management be male-dominated. So that was pretty cool to see more women sort of starting to take agency in those types of spaces because they feel like they can now because, once again, we're all sort of back on that same playing field because of Zoom....

Gabrielli: I'm the chair of the Education Committee for Local Four and ever since the pandemic started, I guess we've all had to figure out a way to continue doing something. So, really, the only outlet that I really had, and I'm sure a lot of people had, is learning [and] continu[ing] education. So, really, it's been a whole bunch of women at webinars and classes. And..., gosh, I think the first two months of the pandemic, I took every class that I could...: rigging and anything that interested me until I burnt myself out and had to stop using the computer...stop learning anything because my brain was fried. But there have been some really positive courses I have taken....

In a lot of the rigging webinars, which [are] more geared towards our industry and the classes that I was participating in..., seeing women got me excited, because you don't really see a lot of women riggers, and that's something that hopefully will change. I think the ratio [of men to women] was probably like 80:20, which is kind of where our industry

is. It was nice to see...[that] there were a lot of women and even younger people...just interested in becoming riggers and trying to find out how they can become [one].

Both Gill and Gabrielli bring forth another insight into women's rising progress through the Zoom platform; they remark on a phenomenon called the "glass cliff." The glass cliff, a term coined by professors of psychology Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam in 2005, refers to the fact that women are especially likely "to be placed in leadership positions in circumstances of general financial downturn," when the chance of failure is greater than usual.¹⁶⁴

Correspondingly, leading business consultants Jack Zengar and Joseph Folkman, writing for *Harvard Business Review*, place the glass cliff phenomenon front and center in an article on women in leadership positions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Zengar and Folkman specifically note that managerial assessments of employees' capacities identify women as better than men when it comes to adapting to changing circumstances and learning new skills.¹⁶⁵

Women in Local Four are doing just that through Zoom. This can pave the way for women to ascend in stagecraft careers and further break down the traditional gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor. While Zoom has given women entertainment workers the ability to survive the glass cliff, it also undercuts them since many virtual performances can take place without the involvement of stagehands. In sum, Zoom has proved itself both a helpful tool and a challenge for women backstage workers.

¹⁶⁴ Michelle K Ryan and S Alexander Haslam, "The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions," *British Journal of Management*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Jun 2005): 81-90, accessed March 28, 2021. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00433.x.

¹⁶⁵ Jack Zengar and Joseph Folkman, "Research: Women Are Better Leaders During a Crisis," *Harvard Business Review*, December 30, 2020, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://hbr.org/2020/12/research-women-are-better-leaders-during-a-crisis>.

It is hard to imagine that with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has halted the entertainment industry and claimed many of its members' lives, would have any positive impact on the industry's workers. This is the case, however; thanks especially to Zoom's facilitation of face-to-face communication in a time of social isolation. When each interview concluded and I stopped recording, my union sisters and I would enjoy casual conversations, which are often impossible on the job. Zoom has also provided women in Local Four with opportunities to participate in webinars and conferences that many of us could never before attend because of our demanding work schedules. The prolonged break has not only provided us with new opportunities to become more mindful of our physical and mental health but has also given us new ways to connect with one another.

Broadway is Coming Back: Women stagehands post pandemic

Kayleigh Truman is a Local One member and currently a master's student at the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Labor and Urban Studies. In December 2020 an article on the school's blog quoted her optimistic reply when asked about her industry's future:

I'm not afraid for Broadway....One of my mentors with the IA told me, "Broadway survived the Depression, it survived AIDS, and it will get through COVID." You know, when things start to come back to normal, people are going to be desperate for entertainment. So yes, Broadway will be back. I don't know if it will come back exactly as it was. But maybe—maybe there are things that will change for the better. So instead of focusing on what we fear we've lost, maybe we should focus on what we might gain.¹⁶⁶

Truman's mentor is correct. Theatre in New York City has survived many obstacles, and finally, after much uncertainty, there is talk of reopening Broadway by September 2021. Journalist

¹⁶⁶ "Kayleigh Truman's Journey to Broadway, and Beyond," *CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies Blog*, December 14, 2020, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://slublog.org/2020/12/14/kayleigh-trumans-journey-to-broadway-and-beyond/>. I met Truman while marching in the 2020 NYC Women's March with other IA members.

Henry Goldman of Bloomberg.com states that the Broadway entertainment sector alone has an “economic impact of \$15 billion a year.”¹⁶⁷ Goldman also states that the entertainment sector employs over 100,000 workers in New York City; however, he does not break this down by occupation, let alone by gender.

Audiences and backstage workers alike are longing to return to live theatre; this stand-by is making headway to finally be over, yet we still do not know when theatre will be back to normal capacity and working conditions as it was prior to the pandemic. On April 2, 2021, it was announced that New York City entertainment venues holding less than ten thousand people (this includes patrons and entertainment workers) can now operate at thirty-three percent capacity.¹⁶⁸ While this sounds encouraging, most venues are unable to make a profit at this capacity, and will remain closed.

Theatre and live events are moving forward; yet we do not fully know what the landscape will look like for female identifying stagehands. Hiring practices can be supremely subjective; many will hire folks they have worked with in the past. This impact is further emphasized by the lack of work during this pandemic. For the steps forward women workers in stagecraft have made to be on the radar of those who hire—COVID-19 has the potential to make it even more difficult to obtain work as theatres begin to reopen.

Union membership guarantees fair pay and safe working conditions. However, a union does not guarantee jobs for its workers when many of its rank and file are hired as needed. Uceta and Leach’s testimonies in particular speak of two vital issues moving forward in post-pandemic

¹⁶⁷ Henry Goldman, “NYC Planning for Broadway Shows to Reopen in September,” *Bloomberg.com*, March 25, 2021, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-25/nyc-planning-for-broadway-shows-to-reopen-in-september>.

¹⁶⁸ BWW News Desk, “New York Arts and Entertainment Venues Re-Open Today at 33% Capacity,” *Broadwayworld.com*, April 2, 2021, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/New-York-Arts-and-Entertainment-Venues-Re-Open-Today-at-33-Capacity-20210402>.

theatre. First, due to the pandemic, women's ability to create a network for work opportunities has been drastically diminished. Second, the network for hiring is and always has been dominated by men. The infrequency of being hired as a woman results in a gendered hiring gap. If these issues remain unresolved, it will lead to a negative financial impact for women after the pandemic has passed.

Many stagehands of all genders have left the entertainment industry altogether due to lack of work; however, because the backstage world has been disproportionately men, this could create room for more women to enter the field. More room for women to enter stagecraft would create a larger women's network, which could also have the potential to change hiring practices.

More importantly, if the union advocates safe working conditions, this needs to extend beyond physical safety on the job. Ensuring that workers of all genders have an equal opportunity of obtaining work, crew chiefs can be more mindful when hiring crew post-pandemic. When hiring, crew chiefs are focused on the skills needed for the job to be completed safely and efficiently. This research has shown, however; that one way women acquire skill is through on-the-job training; therefore, more work opportunities help advance skills. Financial safety is a crucial working condition for the mental health of all of its IATSE membership.

I echo Truman's sentiments, that rather than live in fear for all we have lost in terms of progress for women in technical theatre due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we should focus on what we might gain moving forward. *Stand by for the top of the show.*

CONCLUSION: The Show Must Go On

Historians are like lighting designers; we shine light onto things skewed in darkness, and reveal new angles, to provide more illumination and insight. By focusing on the ways in which skills were acquired to gain entry into backstage union work as a woman—education, networks, and new technologies—this research has assembled documentation and applied a social-historical perspective to the history of theatrical technical production. This thesis is a personal journey to give identity, in solidarity, for many in this community; not just to women interested in stagecraft and theatrical design, but to folks of all genders. The “all-male stage” lore is loading-out; we are breaking down what Nancy Maclean calls “historical amnesia,”¹⁶⁹ and constructing a history of theatrical technical production that recognizes women as core contributors to the success of modern American theatre.

The women’s movement helped unlock the backstage door in regards to higher education and on-the-job training programs in New York City women-operated Little Theatres. Through organizations such as the Neighborhood Playhouse, Civic Repertory Theatre, and institutions like Yale, early women designers garnered the mastery needed to join USA829. For the cohort which entered backstage work as IATSE stagehands after Title VII, higher education consisted of American and labor studies, and for some, access to the backstage door was through open apprenticeship exams.

It is not just the know-how, it is the know-who. There has always been a system of apprenticeship to pass down the knowledge needed as a skilled worker in the trades. Women have been able to foster networks, more specifically— women-worker networks—in technical production. Mentors gave women pursuing technical production work opportunities as well as

¹⁶⁹ Maclean, 47.

protection on the job for both stagehands and designers. These mentors consisted of well-established workers in the field and professors. While some of these relationships were forged with their male-counterparts, women have been able to foster their own network. The ability to move from a patriarchal dominant-narrative into a more inclusive one, rests upon this network of women able to learn and find solidarity with one another.

A more cohesive analysis into women's contributions to technical production is an understanding of both technical knowledge and the artistry behind their skills. The lack of synthesis between technology, artistry, and women in theatre has not been carefully examined by historians. When this topic has been discussed, technical elements and design fields have often been feminized and thus deemed subordinate. In addition, new technology in stagecraft appears to be a threat amongst male workers; a thing which seemingly takes away jobs from skilled workers, and in a trade dominated by men, therefore a threat to their manhood. Furthermore, when women have gained access to new technologies, this is also deemed a threat in which men have resulted in harassment in order to stay dominant. This has resulted in furthering the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor. However, these new technologies were not specifically gendered when first emerging. From the invention of the switchboard and computer operated lighting boards, to the era of "small wires for the girls" and now Zoom, providing a deeper understanding of design theory and rapid technological advancements clearly proves that women have been equal contributors to theatrical production. With sound and video being recognized as elements of theatrical design, I foresee women dominating these technologies as well.

In order to further dismantle the gendered hierarchy of theatrical labor and for this labor to be truly equitable, thus producing a more comprehensive analysis of women in theatrical production, we need to explore "safe working conditions." The phrase "safe working conditions"

needs to be broadened beyond physical safety, extending this towards hiring practices and harassment in the workplace. By doing so will create mental health safety, a condition for all workers and true solidarity for all genders.

In the male-dominated field of technical production, conversations about motherhood in behind-the-scenes work have been emerging. Historian Katherine Turk states that “most employers have not changed their work patterns or expectations since the days when each male professional could be expected to count on a full-time housewife to manage his life at home.”¹⁷⁰ Further research investigating work patterns and providing insight into the experiences of working mothers can bring forth another perspective that can be applied to safe working practices.

Both of my parents encouraged my passion for theatre and would regularly take me to shows. When I would perform on the stage as a young dancer—my mother volunteered to be part of the crew backstage. I consider these experiences to be family ties to theatre, similar to those of Peggy Clark and Jean Rosenthal. My training in backstage work began at Dance New Amsterdam as a production apprentice; the theatre was run and largely operated by women. This education in stagecraft is comparable to what Aline Bernstein experienced at The Neighborhood Playhouse. My first foray into the union was the Local One apprenticeship exam—the same exam that Barbara Schwartz took to gain entry. I have experienced sexual harassment on the job; and I have often had to go along to get along. Mary Leach, Heather Gallagher, and Jobiana Gabrielli are mentors to me. These women have provided myself and others with protection, work opportunities, and mentorship. Through this research, I see now that my entrance through the stage door is no different from that of the cohorts of women who have come before me.

¹⁷⁰ Turk, 206.

I acknowledge that this research focused on the ways in which women obtained the skills needed to join theatrical unions; however, these unions were racially segregated up until the passage of Title VII. Not only has the narrative of technical production been male-dominated, it has also been predominantly white. There is a need to discuss genders, but also race in regards to backstage work. Perkins states in her 1995 piece on African Americans in backstage work: “the reason for the paucity of African Americans in design are numerous and varied, ranging from a sense of no job opportunities once the degree is obtained to lack of mentors to a feeling of isolation.”¹⁷¹ We saw in chapter II that with the passage of Title VII, segregated locals advocated for equality in IATSE. What can also be an avenue of research are the ways in which pioneer BIPOC women—such as lighting designers Shirley Prendergast, Kathy A. Perkins, and others—obtained the skills necessary for membership, in addition to the hardships and struggles they faced within USA829. With the IATSE Women’s committee collecting the oral histories of its women workers we can also begin to identify the experiences of BIPOC women stagehands.

The show must go on, but we cannot disregard the mental and physical well-being of its backstage workers. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has raged on for over a year. Some questions remain unanswered—for now. We must investigate how this pandemic has affected not just females; but to all underrepresented genders and races in design and stagecraft. By expanding the “safe working conditions,” results in a more inclusive solidarity. The conversations are collectively growing on this topic. “Just Labor,” a new forum consisting of workers in the entertainment industry, is currently creating an open dialogue, addressing issues of injustice and equity in the workplace. In this moment there is a stronger sense of solidarity

¹⁷¹ Kathy A. Perkins, “Their Place in History: African Americans Behind the Scenes in the American Theatre,” *Theatre Design & Technology: Journal of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology*, vol. 31, no. 3, (Summer 1995), 35. https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/hickmanbrady/tdt_1995summer/index.php#/p/35.

across race and gender than ever before, folks across the industry are impassioned to create a more inclusive workplace.

Historians are like stagehands; problem solvers, we cable together and draw power from a variety of sources. It is a craft which builds and supports skilled knowledge. Stitched together, this research creates a new backdrop in theatre. It started as a simple question I would ask on gigs, “Do you think we need this history?” and my network of women backstage workers supported such an endeavor to pursue this research. The work is far from finished, but the main curtain has been lifted and women designers and stagehands can have their moment in the spotlight; not only highlighted, but as cohorts contributing to the rise and success of American modern theatre, and to be seen as equal contributors to their male counterparts. I leave you with Barbara Schwartz’s parting words in our interview: “It’s a story that needs to be told.”

Appendix I-Glossary of Terms

Focus (as it pertains to lighting the stage): Once lighting instruments are in their intended positions, focus pertains to the quality of the light. Quality refers to how the light is cast onto the stage in regards to intensity, color, and beam shape.

Focus Chart: A document that shows the intended directional position of each lighting instrument used for a production as determined by the lighting designer.

Jurisdiction (as it pertains to union locals): The geographic region and/or skill set common to the workers in that union. It is also the sum of all the venues covered within this region.

Load In: The process of installing a show into the venue.

Load Out: Uninstalling a show upon its completion from a venue and moving out to either another destination such as a production shop or venue, or into a dumpster.

Light Plot: Similar to a focus chart, this document is a ground plan created by a lighting designer to specify where and which lighting instruments are laid out in a specific venue or for touring purposes.

Mixing: The process of blending microphone signals from actors (and sometimes instruments) to create a balance that is satisfactory to the sound designer, composer, and audience. It is making sure that the playback (pre-recorded sounds) are performed at the correct time and volume.

Rigging: The preparation of a space in order to safely receive the bulk weight of equipment.

Stagehands: The individuals who execute the technical aspects of the load in, load out, and run of the production. Stagehands are also responsible for the care and upkeep of technical equipment.

Tech Week: To describe (usually) the week or two week period leading up to the opening of a show where all the major technical elements are troubleshooted. It is slowly stepping through a production with all of the technical elements, actors, and production crew.

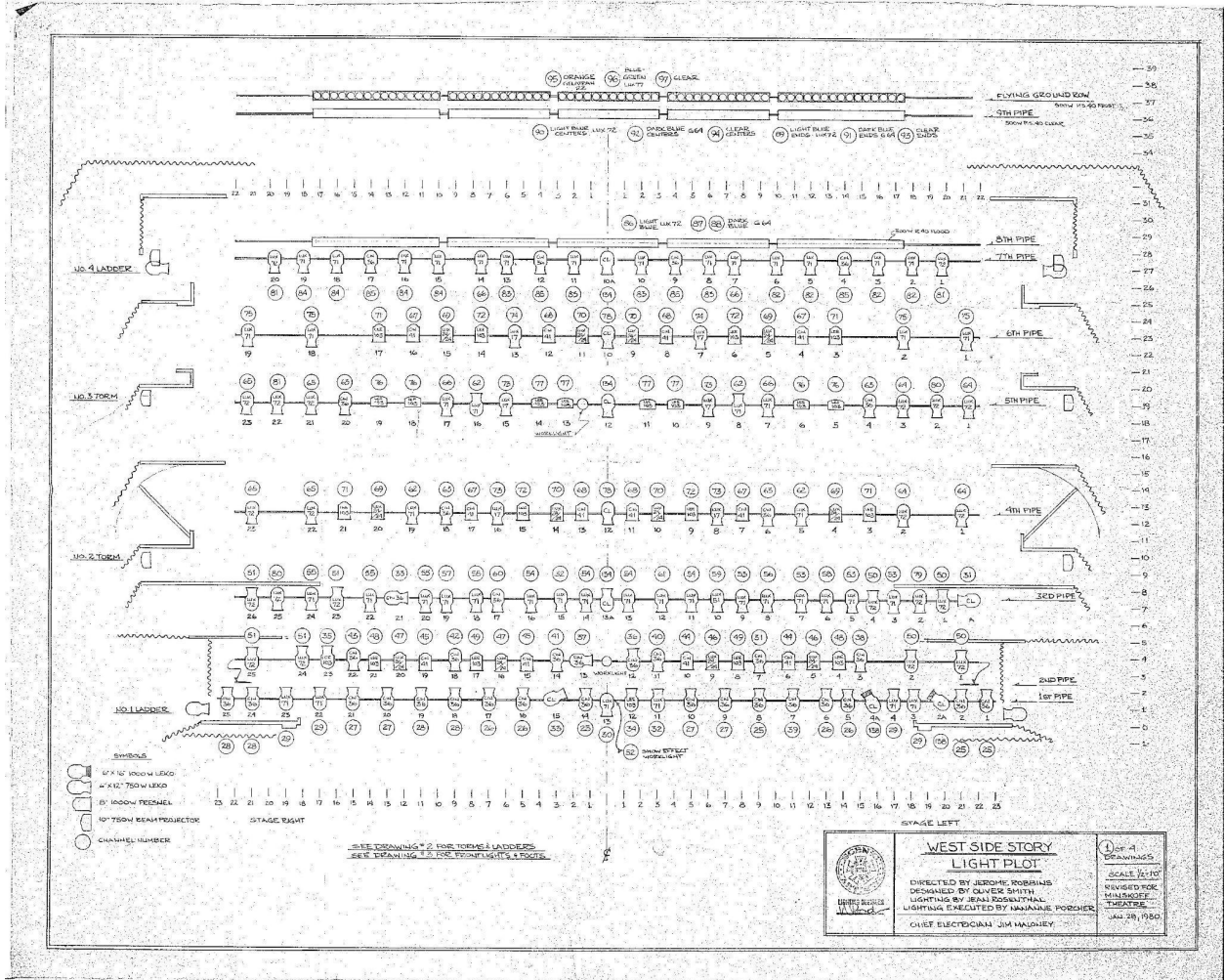
Appendix II-Documentation of Light Design

The following and more can be found at <https://thelightingarchive.org/>.

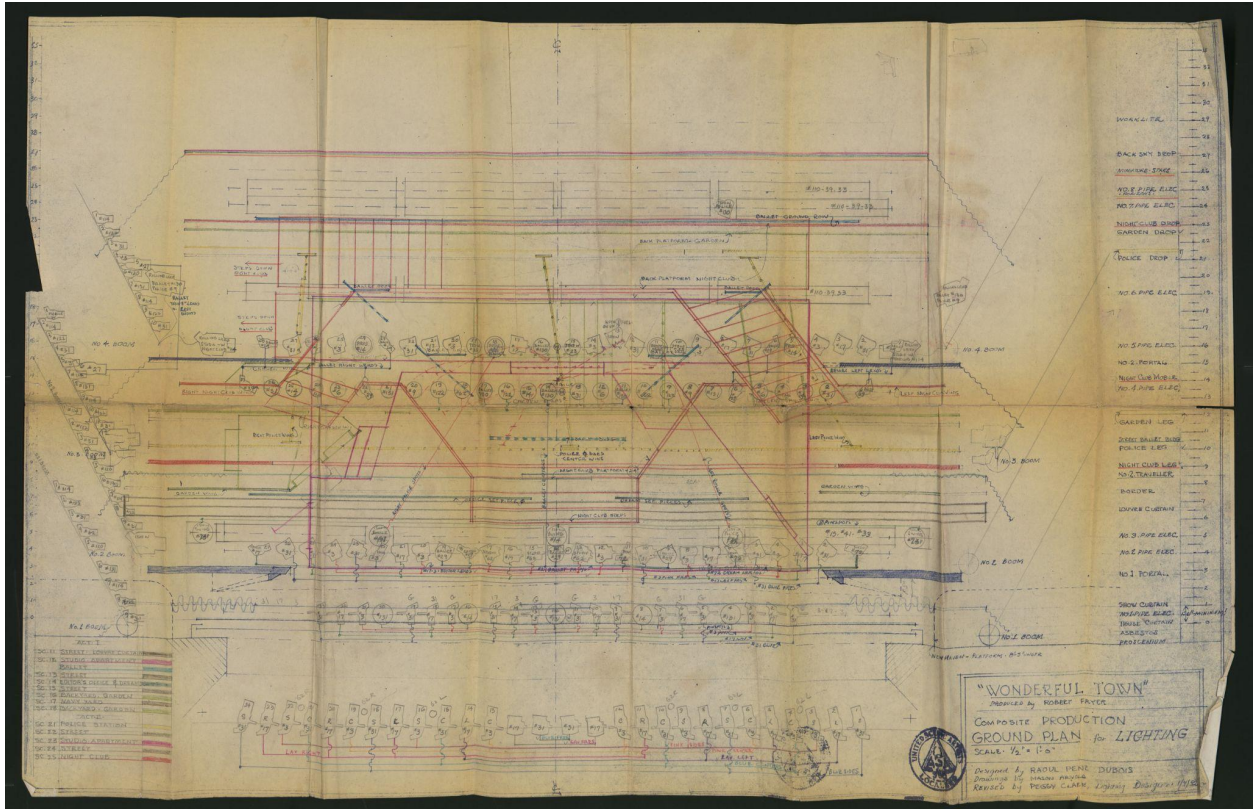
		"WESTSIDE STORY" ROAD - 1959 FOCUS CHARTS		KRUPKE IN STEP LADDER IN FOR 4-15 BEDROOM IN FOR 10-6 DRUGSTORE IN FOR 8-11-17	
SWITCH UNIT	RAIL 1-16			TYPE	COLOR
1 / 1	LEFT (3-6-13)	7L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO OFF PORTAL LEFT		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
5 / 2	ENDS (5-20-23)	8L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO LEFT - CUT TO 9L (OFF PORTAL)	STRAIGHT IN	750w 6X12 LEKO	40c
1 / 3	LEFT (1-6-13)	6L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO RIGHT - CUT TO 4L		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
73 / 7 / 4	S.L. ON LADDER	5L + 1 UP SL - OFF BRICK FLAT ON UNIT SR - TO EDGE UNIT TOP OF FENCE - OFF FOOTS		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
5 / 5	ENDS (2-20-23)	5L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO	CUT OFF AT 9L (OFF PORTAL) STRAIGHT IN	750w 6X12 LEKO	40c
1 / 6	LEFT (1-3-13)	5L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO CUT OFF TO 3 1/2 L.		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
4 / 7	CENTER (9-16-18)	2L + 1 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO SIDES OPEN		750w 6X12 LEKO	40c
2 / 8	CENTER DRUGSTORE (11-14-17)	3 1/2 L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO LEFT - TO 5L		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
4 / 9	CENTER (7-16-18)	1L + 1 UP TOP - 6'6" EDGE LINO		750w 6X12 LEKO	40c
69 / 6 / 10	BEDROOM	4R + 1 UP TOP - TOP OF SET 7' LEFT - TO 4 RIGHT - TO 6R	OFF FOOTS	750w 6X12 LEKO	43c
2 / 11	CENTER DRUGSTORE (8-14-17)	1L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO CUT OFF AT 5R + 5L		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
3 / 12	RIGHT (19-22-24)	1R + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO CUT OFF AT 2L		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
1 / 13	LEFT (1-3-6)	7L + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO CUT OFF TO 3 1/2 L.		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
2 / 14	CENTER DRUGSTORE (8-11-17)	1R + 3/4 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO CUT OFF TO 5R		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
74 / 7 / 15	S.L. ON LADDER	5L + 1 UP TOP - TOP OF FENCE OFF FOOTS SL - OFF BRICK FLAT - 7L SR - TO UNIT 4L		750w 6X12 LEKO	36c
4 / 16	CENTER (7-9-18)	1R + 1 UP TOP - 6'6" TO EDGE LINO		750w 6X12 LEKO	40c

RAIL 1-16

Focus chart for West Side Story (1959 National Tour) by Jean Rosenthal.



Lighting Plot for West Side Story (1959 National Tour)



Light Plot (with scenery) for Wonderful Town (1953) by Peggy Clark.

11 Postals → Gray blue & tan house - Front canopy - Blue turquoise & black gold & yellow in ϕ . (yellows includes honey's - bar colors.)

Sc 11 Street - Day - Dancey - Spot Surges. (Turquoise coral, tan's set Bldg) R L.

Apt - 9 rays - mod left
Red fireplace
Don't
Sca 12 "Long" Ohio - Down down - slant down lights up

Walk forward - source close - open -
Green metal shell

Sc 13 Base stage Blue pulito mid night blue w doors
Blue Bed - (Apt. bad) -
white doors
"hanging picture"
Cyc
can be from overhead

Cost. Dancey in mid with blue with accessories
(coral on seat)
Gd Row 3' high

street
NO 1 Spel
NO 2 job - high overhead

End walk down ϕ - Tron close
Down

Sc 14 St in front of house No Dance

Sc 15 Office of Manhattan - Row row
Form source
gray & tan
Impresso
Bronze
(white & silver units L.)
overhead spot
for vignettes

Design thoughts for Wonderful Town (1953)

"CHORUS LINE" - BOWY 75

<u>SIDES</u>		<u>ENDS</u>		<u>DOWN & BK.</u>			
1	1TL	649	26 2PL IN 1	837	94 2P IN 1	N.C.	
2	2TL LINE	649	27 5PL IN 2	837	92 4P - LINE BK.	649	
3	3TL	649	28 7PL IN 3	837	93 4P - LINE BK.	649	
4	4TL	649	29 8PL IN 4	837	44 6-7P IN 3	843	
5	1TL	826	30 2PR IN 1	858	45 8P IN 4	843	
6	2TL LINE	826	31 5PR IN 2	858	78 6-7 8P IN 3-4	649	
7	3TL	826	32 7PR IN 3	858	86 5-6P PARS	N.C.	
8	4TL	826	33 4PR IN 4	858			
9	1TL - DIAGONAL	859			<u>THOUGHTS</u>		
10	2TL - LINE	859	<u>FRONTS</u>		46	3P PRISC.	843
11	3TL	859	34 LO. BX. L.	649	47 3P PAUL	843	
12	4TL	859	35 LO. BX. L.	859	48 3P MARK	843	
13	1TR	N.C.	36 LO. BX. L.	843	49 3P PAM	843	
14	2TR LINE	N.C.	37 LO. BX. R.	N.C.	50 3P CHRIS	843	
15	3TR	N.C.	38 LO. BX. R.	818	51 3P AL-CASSIE-MIKE	843	
16	4TR	N.C.	39 LO. BX. R.	854	52 3P RICHIE	843	
17	1TR	854	40 UP BX. L.	625	53 3P JUDY	843	
18	2TL LINE	854	41 UP BX. L.	841	54 3P BEBE	843	
19	3TR	854	42 UP BX. R.	602	55 3P BOBBY	843	
20	4TR	854	43 UP BX. R.	854	56 3P SHEILA	843	
21	1TR	818	74 RAIL R.	²⁵ / ₆₂	57 3P GREGG	843	
22	2TR LINE	818	75 RAIL L. R.	²⁵ / ₆₂	58 3P CONNIE	843	
23	3TR	818	76 RAIL □	N.C.	59 3P MAGGIE	843	
24	4TR	818	77 RAIL □	N.C.	60 3P RON	843	
87	1-2-3-4TH - CASSE	863	80 FEETS	⁵⁹ / ₁₈			
25	3-4TL - TR. SHINS	859	81 FEETS	843	<u>MISC.</u>		
82	1TR - SHIN - GREG	649	90 1P LINE	N.C.	73 WORKS	649	
83	3TL - SHIN - BALLET	837	91 1P LINE	N.C.	95 3P FRES. DECO	842	

Magic Sheet for A Chorus Line (1975) by Tharon Musser.

CHORUS LINE '75

HOOK-UP SCRIMMER-EDI 3K PAGE 1 OF 7

CIRCUIT	POSITION / UNIT NO.	TYPE	FOCUS	COLOR
1	*1 TORM LEFT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	X	649
2	*2 TORM LEFT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	LINE	649
3	*3 TORM LEFT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	X	649
4	*4 TORM LEFT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	X	649
5	*1 TORM LEFT 2-3-5-7	6X12 750NL	X	826
6	*2 TORM LEFT 2-3-5-7	6X12 750NL	LINE	826
7	*3 TORM LEFT 2-3-5-7	6X12 750NL	X	826
8	*4 TORM LEFT 2-3-5-7	6X12 750NL	X	826
9	*1 TORM LEFT 11-12-13-14	6X12 750NL	DIAG ¹²⁴	859
10	*2 TORM LEFT 11-12-13-14	6X12 750NL	LINE	859
11	*3 TORM LEFT 11-12-13-14	6X12 750NL	X	859
12	*4 TORM LEFT 11-12-13-14	6X12 750NL	X	859
13	*1 TORM RIGHT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	X	NC
14	*2 TORM RIGHT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	LINE	NC
15	*3 TORM RIGHT 1-4-6-8	6X12 750NL	X	NC

Channel Hookup chart for A Chorus Line (1975)

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