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Press Release

6.6.86.

New York's leading theatre ensemble to visit

U.K. for the first time

The Wooster Group, recognised as one of America's foremost theatrical ensembles for over fifteen years, comes to Britain for the first time this summer in their production of **The Road to Immortality (Part II)**.

Coming to the Edinburgh International Festival's World Theatre Season on August 12th for seven performances only, they will then open in London at **Riverside Studios** on **August 21st** till **September 6th** before visiting Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff from 9th to 14th September.

Initially a splinter of 'The Performance Group', the company's works have been increasingly recognised as ground breaking and their influence has been continually growing.

"What audiences are really looking at is the future of an art form" Theatre Communications

The production is a visionary epic of explosive brilliance that deals with ecstasy and demonism, the search for higher consciousness and the roots of social and political hysteria. It explores two periods of social and moral unrest in the United States: the 1960's beat generation and psychedelia of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Leary and Burroughs, and the 1660's witchcraft hysteria in Salem, Massachusetts. Featuring live rock music, video and dance, it develops the Wooster group's singular modern style to new and giddy heights creating an astonishingly thoughtful and very moving theatrical experience.

It is directed by **Elizabeth LeCompte** (associate director of American National Theatre), designed by **Jim Clayburgh**, and the 14 strong cast includes **William Dafoe** (seen in the films 'The Loveless', 'Streets of Fire', 'The Hunger' and recently as the villain in 'Live and Die in LA') and **Michael Kirby** (editor of the prestigious American Drama Review).

Edinburgh International Festival

Church Hill Theatre

Aug. 12 - 18 8.00pm

London

Riverside Studios

Aug. 21 - Sept 6 8.00pm

Cardiff

Chapter Arts Centre

Sept. 9 - 14 8.00pm

Press Enquiries

Annie Reddick/Norman Jones

01-741 2251/2132

What the U.S. Press said over...
Working for London

archive.parmindervir.com

PARMINDERVIR
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WHAT THE US PRESS SAID:

"It is innovative, bold, uncompromising and demands to be seen"

"Unprecedented wit and skill ... a seething mixture of bitter comedy and slapstick tragedy, crammed with indelible images and stunningly original stagecraft"

"Surreal, exhilarating, dangerous"

"An expansive piece of theatre that will boggle your mind. It is fantastic"

"The eye and ear are bombarded with such a fascinating style and with so many images and gags, that an audience can do nothing but sit back and experience"

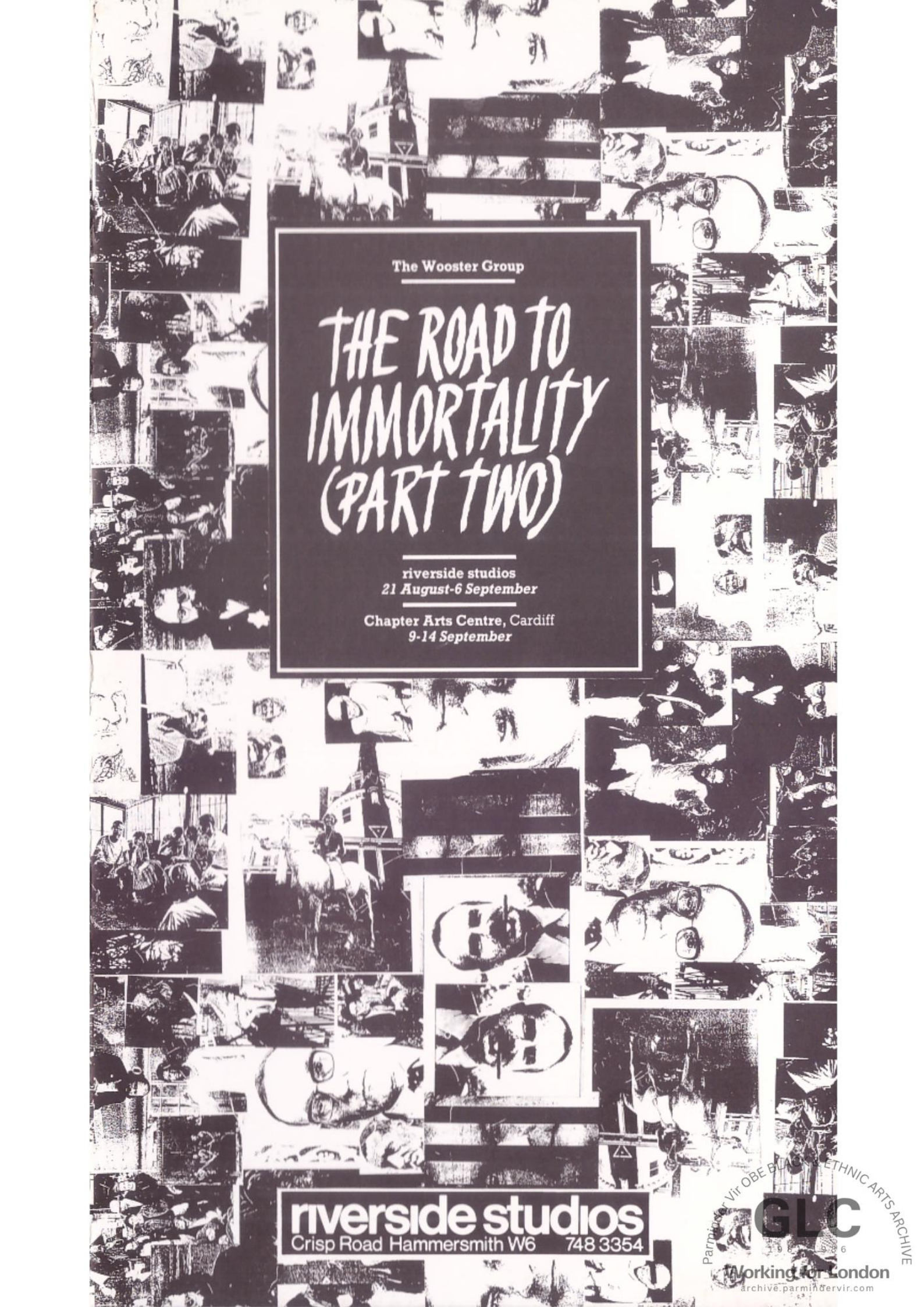
"Entertaining, funny, frightening and theatrically a good trip"

"An amazing collage of experiences, theatrical, informative and finally satisfying"

"A performance high, dazzling in ambition and accomplishment"

"The Wooster Group is remarkable and sometimes astounding"

A Chapter Tour, co-ordinated by Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff in association with Riverside Studios, London. Presented with the assistance of Visiting Arts.



The Wooster Group

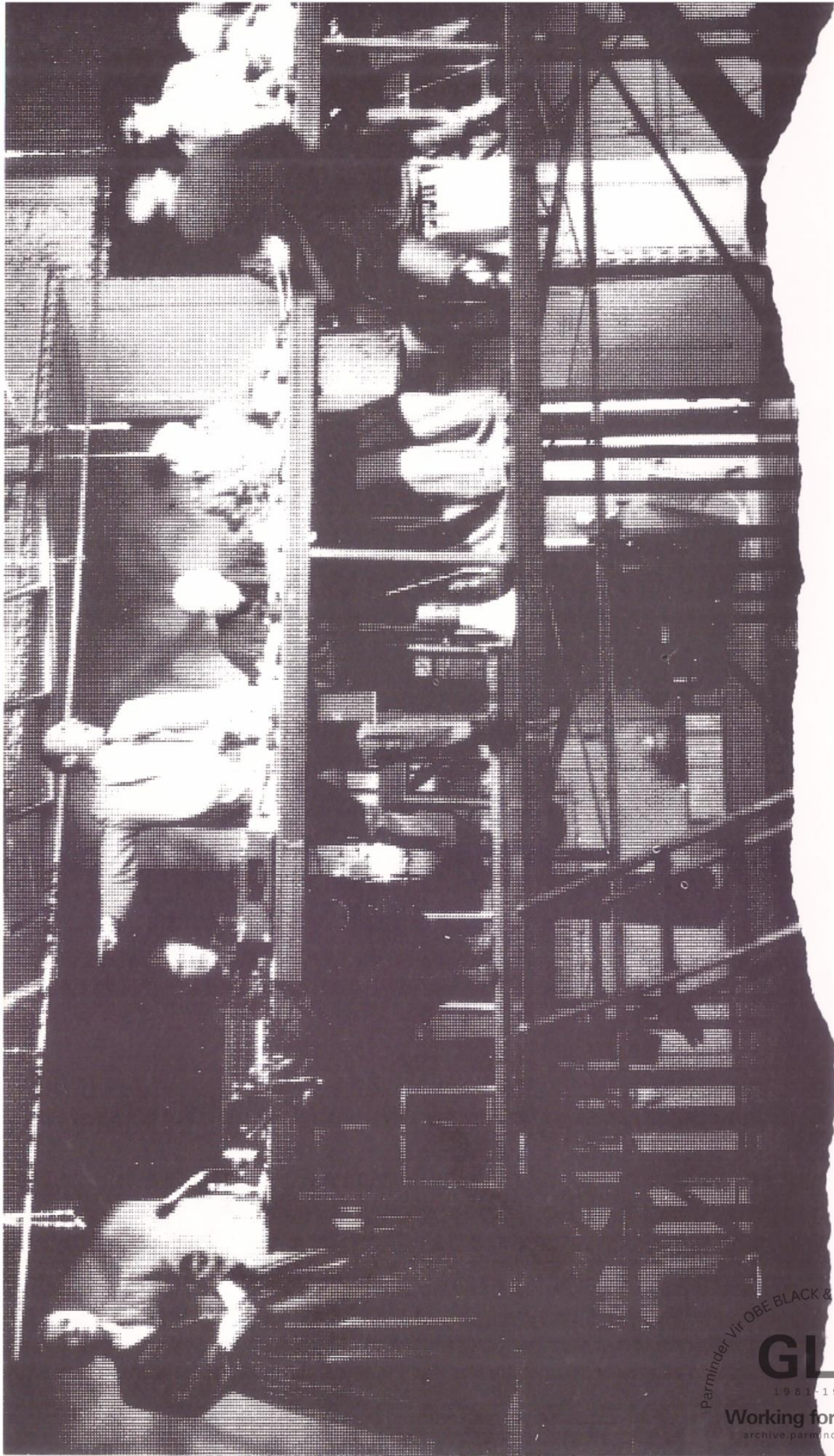
THE ROAD TO IMMORTALITY (PART TWO)

riverside studios
21 August-6 September

Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff
9-14 September

riverside studios
Crisp Road Hammersmith W6 748 3354

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The Wooster Group

The Road To Immortality (Part Two)

Act One **Newton**

Act Two **Salem**

Act Three **Millbrook**

Act Four **Miami**

Composed by **The Wooster Group**

Directed by **Elizabeth LeCompte**

Designed by **Jim Clayburgh**

Videotape by **Ken Kobland**

Technical Director **Jeff Webster**

Assistant to the Designer **Michael Nishball**

"The Hearing" by **Michael Kirby**

Babysitter's Text **Ann Rower**

Assistant to the Director **Jim Johnson**

Band Director **Michael Stumm**

Costumes **Kate Valk & Peyton Smith**

General Manager **Linda Chapman**

Dramaturge **Norman Frisch**

Wooster Group members

**Jim Clayburgh, Willem Dafoe, Spalding Gray, Elizabeth LeCompte,
Peyton Smith, Kate Valk & Ron Vawter.**

Wooster Group Associates

**Scott Breindel, Steve Buscemi, Linda Chapman, Dennis Dermody,
Norman Frisch, Paul Gordon, Matthew Hansell, Mary Ann Hestand,
Jim Johnson, Michael Kirby, Ken Kobland, Anna Köhler,
Coco McPherson, Michael Nishball, Nancy Reilly,
Berenice Reynaud, Elion Sacker, Irma St Paule, Michael Stumm
& Jeff Webster.**

The Road To Immortality (Part Two)

Cast

Steve Buscemi

(reads) Jack Kerouac • Peter Orlovsky • Sid Carver, Clerk of the Court •
Betsy Perry.

Jim Clayburgh

(plays) Maynard Fergusson • Sheriff Jack Espinosa.

Willem Dafoe

(reads) Jackie Leary • Billy Orlovsky • John Webster • Rebecca Norris.

Norman Frisch

(reads) Allen Ginsberg • Earl Sandle.

Jim Johnson

A Townsperson

Michael Kirby

(reads) Alan Watts and William Burroughs • Mr Perry.

Anna Köhler

Annabelle Wilson • Alan Watts' Secretary.

Nancy Reilly

Ann (the babysitter) • Mrs Agnes Goodman, a Townsperson •
A Girl in the Court.

Elion Sacker

Sal Luccioni, a Townsperson.

Peyton Smith

A Townsperson • Elizabeth Webster • A Girl in the Court •
The Moderator of the Debate.

Michael Stumm

(reads) John Bryan and Dr Charles Slack • Chairman Danvers •
A Religious Young Man.

Kate Valk

Kitty Toliver, a Cleaning Lady • Marie Washington, a Schoolgirl.

Ron Vawter

(reads) Aldous Huxley and Arthur Koestler •
Congressman Donald Hall • The Man in Miami • G. Gordon Liddy.

Jeff Webster

(reads) Dr Timothy Leary PhD • John Webster.

The Wooster Group: a brief history

For over fifteen years, the Wooster Group has been recognized as one of America's foremost experimental theatre companies — a small collective of artists working together on collaborative projects over long periods of time.

Composed by the Group and directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, Wooster Group pieces join an ongoing repertoire and are periodically revived in conjunction with new work. All productions are created and performed at the Group's permanent home, the Performing Garage in New York — a flexible, 150-seat theatre which is redesigned for each production.

The Wooster Group texts stand as an alternative theatre language which redefines the traditional devices of story-line, character and theme. Each production reflects a continuing refinement of a nonlinear, abstract aesthetic which at once subverts and pays homage to modern theatrical "realism".

The Group has developed an idiosyncratic work process. "Source" texts are quoted, reworked and juxtaposed with fragments of popular, cultural and social history, as well as with events and situations which emerge from the personal or collective experience of Group members. These various elements are fused into a collage or score — the final text.

The first three Wooster Group pieces — *Sakonnet Point* (1975), *Rumstick Road* (1977), and *Nayatt School* (1978) — are collectively known as the trilogy *Three Places in Rhode Island*, and were followed by *Point Judith* (An Epilog) in 1979. *Route 1&9* (1981), *LSD (..... Just The High Points)* (1984), and the Group's next work, *The Temptation of St Anthony* (1987), form a second trilogy, *The Road To Immortality*.

In addition to its own works, the Wooster Group has premièred Jim Strahs' *North Atlantic* (1983), and *Miss Universal Happiness* (1985), written and directed by Richard Foreman. The Wooster Group has also presented two short dance pieces, *Hula* (1981) and *For The Good Times* (1982).

The Wooster Group appears in the UK as a **CHAPTER** Tour, co-ordinated by **Chapter Arts Centre**, Cardiff, mounted in conjunction with **Riverside Studios** and **The Edinburgh International Festival**, with assistance from **Visiting Arts** and **The American Center in London**.

Riverside Studios is funded by **The Arts Council of Great Britain**, **The London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham**, **London Boroughs Grants Unit** and **Greater London Arts**.



The Road To Immortality (Part Two)

Act One: Newton: in which the men read from great books and the babysitter remembers the Leary household

"My first psychedelic experience occurred in Mexico in 1960. At that time I was a whisky-drinking, cigarette-smoking, symbol-addicted psychologist. I ate seven of the sacred mushrooms of Mexico, and within half an hour I was spun into a psychological laboratory two billion years old, which laughed at my pretensions at predicted knowledge. Since that time I have done almost nothing but attempt to understand and communicate this experience. Shortly thereafter, I returned to Havard University and gave psychedelic drugs to some 300 professors, graduate students, writers and philosophers."

— Dr Timothy Leary, Ph.D.

Random readings from works by the following authors: **Aldous Huxley, Arthur Koestler, Timothy Leary, Alan Watts, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, John Bryan, Dr Charles Slack.**

Music — **Maynard Fergusson.**

The Babysitter's text is composed from letters, interviews and text given to The Wooster Group by **Ann Rower.**

Act Two: Salem: in which the readers are joined at the table by women in costume, and excerpts from a play are performed

"Has old Leary finally fried his marbles?" said Kesey, pondering the issue for a few moments. 'That's the issue on everybody's mind.'

'There was Leary', he wrote, 'the undeniable genius who can and does talk on at least five levels at once. There was Leary, the philosopher, the prophet, the saint, the madman, the alchemist, the trickster, the megalomaniac, the escape artist, the martyr, the comedian — there was Leary smiling at us behind the bars of Folsom Prison It was a show. Leary can slide in and out of identities faster and more easily than a cock can slide in and out of a well lubricated vagina '

Joanna got busy and organized her own road-show version of the Comet Kohoutek Fantasmagora."

— From *Whatever Happened to Timothy Leary?* (..... an unauthorized history) by John Bryan (p 234)

Scenes from *The Hearing*, a play by **Michael Kirby** with The Wooster Group.



Act Three: Milbrook: in which the reading continues and a man in Miami arranges a gig in one of the local hotels

"Millbrook was really fun while Timothy was away that was the best time. Dick was my legal guardian. He signed my report cards and whatever I needed for school"

— Jackie Leary, quoted in *Whatever Happened to Timothy Leary?* (..... an unauthorized history) by John Bryan

The Band — Michael Stumm (rhythm guitar & vocal), Anna Köhler (vocals & percussion), Jeff Webster (lead guitar), Willem Dafoe (bass guitar), Ron Vawter (drums), Steve Buscemi (casio).

Act Four: Miami: in which the men debate and a troupe of dancers impersonate Donna Sierra & the Del Fuegos

Mr Liddy:

Thank you for your poem. I shall answer poetically as best I can.

This will be a brief poem:

May the bleeding piles possess thee.

May thorns adorn your feet.

May crabs as big as (inaudible) turds

Crawl on your balls and eat.

(inaudible)

.... a sympathetic rat

(inaudible)

May a (inaudible) crawl through your asshole

And break your fucking neck.

(Loud applause and laughter)

— Texts taken from the **Liddy-Leary Debates** (circa 1982-83).

Man in audience:

My name is Earl Sandle and, ah, my question is directed at Dr Leary. Personally, he'll be able to answer my question. And, ah, let me inform you that I did serve in Vietnam with Marine Corps and I came back and I got — and I was shot in the face with a shotgun. I have over 130 pellets left on my brain, my eyes are made of plastic, and the people that did this got the false courage to do it because they followed the teachings that you put out in your books, and because of this false courage I stand before you. And you made a statement that you have never seen a victim of drugs, and that I stand here and because I do believe in God, I forgive you for your cheap thrills. Thank you.

— **Liddy-Leary Debates** (circa 1982-83).

The Dancers — Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk & Ron Vawter.



The Road To Immortality (Part Two)

The Wooster Group, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization, supported by public funds from **The National Endowment for the Arts, The New York State Council on the Arts, The Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities** and **The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs**, and gratefully acknowledges the support of **American Broadcasting Companies, Art Matters, The Birsh Foundation, Boardroom Reports, Dr Sabra Calland, Columbia Pictures Industries, Con Edison, Catherine Hough, Leonard Langman, The Mobil Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust, Philip Morris, RKO General, The Wallace Funds**, and many other private contributors.

Staff for The Performing Garage —

Linda Chapman, General Manager • Paul Gordon, Technical Director • Mary Ann Hestand & Coco McPherson, Administrative Assistants.

For CHAPTER —

Jane Alexander, Dave Hutton, Karin Taylor, Neil Wallace.

The Wooster Group's Press Representative at the Edinburgh International Festival — **Annie Reddick.**

Coming soon at Riverside

6 September 9pm & 7 September 8pm

JOOLZ the punk poetess

in **MAD BAD & DANGEROUS TO KNOW**

9-14 September 8pm

GABY AGIS & COMPANY

present a new show developed specially for Riverside

Choreography by **Gaby Agis**

"This is dance on the edge explores far, far below the tutu-surfaces of dance" — The Guardian

18 September-2 October 8pm

THE LEMMINGS ARE COMING

with **John Gordon Sinclair**

A month of Glaswegian black humour

"A remarkable production saturated in Glasgow wit and extremely funny" — The Times

"One of the funniest, saddest and most pertinent pieces I have seen in years" — The Listener

15 October-2 November

DANCE UMBRELLA '86

including **Ashley Page, Michael Popper, Gregory Nash,**

Sue MacLennan, Meredith Monk, Kim Branstrup & Pablo Ventura

5-30 November

SHARED EXPERIENCE present

Bernard Shaw's comedy

TOO TRUE TO BE GOOD

directed by **Mike Alfreds**

with **David Beames, Selina Cadell, Sam Dale, Russell Enoch,**

Michael Maynard, Jonathan Newth, Sheila Reid & Sian Thomas.

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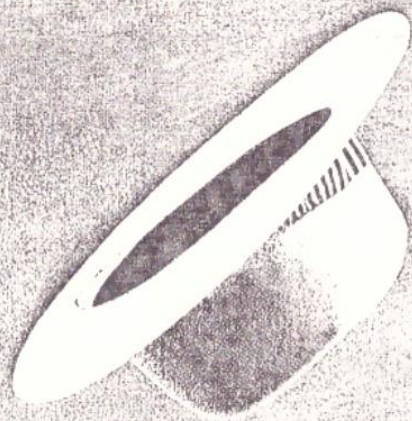


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The Wooster Group

LSD (...Just the High Points ...)

The Arts Theatre

March 1, 3, 4, 6-8, 10,

11, 13-15 at 8 pm

March 2, 9 at 5 pm

March 8, 15 at 2 pm

Director: Elizabeth LeCompte

Design: Jim Clayburgh/Elizabeth LeCompte

Within the black-walled confines of a 99-seat performing space that was formerly a garage in the Soho district of Manhattan, the Wooster Group has created one of the most provocative bodies of experimental theatre work in the world. A seven-member collective,

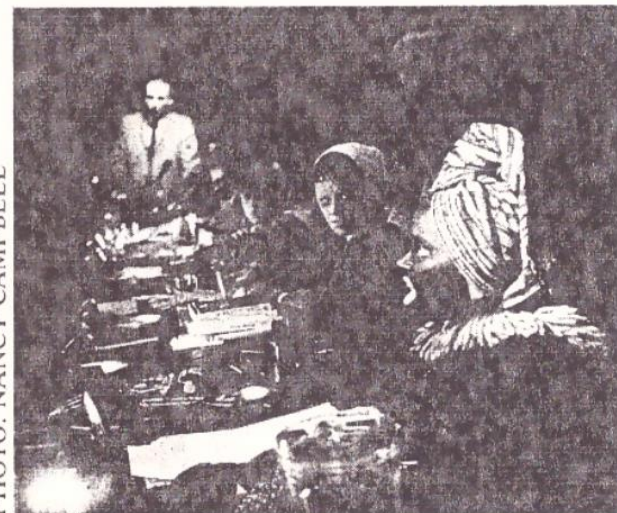


PHOTO: NANCY CAMPBELL

led by director Elizabeth LeCompte, that also includes designer Jim Clayburgh and actors Willem Dafoe, Spalding Gray, Peyton Smith, Kate Valk, and Ron Vawter, the company has performed for more than a decade to enthusiastic acclaim across the country and abroad - indeed, the Wooster Group is one of the very few American companies with an ongoing repertory of original, innovative work to rival such European troupes as Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Tanztheater or Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil. It is typical of the Wooster Group, though, that even in its hometown, the company's work is highly controversial, dividing critics and audiences alike. In the most exciting avant-garde tradition, LeCompte and her virtuosic performers use the discipline and ordering principles of art to portray the anarchy and chaos of the universe. Radical in both form and content, the group's work is characterised by an extremity that continues at times to threaten the very existence of the company.

The core of the Wooster Group formerly belonged to the Performance Group, founded in 1968 by Richard Schechner. Along with the Living Theater and the Open Theater, the Performance Group was one of several experimental theatre collectives in New York which began in the '60s to challenge basic assumptions about theatre. The use of nudity and ritual, environmental stage settings and radical adaptations of classical texts in productions such as *DIONYSUS* in '69 and *COMMUNE* attempted to obliterate traditional distinctions between audience and actors and their characters. Unlike the Stanislavsky method of acting in which actors attempt to transform themselves into the characters they play, members of the Performance Group, under Schechner's direction, brought their own personalities onstage and added them to the characters they played.

In the mid-'70s, when Schechner left the Performance Group to travel and teach, the remaining members consolidated under LeCompte's direction and rechristened the company the Wooster Group, after the street where their theatre is situated. The actors brought with them the Performance Group's idea of seeing themselves as creative artists rather than mere interpreters of roles, and LeCompte, who was originally a painter and photographer, had a strong visual bias. So the experiment they embarked upon together was one of combining avant-garde performance styles and techniques from other media.

The company began not with a play but with improvisations based on objects and images brought in by Spalding Gray that had personal associations for him. 'We began to structure it', Gray wrote in an article at the time, 'like a piece of music (concern with rhythm), like a painting

(concern with light and colour), and like a dance (concern with movement)'. Out of this process came SAKONNET POINT, an almost wordless evocation of childhood that became the first of a trilogy called THREE PLACES IN RHODE ISLAND. In the second, RUMSTICK ROAD, Gray used taped conversations with his relatives and his own remembrances to present an emotional documentary about his mother, who committed suicide in 1967. The autobiographical elements appeared alongside choreographed movement and visual images inspired by themes of madness, religion, and medical treatment that would reappear in the group's later work.

With NAYATT SCHOOL, which was intended to conclude the trilogy but proved to be the model for two subsequent pieces, LeCompte came to the forefront as the organising intelligence of the Wooster Group's creative collaboration. Her technique as a director is to develop strong, emotionally charged images - through words or pictures or movements suggested by the actors - and then to juxtapose them with other highly charged elements. The result is not a linear play at all but a kind of mixed-media collage, like a Bosch or Dali canvas come to life.

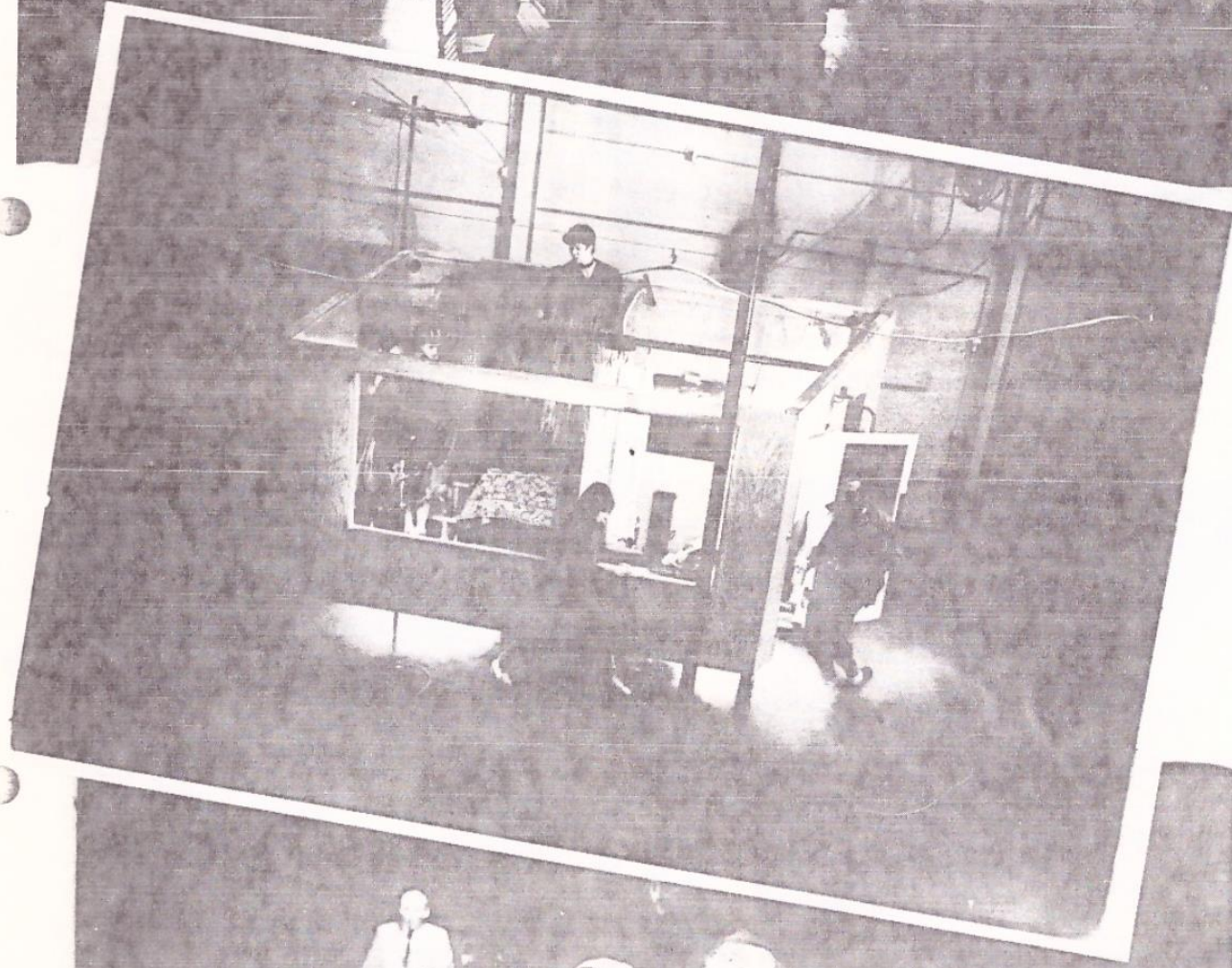
Multiple stories and themes emerge and resonate against one another only to circle back on themselves rather than being neatly resolved.

NAYATT SCHOOL, for instance, examines medicine and religion as healing forces. It uses three comic-horror stories performed as slapstick routines, a scene from T.S. Elliot's THE COCKTAIL PARTY with several roles played by children, and an autobiographical monologue in which Spalding Gray discusses his acting career, his mother's psychiatric treatment, and her Christian Science faith. POINT JUDITH, an 'epilogue' to the Rhode Island trilogy exploring new structures for the family, juxtaposed three examples of community: the all-male crew of an oil rig, as characterised in a short play called RIG written for the company by Jim Strahs; a group of nuns (played by the same male actors), seen on film frolicking by the sea; and the family in Eugene O'Neill's LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, a portion of which is surreally acted out. And ROUTE 1 & 9, which contemplates the distinction between high art and low art and the status of white people and black people in American society, juxtaposes a soap-opera version of Thornton Wilder's OUR TOWN, shown on video monitors, with an old Pigmeat Markham vaudeville routine performed in blackface by members of the company.

As its title may suggest, ROUTE 1 & 9 was both an ending and a beginning, the last of the Rhode Island plays and also the first of a new trilogy called THE ROAD TO IMMORTALITY. This trilogy continues with LSD (...JUST THE HIGH POINTS ...) and will conclude with an adaptation of Gustave Flaubert's THE TEMPTATION OF ST ANTHONY, co-directed by LeCompte and Peter Sellars, artistic director of the American National Theater. LSD is partly inspired by a controversy that erupted over the use of blackface in ROUTE 1 & 9, which raised charges of racism that led to a loss of state funding for the company. Brooding over the artist's responsibility for meaning and the interrelation between art and social issues, LeCompte began studying writings and recordings by psychedelic guru Dr Timothy Leary (and contemporaneous Beat writers such as Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs) and eventually wove into them a memory play about the Salem witchcraft trials in colonial America. The result is a free-floating, at times nightmarish, study of the erosion of moral certainty in the search for 'higher consciousness'.

'This production has to do with visions, with seeing things other people can't see', LeCompte has said of LSD. 'It has to do with stepping outside of normal ways of producing imagery, it has to do with conjuring. I trust in my conjuring. I go by instinct. I'm still in touch with what gives me pleasure and pain, and when I feel pleasure and pain I hold onto them and put them together, and I count on something more coming from that'.

It is a significant measure of the Wooster Group's success that the company continues to stir up sometimes heated debates about the relationship between content and form, images of racism in American culture, and the social responsibility of art. For the nature of experimental theatre - from Alfred Jarry's UBU ROI to Samuel Beckett's WAITING FOR GODOT to the theories of Antonin Artaud - has always been to jar expectations, to question the status quo, and to provoke audiences to see the world through new eyes.



Wooden Grows

THE WOOSTER GROUP: A BRIEF HISTORY

For over fifteen years, The Wooster Group has been recognized as one of America's foremost experimental theatre companies - a small collective of artists working together on collaborative projects over long periods of time.

Composed by the Group and directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, Wooster Group pieces join an ongoing repertoire and are periodically revived in conjunction with new work. All productions are created and performed at the Group's permanent home, The Performing Garage - a flexible, 150-seat theatre in New York that can be redesigned for each production.

The Wooster Group texts represent an attempt to create an alternative theatre language which enlarges the frame of the traditional theatre of story-line, character and theme. Each of these works reflects a continuing refinement of a nonlinear, abstract theatrical aesthetic, and of a unique work process. This process begins with the assembly of a "working pool" of "source texts". These texts are explored, reworked, echoed, quoted, blended and juxtaposed with fragments of popular, cultural and social history, and with events, ideas and situations which emerge from the personal and collective experience of Group members. These various elements are fused into the final score of an original collage work.



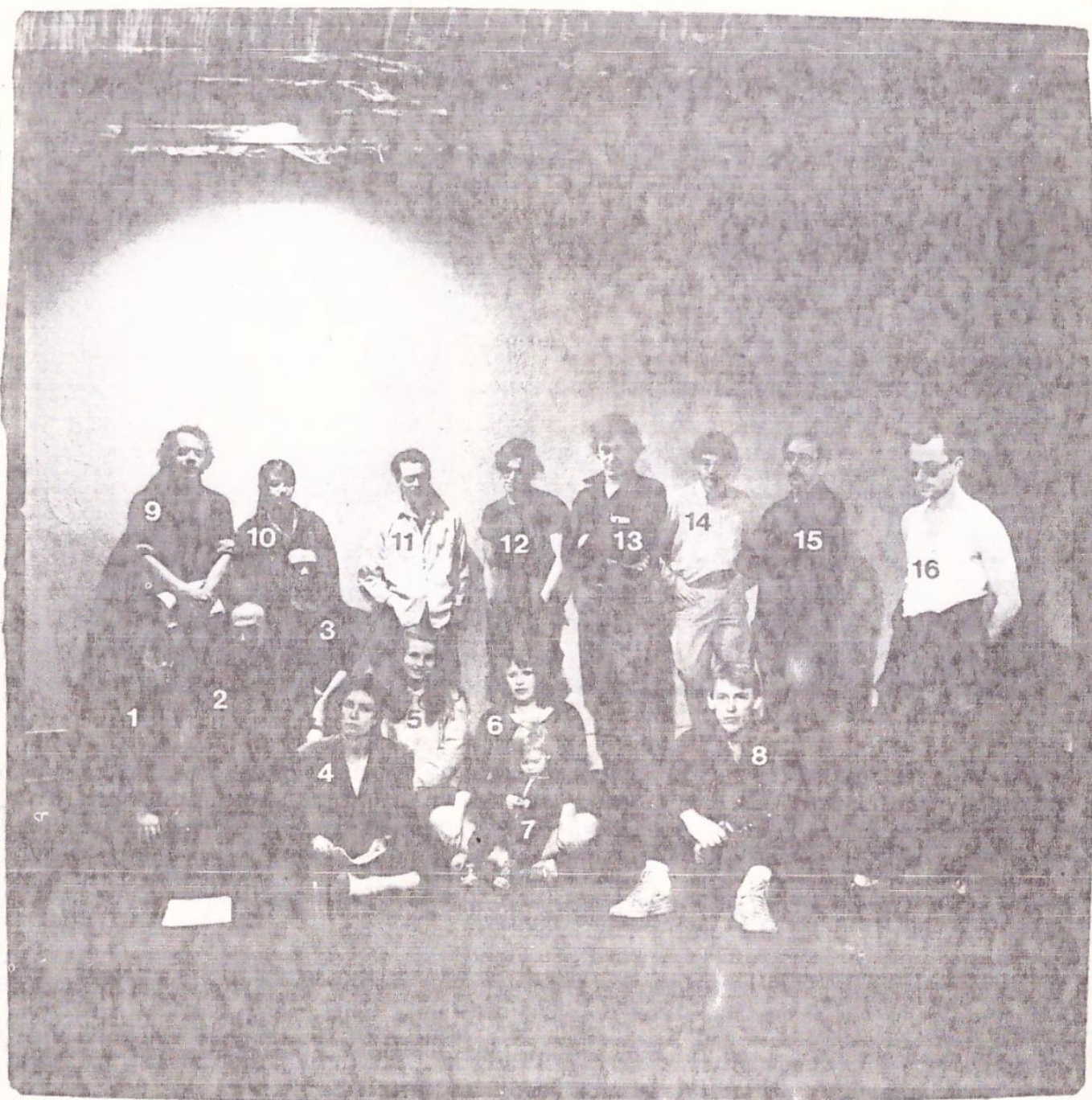


Initially a "splinter" of The Performance Group, the original company members began working with Spalding Gray and Elizabeth LeCompte in 1975 on a body of theatre pieces which radically diverged from the work of The Performance Group.

The first three of these collaborations -- SAKONNET POINT (1975), RUMSTICK ROAD (1977), and NAYATT SCHOOL (1978) -- are collectively known as the trilogy THREE PLACES IN RHODE ISLAND, and were followed by POINT JUDITH (An Epilog) in 1979. The Wooster Group has presented two short dance pieces, HULA (1981) and FOR THE GOOD TIMES (1982). ROUTE 1&9 (1982), L.S.D. (...JUST THE HIGH POINTS) (1984), and the Group's most recent work, THE TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTONY (1986), form a second trilogy, THE ROAD TO IMMORTALITY.

In addition to its own works, The Wooster Group has performed NORTH ATLANTIC (1983), a play with music, written by Jim Strahs, and MISS UNIVERSAL HAPPINESS (1985), written and directed by Richard Foreman.

In recent years, The Wooster Group's works have been increasingly recognized as ground-breaking and their influence has been continually growing. Both the ensemble pieces and the solo performance monologs of Group member Spalding Gray have been performed throughout America and abroad. In 1986, The Wooster Group will play at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., at The Adelaide Festival in Australia, and on tour in Britain and Europe. "Not only are The Wooster Group's audiences able to experience some of the old vitality of the experimental community when it was in full swing and making its mark on the world, they are also able to glimpse some new possibilities and directions for the theatre. Because this kind of theatre invariably feeds the rest, keeps it changing, responsive and alive, what these audiences are really looking at is the future of an art form." (James Leverett, TheatreCommunications)

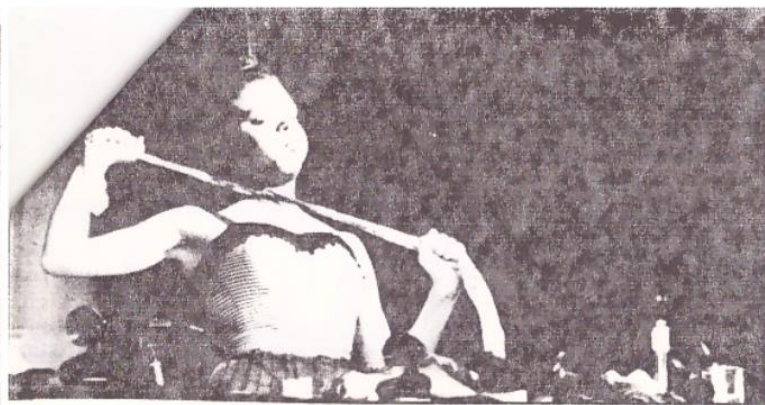
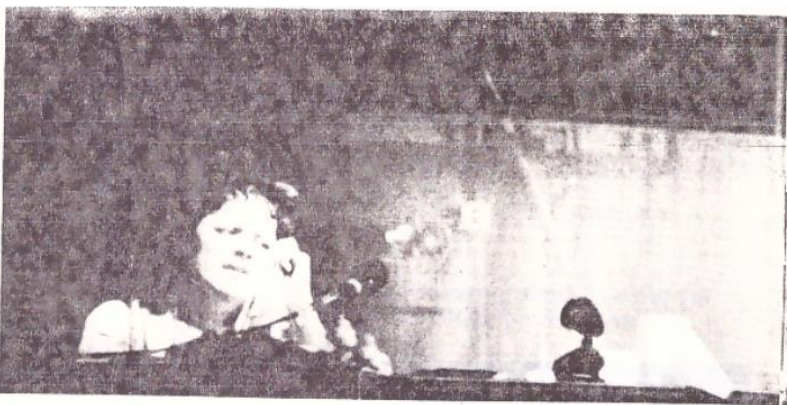


THE WOOSTER GROUP: Jim Clayburgh (13), Willem Dafoe (12), Spalding Gray (9), Elizabeth LeCompte (4), Peyton Smith (6), Kate Valk (3), Ron Vawter (2).

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: Steve Buscemi (11), Norman Frisch (14), Paula Gordon, Matthew Hansell (10), Michael Kirby, Ken Kobland, Anna Kohler (5), Michael Nishball, Nancy Reilly (1), Elion Sacker, Michael Stumm (16), Jeff Webster (8), Jack (7). Visiting Director: Richard Foreman (15). STAFF: Linda Chapman (general manager), Dennis Dermody (box office), Mary Hestand (administrative assistant), Coco McPherson (administrative assistant), Berenice Reynaud (director of development).

The Wooster Group is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, and gratefully acknowledges the support of The Birch Foundation, Boardroom Reports, Dr. Sebra Calland, Campari USA, Columbia Pictures Industries, ConEdison, the Mobil Foundation, Philip Morris, Inc.

Photo Credits - Cover: top, RUMSTICK ROAD (Ken Kobland); middle, POINT JUDITH (Nancy Campbell); bottom, L.S.D. (Nancy Campbell). Page 2: ROUTE 169 (Nancy Campbell). Page 3: HULA! (Nancy Campbell). Back cover: The Wooster Group Members and Associates, 1985 (Gary Green).



THE WOOSTER GROUP VS. MAYER: JUST THE HIGH POINTS

CEASE AND DESIST!

NEWS



By CATHERINE BUSH

The Wooster Group's *L.S.D.* (... Just the High Points ...) was/is a dense, dizzying theatre piece about hallucination, hysteria, authority and the subversion of it. Perhaps it was only fitting that the response it engendered included some of the same.

In its final form, the four-part *L.S.D.* juxtaposed material drawn from the life and writings of Timothy Leary, guru of the psychedelic '60s, and his gang, all tripping woozily toward counter-cultural revolution, and from Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* about the Salem witch trials but written in the '50s at the time of the McCarthy Communist-hunting hearings — another episode of hysteria, hallucination and conflict between individual freedom and institutional authority. It was with *The Crucible* that the Wooster Group ran into its own conflicts with authority, namely the author himself.

Unable to obtain New York City performing rights through the play's publisher, Elizabeth LeCompte, artistic director of the Group, approached Miller for special permission. What ensued was a two-year history of refusals, attempted negotiations on the Group's part, cease and desist orders (American legalese for 'injunctions') on Miller's, and repeated closings. *L.S.D.* (in its most recent incarnation) closed for good in January of this year. As far as LeCompte, the Group and its lawyer are concerned, however, the case isn't entirely laid to rest. They'd still like to resurrect the piece in some form and so are keeping their bases covered. After agreeing to talk with me, LeCompte asked when we met that the interview be off the books. We finally decided that LeCompte and the Group's lawyer would have a chance to read this piece and clear all comments she is quoted as making before they appeared in print.

Strictly speaking, Miller's play is Miller's property. The issue of ownership has two faces, though; there's not only the legal issue of copyright but also questions of aesthetic rights. At what point does interpretation become violation? The root of the controversy between Miller and the Wooster Group really lies in their antithetical approaches to theatre. A multidisciplinary New York-based collective, the Group appropriates all varieties of text into its productions, fragmenting and redefining them. Miller, author of such sombre, naturalistic American '50s masterpieces as *Death of a Salesman*, believes the playwright to be the often-abused crux of the art.

Initially, the Group was performing what amounted to a separate 45-minute, fiendishly compressed version of *The Crucible*, set interrogation-style at a long, raised conference table equipped with mikes and buzzers, some performers in Puritan, some in contemporary dress. Miller in fact saw this version in October 1983 before advising his agent to refuse approval. Subsequent letters sent by LeCompte to Miller, requesting that he reconsider, emphasizing her respect for the play, the seriousness of the Group's theatrical intentions, and charting the development of *The Crucible* material within the complete piece, were met with silence.

'I felt he wanted to ignore the situation,' says LeCompte. 'He didn't want to come down and say, "I don't want you to do this." He didn't want to give approval because it would set a precedent of some sort.' Yet she and the Group

hoped that the sheer lack of response or intervention would amount to a form of 'tacit approval.'

The controversy re-emerged a year later in the fall of 1984, when *L.S.D.* finally opened to the New York press. The 45-minute version of *The Crucible* had now been reduced to a 20-minute segment, the second of four parts, framed by Leary material. Although *L.S.D.* had played to the Boston press in the spring, it was only after a pan in *The New York Times*, describing *The Crucible* section as a parody, that the Group received, not a warning call but, bang, a cease and desist order from Miller's lawyers. They performed through that upcoming weekend, turning Miller's lines into fast-forward 'gibberish,' keeping the same tempo, cues and physical gestures.

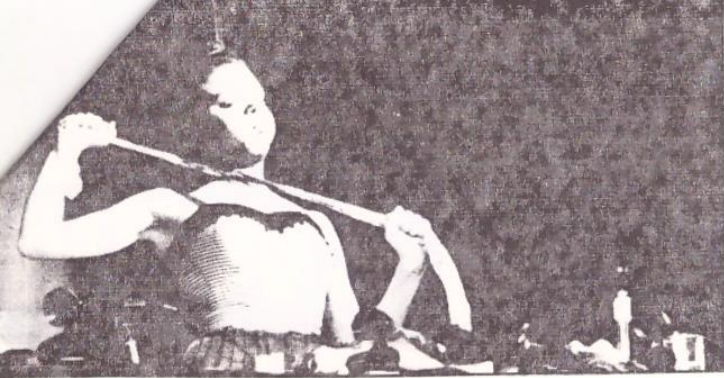
After the closing, Miller, perhaps guiltily, called in person to apologize for the way the situation had been handled. With his agreement, LeCompte then sent him a copy of the portions of his script that she wanted to use, which now amounted to no more than two pages, or four minutes, of text. Once again no response. The Miller passages were primarily needed not for 'Salem,' as *The Crucible* section had been called, but for the part which followed, 'Millbrook,' a drugged-out party sequence structurally dependent on visual allusions to and key lines from Miller's play. Excising those was actually far more problematic than removing Miller from Part 2, although there LeCompte wanted her original blocking intact.

For Part 2, LeCompte had

THE WOOSTER GROUP VS. M

CEASE
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PARMIND ENVIR
ARTS ARCHIVE



Fast-forward gibberish — not yet good enough for Miller and his lawyers

ER: JUST THE HIGH POINTS

AND

!

Group-associate Michael Kirby write a parallel script to the Group's rendering of the Miller text, changing all names but fitting exactly into the metre of the original. 'I wanted words to be heard,' LeCompte said, 'to overlay the Miller words, to obscure them. I didn't care what words, or whether there was any narrative line. In fact, I'd always imagined, right from the beginning, that we might end up with something like this.' A copyright lawyer seemed confident this current version would pass in court as fair usage.

When the new and improved *L.S.D.* reopened in January 1985, it was enhanced not only by the Kirby script but by 60 to 70 copies of *The Crucible* strategically placed on the backs of the audiences' chairs — 'like hymnbooks' — with the Group's originally performed sections marked, although without any instructions to audience members as to what they should do with them.

Perhaps ingenuously, LeCompte believed that since the Miller lines had been phased off stage, simply having copies of the play in the room would be legally OK. On the other hand the visible scripts had an air of asking for trouble. But maybe no amount of 'good-books' behaviour would have stopped Miller's lawyers, who slapped the Group with another cease and desist order. In essence, it was blackmail. The group was as good as told that if it didn't close down the whole piece it would be sued for the 45 minutes of *The Crucible* performed the year before. Miller and his lawyers seemed ready to go to any lengths just to shut the group

up altogether. The Group felt that they did not have the resources to take the case to court. 'That's not what I want to spend my life doing,' adds LeCompte. The show closed.

Miller's objections seemed to stem increasingly from what he described to *The Village Voice* as the Group's 'mangling' of his play. He never saw the completed *L.S.D.*, however, just gained his information from reviews and secondhand reports. And LeCompte herself attests to the difficulty of describing what the Group does on stage without making it sound as though they're making light of *The Crucible*.

A solution which LeCompte would like to have seen would have been the inclusion of programme notes stating both director's and playwright's positions; a solution reached in a similar controversy over interpretive rights that arose about the same time between experimental director Joanne Akalaitis and Samuel Beckett's American representatives over a production of *Endgame* which Akalaitis set (contrary to Beckett's visually precise stage directions) in a subway station.

'The playwright should be allowed to say, "This isn't how I conceived my play visually",' LeCompte says. 'I feel strongly that people should understand this is an adaptation, in case someone didn't know the original wasn't 20 minutes long. We stated this in our programme. We also quoted Mr Miller from his essay on adaptations, where he argues that an adaptation cannot be used ade-

quately to represent or substitute for the original.'

LeCompte is quick to acknowledge Miller's legal rights and that he was within them to stop the production. Yet who knows how many productions of *The Crucible* are going on at this time which violate the integrity of Miller's text? LeCompte and the Group were (un)lucky enough to be singled out as symbolic targets, used by Miller and his lawyers to demonstrate exactly what power was at their disposal. Wham! The great hand of authority comes down.

What's ironic, of course, is that Miller has a history as a liberal and a radical, of which *The Crucible* is a leading statement, and sees himself as the defender of the little guy, like the beleaguered playwright. Now here's this radical man, defending not only his freedom but his rights to private property and basically attempting to suppress a vision that doesn't accord with his into the bargain. 'The issue here is very simple,' Miller has said. 'I don't want my play produced except in total agreement with the way I wrote it.'

The playwright's claims to his property become complicated, in this case, by *The Crucible's* status as a contemporary classic, which LeCompte would like to claim that it is. The play's entry into public consciousness, the almost mythic status it gains from the wealth of association most Americans bring to it, accounts in part for LeCompte's interest in the text. In addition, *The Crucible* is based on actual transcripts of historical events which could be deemed public property. The ironies mount: LeCompte believes Miller's lawyers may have mistaken passages she pulled from the original transcripts for the Miller lines they were intended to replace. And the names which the Kirby rewrote changed weren't Miller's names but actual historical ones.

Theater



Devil's advocates

Everybody must get stoned

There'll be a high time in the old town tonight

by Carolyn Clay

L.S.D. ... JUST THE HIGH POINTS ... by the Wooster Group. Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte. Designed by Jim Clayburgh. Costumes by Kate Valk and Peyton Smith. Film and video by Ken Kobland. Musical direction by Michael Jaxon. With Jim Clayburgh, Jack Daloe, Norman Frisch, Matthew Hansell, Michael Jaxon, Michael Kirby, Anna Köhler, Nancy Reilly, Peyton Smith, Kate Valk, Ron Vawter, and Jeff Webster. Presented by the Wooster Group at the Boston Shakespeare Company through May 13.

The brief reign of King Leary, during the 1680s, seems but a visionary drizzle compared to the deluge of imagined delirium that swept Salem in the 1690s. Those Puritans, though partial to an austere diet that did not include Leary's relished "sacred mushrooms" of

Mexico" could hallucinate up a storm. As Arthur Miller suggested in his 1953 *The Crucible*, the country was not to see such a spell of hysterical, accusatory weather again until the McCarthy witch hunts — for which Satan, still wearing hellfire red, traded in his pitchfork for a hammer and sickle. Leary, at least, relied on drugs to get paranoid: the Devil didn't make him do it. But the New York-based experimental theater troupe the Wooster Group has nonetheless mapped "a history of America from 1950 to 1984" that places Leary's haunts, Newton and Millbrook, hauntingly close to the Salem of *The Crucible*. As the Puritans might say, there goes the neighborhood.

The Wooster Group, which emerged in the '70s from Richard Schechner's Performance Group, combines in its sometimes controversial dramaturgy elements of autobiography and parody with so-

called "deconstructions" of classical texts. Here the company, under the joint influence (so to speak) of chemicals and *The Crucible*, conjures its *L.S.D. ... Just the High Points ...*. Miller's peaks of hysteria augmented by peeks into the Leary living room of yore, where apparently pills of every hue adorned a tiered candy dish and were popped like Cents by "those increasingly mythical figures of the '50s." Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and assorted hangers on. Currently *L.S.D.*, now being dispensed by the Boston Shakespeare Company, is an uneasy blend of two parts Leary to one part Miller — though *The Crucible*, in a deliberately garbled, acid-trip adaptation, is definitely its high point. And a fourth part, featuring that John Proctor of our time, G. Gordon Liddy, is in the works.

One reason *L.S.D.* is having its premiere in Boston rather than in New York, where the Wooster Group enjoys a considerable reputation (and where it has showcased the *Crucible* section of the work) may be trouble with playwright Miller, who is reportedly nettled by the company's Art-for-Tim's-sake approach to his second-greatest work. Clearly he doesn't know what's good for him — beginning with deconstruction. Director Elizabeth LeCompte (with monologist/actor Spalding Gray the company's guiding force) does not mean to make fun of Miller, except perhaps peripherally. She was attracted to *The Crucible*, she says, because of its absolute moral certainty — a sureness about what's right and wrong that defies the self-questioning spirit of the past few decades (LeCompte was, she makes no bones, quite shaken by charges of racism brought against her production of *Route 1 & 9*, which juxtaposed a soap-opera video of *Our Town* against an old Pigeon Markham vaudeville routine performed by whites in blackface.) And the moral strength of Miller's play is reinforced by its being wedged between artfully offhand, Leary-eyed symposiums that share its induced visions but that, in the end, crumble into regret for a coup de consciousness that never took place. An altered state is not, after all, a changed world; and the drug culture's "great experiment" expanded many minds beyond their limits. "I don't know if I'd say I saw God, you know," drones the Learys' erstwhile babysitter in *L.S.D.* "But it was more than a party; it was a revolution." Later she adds, tangling the threads of *The Crucible*, "Sure Leary was a liar, a classic paranoid. But like most paranoids he turned out to be right."

Arthur Miller, too, has his rightness (not to mention his leftness) — whatever you think of his carefully plotted, plodding plays. Here *The Crucible*, which makes up the "Salem" section of the piece, is reduced to less than an hour of rattling incantation performed as if at a modern-day judicial hearing, with the pristinely bonneted, Puritanical dramatis personae seated behind microphones at a long, narrow metal table that runs the width of an elevated scaffolding stage. The proceedings seem suspended in time, the actors trapped in their juices — there is almost nowhere to go but under the table. The entire exercise is tantamount to acting in the stocks; yet the Wooster Group does it with intense precision, giving the lie to the studied lackadaisicality of the Leary sections (entitled "Newton" and "Millbrook"). And LeCompte's deconstruction, punctuated by woozy electronic music, harsh buzzers, and choral frenzy, fractures *The Crucible* as surely as a gem cutter might a

Continued on page 12

L.S.D.

Continued from page 6

diamond. Chipping the play's lurid emotions away from its plot, preserving its mounting madness, and framing the witch trials in the paper-shuffling-and-brimstone cadences of the Congressional inquisition as we've come to know it, the Wooster Group liberates Miller from his hokum. You can almost see him dancing naked in the woods with those suggestible Salem hussies Abigail Williams and Mercy Lewis, scraps of the well-made play scattered about him in the underbrush.

The Devil, after all, is one hell of a droll choreographer — as is proved at the end of the "Salem" section, when Abigail, Mary Warren, and the virtuous Elizabeth Proctor kick up their heels, seemingly in midair, to a ragtime piano. This and other whimsical touches give LeCompte's *Crucible* a wacky air through which its potent hysteria can wait. Some of the melodrama is played mechanically (the most effective job is done by Kate Valk, as Mary Warren in blackface), for laughs. But the thunderous attack

— it's hurled like a weapon the length of the long table — by Proctor (Jack Dafoe) on Abigail is terrifying, though its furor is undercut by the other characters, who register the shocking exchange by jerking their heads back and forth as if observing a taut tennis match. And the delicate exchange between the Proctors is given its romantic due. In this anything-can-happen context, where the rigid Deputy Governor Danforth is played by a teenager and the winds of hell emanate from an electric fan, even Elizabeth's climactic, pidgin-arcane "He have his goodness now" rings true. Nothing, including Miller's token evocation of period-speak, is too far out for L.S.D.

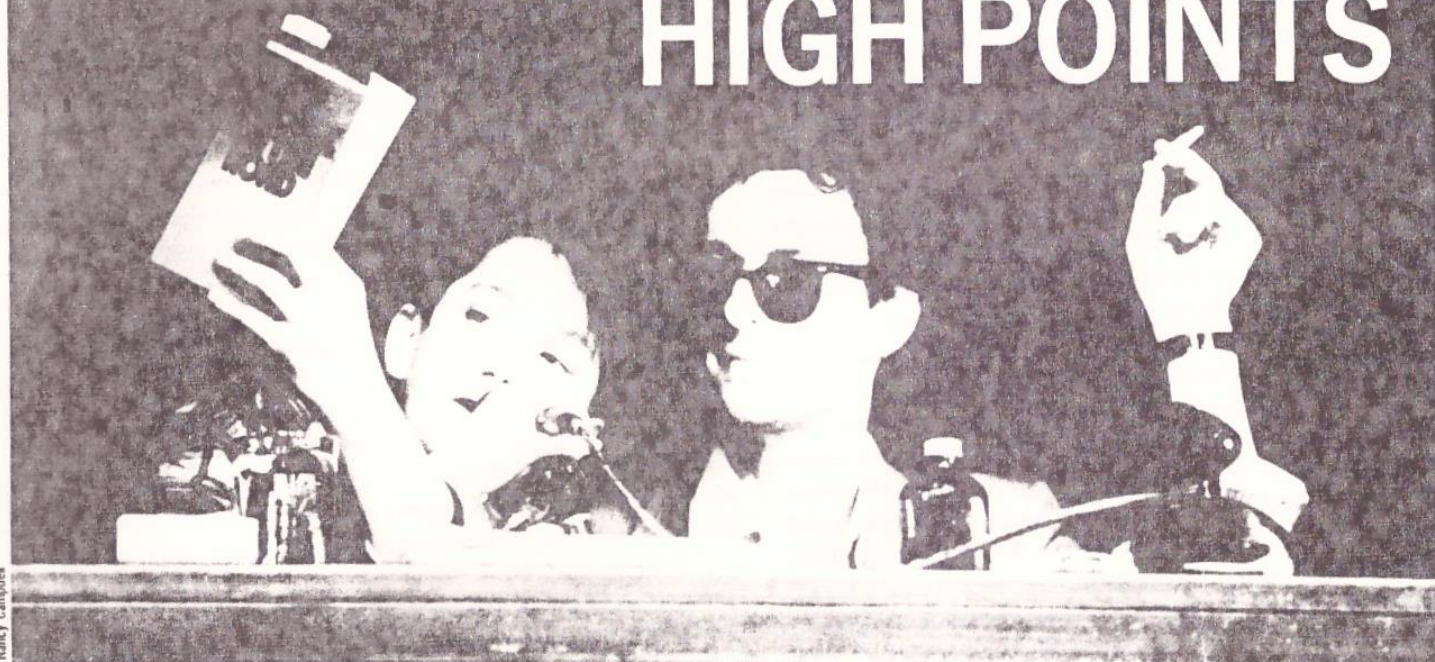
The chemical-choked slices of Leary life between which *The Crucible* is sandwiched aren't without grains of edification and amusement either. There are some wry juxtapositions, as when a tripping woman at Millbrook (the upstate New York estate where Leary and others convened in the late '60s) hallucinates that the birds on the bathroom wallpaper are swooping down to "steal my shit" — much as the overwrought girls in act three of *The Crucible* are seized by the vision of a giant devil bird in the rafters of the court (its excremental intentions unknown). And there is an anecdote about Arthur Koestler's freaking out at the discovery of Ginsberg in bed with Peter Orlovsky that echoes the sexual uprightness implicit in the Puritan hysteria. This episode, like the rest of the piece tied to the courtroom motif, is dramatized as a mock-technical reenactment, with Ron Vawter's deadpan Koestler running blankly in place to an excited narration. The effect is not only jarringly funny; it suggests the underwater, out-of-body character of drug experience.

The "Newton" section (named for Leary's place of residence while at Harvard) consists in the main of "random readings" from Leary, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac, Koestler, Alan Watts, and that druggie staple Aldous Huxley. As the aforementioned babysitter, Ann Rawler (whom the Wooster Group apparently interviewed), Nancy Reilly, earphoned as if for a recording session and sporting pointy glasses and the nasal inflections of a Valley Matron, acts as a sort of stream-of-consciousness MC as ideas, great and banal, are batted around. For instance, to the mumbled adage that one swallow does not a summer make, a pint-sized Kerouac (the 15-year-old Matthew Hansell, rendering the sine qua non of the beat generation as if he were a compatriot of Spin and Marty) pipes, "I don't know about that, but I blow a sweet tone wherever I go." Which prompts Ginsberg to a riff comparing the blues to oral sex. It's like a stoned soul picnic on drugland's Mount Rushmore, with only the most revered and chiseled heads invited.

But "Millbrook," coming as it does after "Newton" and

"Salem," makes you feel you've been there before. The two previous neighborhoods have merged, which is tantalizing, but the terrain is still too familiar. The drug-hazed memoirs meander in and out of *The Crucible*, and there is live rock music (songs from the Kinks and Velvet Underground), for which parts of the acting ensemble metamorphose into a dispersed band. Throughout the section there runs an inexplicable video by Ken Kobland in which Wooster actor Vawter, or parts of him, is seen prowling Miami Beach and Holiday Innish environs. This may make sense when the bridge is built between Millbrook and "Miami" (the planned fourth part). But right now the goings on at Millbrook are so laid back — the actors smoking and joking, half in costume, half out of it — that they threaten to topple over. Without the aid of the deconstruction crew. You find yourself wishing for more Arthur Miller spoken in acid tongues. Coming next from the Wooster Group: *Death of a Pusher*? □

LSD: JUST THE HIGH POINTS



Nancy Campbell

However far Reagan and Jerry Falwell have got in cleaning up America, it will still take a long time to expunge the libertarian mythologies of the sixties. Where else in the world is not only the name but also the personalities and arcanology surrounding an illegally manufactured hallucinogenic drug still, twenty years on, almost a household topic. LSD. Acid. Good Trips. Bad Trips. Timothy Leary. Millbrook. The FBI. Then finally, assimilation into the darker American mythology of Watergate.

After seeing the Wooster Group perform their new work-in-progress *LSD (...Just the High Points...)* Parts 1, 2 and 3 at the Performing Garage in Soho, I was sent a sheaf of newspaper reports from Boston, Massachusetts, where they went on to perform the show in the prestigious, but it would seem, adventurous, Boston Shakespeare Company. The headlines given to the piece in the popular press ranged from the hostile *LSD: BAD TRIP BACK TO THE SIXTIES* (*Boston Herald*) through the teasing *LSD AS MINDBENDING AS ITS TITLE* (*Boston Globe*) to the enthusiastic *LSD IS WORTH THE TRIP* (*Daily Evening Item*). Clearly capturing the imaginations of audiences and critics alike, and littered with references which seem nothing less than household, the initial reception of *LSD* seems to contradict the assertion made by director Elizabeth LeCompte in a recent *Village Voice* interview, that 'American society is terrified of people with strong visions about anything from God to politics to art'. (I'd say the 'strong visions' of America are just one thing that makes it highly dangerous as a world power, but that's another story).

Bearing in mind the nature of *LSD's* subject matter, ranging from Beatnik references to the paranoid self-mythology of (as Arthur Freidman of the *Boston Herald* puts it) '60s pill-and-thrill-a-minute guru Timothy Leary and his crazed band of druggies', one might have expected a rambling epic akin to the British Ken Campbell's *Illuminatus*. But where that was really just an expanded pantomime/knockabout survival test with special effects, this is seriously researched and dangerous performance by the Wooster Group, one of the last truly experimental theatre companies in New York to survive with their ideals intact.

Seriously researched indeed. Scanning the *Globe* further, one comes across an interesting revelation about the group's working method. Says Spalding Gray, one of the group's founders, and now known as a performance artist/raconteur in his own right, 'We were working on *The Crucible* at the time, extracting its major climaxes, planning to use them in some way which was then not clear to us...' Apparently, along came someone with a record of Leary unfolding his paranoid visions and 'We all took LSD and tried scenes from *The Crucible* and the play just died.' Indeed. Presumably this was in the hallucinogen's latest incarnation as a New York disco-drug, rather than the real thing from the Sandoz labs. The resulting central part is however exactly as Gray describes...*The Crucible* on acid.

The staple diet for many a high school drama dept (lots of parts for girls, high moral overtones about McCarthyism) has been exploded, viciously twisted about, riotously speeded up, hysteria induced, and generally deconstructed by Elizabeth LeCompte; but is still recognisable enough to shine through as a monstrous parody of the original, often lugubriously-played, Arthur Miller play. As the *Voice* reported in December, after the original previews, Miller, who has right of veto 'came to one performance and was apparently impressed, if a little shocked. He thought they were asking for permission to quote some sections of the play, but since they're doing the whole play he felt he couldn't really give his approval'. From the laughter I heard at the Performing Garage at the Lucy-show style declamations of 'I saw Abigail dancing naked in the woods' and 'I drunk the devil's brew' while Governor Danforth et al. crawled around the floor barking through loudhailers, I imagine him wishing he were in some draughty gymnasium hearing the high-school rendition of his sombre classic.

The deconstruction of *The Crucible* is however, merely the cathartic centrepiece to a complex melange of recollections, extracts and cameos taken from drug-related history and literature. It is all set on a long conference table, and it in fact starts off exactly like one of those conferences which still take place around the world, bringing together a procession of retired Beat poets, academics, lecture-circuit novelists and assorted subcultural demimonde characters and

which always has to include William Burroughs. Starting off low-profile, low key, the characters introduce themselves. Allen Ginsberg, Arthur Koestler, Peter Orlovsky, Alan Watts, Leary himself; they're all there. And when Alan Watts puts on his cowboy hat, he becomes William Burroughs. OK?

The Leary babysitter (apparently herself a reliable source of anecdote and information of the psychedelic goings on, and somewhat 'leery about Leary' until she herself was turned on in the wake of 'some three hundred professors, graduate student, writers and philosophers at Harvard University'), Ann Rower, is the narrator. The way the participants casually address the audience at this point gives the impression that what we are seeing really is a 'work in progress', or even only a discussion about doing it. The table is raised so that you can see the performers' legs and shoes (another informalising effect). Orlovsky is played by a young-looking fifteen year-old and dialogue is seemingly fished from a chaotic repository of notes, tapes, sourcebooks etc.

But slowly, the paranoid aspects of this part-sloppy/historical scenario, part-seminar start creeping in. Echoes of Leary's alleged later involvement with the FBI filter through. Koestler drops acid and freaks out at seeing a gay sex act. The spaced-out vision of the world becomes sorely troubled. And the trouble really starts in the second part, Salem.

'In these books the devil stands stripped of all his brute disguises. Here are all your familiar spirits—your incubi and succubi, your witches that go by land, air and sea, your wizards of the night and day. Have no fear now—we shall find him out if he is among us, and I mean to crush him utterly if he has shown his face'. Rev John Hale, *The Crucible*

And so, the Wooster Group stand stripped of all their laid-back, post-modern disguises. Veering to the edge of Foreman's Ontological-hysteric Theatre territory now, the pace is jerkily cranked up to out-of-control chainsaw level by the words of the *Crucible* being muttered, howled, yammered, screamed, declaimed, spat and generally hurled in all directions by the seemingly possessed performers. As LeCompte said to the *Voice*, 'when I read the stage direction "the girls scream", I got the giggles. Omigod, a playwright has given me permission for the girls to scream—everything is all right in the world!' You can see what she means.

The curious touches of John Jesurun's *Chang in a Void Moon* here, during the interrogations (the deadpan staccato repetitions 'you danced?—I did dance—you drank?—I did drink/You must go—Are

we going now?—You must go now') are perhaps not incidental, as at least one LSD performer (as always in New York, it's difficult to tell) is regularly one of the the *Chang Gang*.

The rise and fall from cogent parts of *The Crucible* to waves of infectious hysteria continue, until—after a final frenetic courtroom scene—the 'witches' are really allowed to become witches, probably again to the chagrin of the allegorically-minded Miller, and indulge, skirts aloft, in a fiendish 'flying' dance, by an ingenious trick with the table and a set of the other performers' disjointed legs. LeCompte: 'This production has to do with visions, with seeing things other people can't see. It has to do with stepping outside of normal ways of producing imagery, it has to do with conjuring'. Your paranoid fantasies may be true, the devil can be worshipped in Massachusetts, 'nothing is true, everything is permitted'.

On to Millbrook: 'bad' psychedelic music being played live, the trial continues, but everyone's now stoned out of their heads. Prosecutor Danforth et al. are giggling, no one can take the charges seriously, but still the paranoia persists. A relaxing, and clever departure by the trial from the acid nightmare of the courtroom to the *Huis Clos* of the stoned living room—but this third part is waving loosely in the breeze, dismembered, awaiting its fourth part in which the central figure is Gordon Liddy, or as Gray puts it 'The Modern Hero; in the 1970s the guy who wouldn't speak'.

As a kind of concession to an ending, Alan Watts puts on his cowboy hat, pulls out a pistol, and shoots at a woman who has on her head...a glass of liquid. She drinks it, calmly. The audience get the reference.

This piece of genuine theatrical experimentation reaches areas that just don't get touched in British theatre, once again leaving the performance artists here to take up the slack for what would be strictly regarded as 'theatre' by the New Yorks art establishment's tight categorical leash. It's certainly worth recording and documenting in this magazine though, in a way, the quipping no-nonsense prose of the redoubtable Arthur Friedman (*Boston Herald*) sums up *LSD* and the culture it briefly took by storm somewhat better:

'Is the hysteria that ditches witches the same hysteria that stones the stoned? Or was Leary himself a devil deluding his devotees into believing that his "round the bend" parties were revolutions to change the future? Search me. I'm going home to pop an Anacin'. Put it in the water supply, I say.

ROB LA FRENAIS



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The Boston Globe

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 1984

ARTS & FILMS

'LSD' — as mind-bending as its title

REVIEW | STAGE

"L.S.D., Just the High Points"
— Multi-media piece conceived by the Wooster Group, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, designed by Jim Clayburgh, costumes by Kate Valk and Peyton Smith, presented by the Boston Shakespeare Company, at 52 St. Botolph st., Tuesday-Sunday, through May 13.

By Kevin Kelly
Globe Staff

The high point in "L.S.D., Just the High Points" is a stunning abbreviation of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" performed by The Wooster Group at a long conference table precariously set on a scaffold platform and littered with papers, scripts, books, personal gear, electronic equipment. The hysteria of the Salem witch trials ricochets the length of the table and, although only a few members of the Group are given to dramatic movement, the chaos is truly spellbinding. But further: It's not just that Miller's well-plotted play has been reduced to its Puritan bones; more to the point, the paranoia giving "The Crucible" its power has been let loose like a tornado funneling down on all of us.

As it eventually becomes clear, "L.S.D.," which comes in three parts (a fourth part is still in preparation) is about paranoia as an historical perspective. The frag-



A scene from part three of "L.S.D.," based on "The Crucible."

mented "Crucible" is a centerpiece flanked by two episodes dealing with the woozy days of Timothy Leary and "consciousness raising," the first called "Newton," the second called "Millbrook." These specific places are meant to be as relevant as Salem was to the witch trials. Newton was the site of Leary's house when he was on the Harvard faculty; Millbrook was a retreat in New York for Leary and his followers (Alan Ginsburg, Peter Orlovsky, Jack Kerouac, William

Burroughs). The Leary material is centered in the same kind of hallucination that motivates the spiteful young witches in Miller's play. Whatever the seeming disconnection among the three parts, "L.S.D." sets out to chronicle a desperate public fear of anything outside normalcy. Although the piece has been extravagantly described as a "history of America from 1950 to 1984," "L.S.D." is — at the very least — as surreal, exhilarating, dangerous and mind-bending as its title.

"Newton" begins with Nancy Rellly (as Ann Rower) delivering a reminiscence of Dr. Leary. She starts off in a flat Elaine May voice explaining that she was "leery about Leary" yet, as "the babysitter," she got caught up on the promises in little pink pills. Other speakers at the table who have earlier identified themselves (Matthew Hansell, who's 15 years old, will be Jack Kerouac, Michael Kirby will be Alan Watts, Norman Frisch will be Alan Ginsburg) interact episodes from Leary's days in Newton. They are all "participants in a Great Experiment." This section reaches a funny climax involving one of Leary's opponents, the nov-

elist Arthur Koestler, who is morally rattled when he walks in on a sex scene between Alan Ginsburg and Peter Orlovsky. The Koestler finale leads naturally enough into the moral outrage voiced by Salem's pillars against the adulterous John Proctor in "The Crucible." Hallucinations are the same whether self-induced or created by society.

"Millbrook," the concluding section, is really little more a thin echo of "Newton"; here the partying among Leary's followers is played against leftover lines from "The Crucible," which has just been performed. The promises of a higher spheres of endeavour and accomplishment through drugs have begun to peter out. A woman gets paranoid in the bathroom, imagines the birds in the wallpaper are after her, birds similar to those sited by the would-be witches in Miller's play. There are a couple of bursts of zinging rock music; and then there is a coda-of-sorts spoken by the babysitter: the Leary 60s had a feeling that something "world shaking" was going to happen through drugs which, if they were given to everyone, "would change the world." As an apparent contradiction, Leary's zealotry is tied to the zeal of the self-righteous accusers in "The Crucible." One of the points "L.S.D." makes is that we're all trapped in our attempts to improve ourselves (alter our consciousness).

Under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte another point (ex cathedra) "L.S.D." makes is for experimental theater. The Wooster Group is remarkable and, within that, sometimes astounding. The normal dramatic framework has been shattered just as conclusively as Miller's script. Thus, the acting is almost run-on conversation, or is through most of "Newton" and "Millbrook." Stage movement is limited. In fact most of "L.S.D." has the deliberate aspect of a reading, a run-through. But if you think the Group is just up to sloppy camaraderie, party binging, and nothing else, you'll have your head turned by the dramatic scale that's worked through "The Crucible." The performances here are intense, honest, disciplined. Unsettling as "L.S.D." sometimes is in its looseness, its filmy abstraction, it is more often innovative, bold, uncompromising, and demands to be seen.

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Wooster Group explores mass hysteria, new theatrical territory

By David Sterritt

New York

This is a rousing year for the Wooster Group, a tremendously exciting theater company that deserves much more attention than it usually gets.

After years of teetering on the edge of poverty, the troupe has received a major grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, as part of an NEA effort to establish and strengthen theater ensembles. Beginning with a \$170,000 contribution in the 1985-86 season, this support will solidify a company that has been buffeted by money problems — most notably when the New York State Council on the Arts slashed its aid after a Wooster piece called *Route 1 & 9 (The Last Act)* stirred up political as well as aesthetic controversy.

And now, as if to celebrate its new security, the group has opened its most astonishing theater piece in years, a multimedia show called "L.S.D. (... Just a High Point ...)."

Despite its title, the work doesn't dwell on drugs, but uses them as an intermittent metaphor. Built in four sections, it explores two periods of social and moral unrest in the United States: the "beat generation" and "psychedelic" time of the 50s and '60s, and the witchcraft hysteria in Salem, Mass., during the 1690s.

As always, the group approaches its subject intuitively, brushing over history in search of a deeper, more idiosyncratic view than ordinary facts and fictions can provide. Developed by the performers under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte, the result is a visionary epic of explosive alliance.

Like all Wooster Group shows, "L.S.D." doesn't bother with the usual rules of theater. Don't look for conventional story, dialogue, or characters. And don't expect the actors to act. Instead, focus on the nonstop cascade of images and ideas that bounce off one another within an ingeniously designed setting. And be

ready for the performers to slide in and out of roles, treating the stage as a laboratory-playground where familiar formats take on uproarious new shapes.

I'll try to give some idea of what happens in the show, though there's no way to capture its unearthly resonance and overwhelming momentum. The players sit at (or under) a long table on a high platform. At first this resembles the dais of a hearing room; later it breaks open to become an outlandish parlor; and finally an off-kilter cabaret stage.

In the first section, performers read at random from books of the '50s and '60s by Aldous Huxley and Jack Kerouac, among others. Sometimes they act out their selections. At one side a "baby sitter" drones a silly narration full of phony and irrelevant information. The mood is casual, unpredictable, funny.

The second section is the thunderbolt of the evening — a zany performance of Arthur Miller's play about the Salem witch trials, "The Crucible," in a radically Woosterized form. The troupe throws out most of the plot and characters, distilling the drama into pure energy and emotion. Each actor has a different style: Some give naturalistic portrayals; one does a scathing parody of racial stereotypes; others spew their dialogue so fast that sentences become percussive riffs with irresistible rhythms. The result is a seething mixture of bitter comedy and slapstick tragedy, crammed with indelible images and stunningly original stagecraft.

Part 3 transports the "Crucible" performance to a spaced-out living room of the 1960s, where the Salem witch hunt competes with stoned self-indulgence and more prattle from the baby sitter. The play disintegrates before our eyes; the mood grows dark and fuddled — and suddenly the performers become a rock band pounding out nostalgic songs while a leftover Salemite swirls in crazy circles on the stage.

In the last section, just one line from "The Crucible" remains — the words "What is this dancing?" etched on a pair of TV screens. Performers read a brief excerpt from the recent real-life "debates" between psychedelic guru Timothy Leary and Watergate figure G. Gordon Liddy, while an implausible quartet called Donna Sierra and the Del Fuegos do a nutty fandango. Liddy recites a smutty poem, Leary parries questions from an invisible audience, and the lights fade.

What does it all add up to? Many literal meanings weave through the show. On one level, it underscores Miller's original purpose in writing "The Crucible" — to criticize the anticommunist witch hunts of the 1950s — and extends the metaphor into the present. On a deeper level, it probes the nature of all national hysterias

which grow from wormy fads to haywire mass movements.

Much more to the point, though, director LeCompte and her troupe are confronting the outer limits of theatrical invention with unprecedented wit and skill. Working as a tightly knit unit for years, they have developed a shared vocabulary of word and gesture that digs beneath literal representation, uncovering allusions and assumptions that surface more readily in dreams than in ordinary "representational" art.

"L.S.D." marks a bold step forward in the Wooster Group's continuing exploration of what theater can do when stretched into a new dimension by aesthetic wizards who reject the notion of conventional limits. The show is having an open-ended run at the Performing Garage in SoHo.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

ARTS & LEISURE

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1984

THE PERFORMING GARAGE

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THE BOSTON GLOBE FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 1984

CRITICS' CHOICES

Theater

"American Buffalo" — David Mamet's powerful play — about petty hoods planning a robbery they lack the smarts to bring off — is given a stunning production in this import via Long Wharf and New York. Al Pacino is a dynamo as a would-be mastermind named Teach, and he's perfectly supported by J. J. Johnston and Bruce McVittie. At the Wilbur.

"L.S.D., Just the High Points" — A startling three-part production by the SoHo experimental theater company known as the Wooster Group. The middle section is an abbreviated version of "The Crucible" which, in all its abstraction and brevity, is hypnotic. The other two parts center on the drug experimentation of

the 1960s pioneered by Timothy Leary. The evening is funny, provocative and memorable. At the Boston Shakespeare Company, 52 St. Botolph st.

— KEVIN KELLY

Music

Voice of the Turtle — Spring concert of folk and holiday music from the Sephardic Jewish tradition at Paine Hall, Harvard, Sunday, 3.30.

Boston Conservatory Chamber Players — Soprano Beverly Morgan appears in Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" at Sanders Theater, Sunday at 8; also on the program Schubert's "The Shepherd and the Rock" and an E flat trio of Beethoven.

— PAUL DRIVER

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29 Bessies Awarded

By Burt Supree

"You're my tribe," said Dana Reitz, picking up a "Bessie" award for *Severe Clear*, her untransportable collaboration at MIT with designer James Turrell. "This is quite a thrill. Thanks," remarked choreographer Susan Rethorst, briskly escaping the microphone.

Frank Moore, sharing an award of \$1800 with choreographer Jim Self for their film collaboration, *Beehive*, informed interested members of the audience that "checks will be going out in the morning."

Performance artist Judith Ren-Lay had an impressive stylized fit, and then said thank you.

"I was up in the balcony," explained John Jesurun, having clambered onstage while the presenters were trying to figure out where he was or if he was anywhere.

Cornelius Conboy, picking up an award for *SBC* with his partner Dennis Gatra, remarked, "They framed it and everything. They spelled your name right. Let's get out of here."

The second annual New York Dance and Performance Awards, called "The Bessies," were given Thursday night, September 26, in a—shades of the Oscars!—three-and-a-half-hour ceremony at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's packed-to-the-rafters Helen Carey Playhouse. Four lawyers (available after the show to sue the members of the "Bessies" committee, according to David H. White) opened the evening demonstrating gestural urgency and unusual legal shut-mouth in an excerpt from a piece by Ann Carlson. Harvey Lichtenstein of BAM introduced White, director of Dance The-

ater Workshop, through which the awards, established under a grant from Morgan Guaranty Trust, are administered. Award recipients were chosen by a 15-member panel (including myself), which whittled down 175 nominations to 29 awards over the course of the year.

This year, eight cash awards of \$1800 were given to "choreographer/creators" and, for the first time, five cash awards of \$500 each were given to dancers, "the most vulnerable economic link in our community," as Carolyn Adams stated in presenting those awards. This is a particularly happy award, since nobody funds dancers and their contributions never are honored directly by grant-giving organizations.

Alien Comic (Tom Murrin) invaded the ceremonies to announce his own awards to denizens of lower Second Avenue, while stripping down progressively from one costume to another, before being carried offstage when he got down to rubber boobs. Mime Bob Berky, only slightly peccable in formal tails and galashes, and Rhoda Grauer, who has worn many hats in the dance world, including that of director of the NEA's dance program, and who is now associate director of performance at WNET, hosted the evening. Louise Lecavalier and Marc Beland knocked themselves silly in a savage excerpt from Edouard Lock's *Human Sex*; Meredith Monk and Ping Chong delighted the audience in a wry, exquisite portion of their 1972 collaboration, *Paris*; Jawole Willa Jo Zollar evoked the joy of community with two sections from her *River Sonnet*; David Parsons dazzled us

with the closing piece, *Caught*.

The "choreographer/creator" awards, along with \$1800, went to Johanna Boyce, for "embodying in her dances contemporary ideals of humanity," as well as to Susan Marshall, Cydney Wilkes, Robert Longo, Jesurun, Ren-Lay, Rethorst, and Frank Moore/Jim Self. Tony Giovannetti received a lighting design award for his work with Meredith Monk over many years, and Carol McDowell for her design for John Bernd's *Be Good to Me* at P.S. 122. Peter Gordon, David Linton, and Dudu Tucci received composer awards, and Pepón Osorio, Renata Petroni, Liliana Villegas, and Huck Snyder picked up the honors for visual design.

Awards of \$500 recognized the sustained achievement of performers Vicky Shick (for her work with Trisha Brown) and Teri Weksler. Also so honored were Sean Curran in Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane's *Secret Pastures*, and Louise Lecavalier and vocalist Frédérique Bedard in Edouard Lock's *Businessman in the Process of Becoming an Angel*.

The special achievement of Val Bourne and the ever-precarious London Dance Umbrella was acknowledged in an award for "sustaining, under difficult circumstances, a model of international opportunity for independent choreographers from both sides of the Atlantic." "It seems strange," she said, "to get an award for something that gives me so much pleasure."

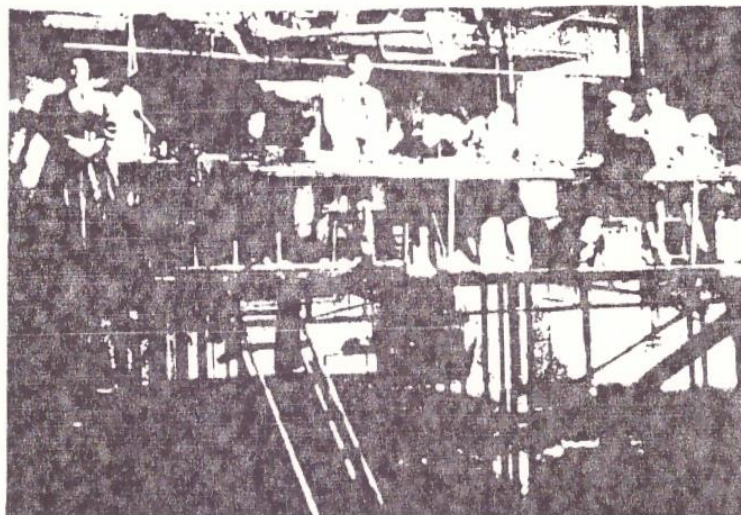
Phyllis Lamhut announced herself as the shortest presenter, and was certainly

the blondest. She harked back to a meeting 27 years ago at the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College to mysteriously introduce an award to Voice dance critic Deborah Jowitt "for a clear, uncompromising eye and mind that have documented contemporary dance with understanding and humility." "The words," Jowitt said gratefully, "are really built on the muscles and brains and hearts of choreographers."

"Hello, I'm the other Bessie," softly said choreography consultant and teacher Bessie Schönberg, who long headed the dance department at Sarah Lawrence College and for whom "the Bessies" are fondly nicknamed. "I have known her since the beginning of her career... as a serious, unorthodox student," she said gravely, leading up to an award to Meredith Monk for a sustained achievement over 20 years. Schönberg went on to praise Monk affectionately for "exceeding my highest expectations and, finally, making a student out of a teacher." The Wooster Group, who displayed their tushes in a excerpt from *Hula* at last year's "Bessies" awards, also received an award for sustained creative achievement, delivered by Peter Sellars in a burst of ironic bombast.

Elaine Summers presented an award to Robert Ellis Dunn, whose teaching incited the innovations of the Judson Dance Theater, and who's still at it. "We should go on... bringing the future into being every day," Dunn urged.

Special citations also were presented to the seven dance program directors of the National Endowment for the Arts over the past 20 years.



The Wooster Group, *L.S.D.*, 1984, performance views. Photos: Elizabeth LeCompte

THE WOOSTER GROUP, "L.S.D. (... Just the High Points ...)", the Performing Garage; LYNNE AUGERI, 303 Park South:

THE WOOSTER GROUP

For over a year the Wooster Group has been presenting in-progress versions of a performance work called *L.S.D.* The four-part opus shown here, subtitled "(... Just the High Points ...)", in fact represents the completed piece. Both its conceptual framework and its dramatic techniques will be familiar to any viewer of the Group's previous work, but it develops their singular style and their sociopolitical thrust to new and giddy heights, creating an astonishing, thoughtful, and very moving performance.

The work's material is spun from two primary sources—Arthur Miller's witchcraft-and-McCarthyism play *The Crucible* (1953), and a record by Timothy Leary, acid guru, called *L.S.D.* (1965). The two are juxtaposed, interwoven, fleshed out, adapted, twisted out of

shape, parodied, and mimicked; ultimately they are served in a way faithful to their deepest significance, which is seen not as historical but as critically important to the state of today's America. The Group's principal organizational method is a dialectical one, and the Miller/Leary alternatives line up opposing lists of qualities between which the performers ricochet like indecisive diners: '50s versus '60s, theater versus performance, earnest moralizing versus woozy prophesy, Communist witch-hunting versus counterculture wars, and so on. At the same time, similarities emerge, both in theme—the war between individual rights and institutional authority, for example—and dramatically, in the extreme emotional states each source enjoys.

The polarities are laid out from the start. Part one, "Newton" (Massachusetts; each section is located geographically, a Group trademark), is a lecture in which actor Ron Vawter allows panel members one minute each for readings from a panoply of counterculture classics—texts by Aldous Huxley, Arthur Koestler, Alan Watts, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and others. Part two, "Salem," is a version of Miller's *Crucible* played as a grotesque farce. The Reverend John Hale (Vawter), the prosecutor, speaks all his lines at fast-forward speed, the judge is a teenage boy (Matthew Hansell); Tituba (Kate Valk), a black character in the original, is played in blackface. The performance dynamic is now speeded up hysterically, now slowed to eye-of-the-storm quiet, so that the overall effect is of a controlled whirlwind of pleas, breakdowns, threats, visitations, accusations, and death sentences. Part three, "Millbrook," is the truly cathartic scene that brings the two

strands together. While a sardonic babysitter (Nancy Reilly) intones mocking memories of her life among the altruistic acidheads at Leary's retreat, the performers convert themselves into a rock band to play thematically appropriate songs such as the Kinks' "This Is Where I Belong" and Lou Reed's haunting ballad of adultery and sin, "Pale Blue Eyes." On TV monitors, video footage by Ken Kobland shows an emptied-out rural landscape (Millbrook itself?); all the while Tituba spins about, for, in *The Crucible*, she will save her life if she can make herself faint.

Part four, "Miami," is a typically offbeat Group coda, a sort of largo letdown from the spacey high of "Millbrook." "Donna Sierra and the Del Fuegos" stomp around in a vaudevillian shtick of amateur dance, while a horrifying exchange between Leary and a drug-crippled questioner is read aloud. It's an ending that resonates with irresolution, but which restates the contradictions that have smacked together throughout the piece. Baldly summarized, *L.S.D.* may seem an overdetermined, willfully conceptual pot-pourri, but this jumble of sources and techniques is in fact carefully assembled. The extraordinary performing qualities of the actors, the skills of the technicians, and the structural coherence, rhythmic clarity, and visual unity imposed on the work's significant Babel by the Group and its director, Elizabeth LeCompte, make *L.S.D.* a performance high, dazzling in ambition and accomplishment.

—JOHN HOWELL